

Living by Faith XII: Through Patience

November 5, 2017

James 5:7-12

What is the most difficult thing to handle in our life? It is suffering, isn't it? There is no pain or suffering in heaven, but in this world, everyone suffers. Suffering comes in many different ways. It may come from our physical sickness; it may come from financial or relationship difficulties. One of the most painful moments in ministry is to watch our faithful families suffering due to various reasons. Even though they are faithful to God, they are not exempted from suffering. The maturity of faith doesn't make us free from sufferings. Is this a life? Is it what life is about?

Last Thursday when we had a prayer time in the social hall, a man came in. He shared some of his stories. He said his baby just died; one of his sons is in prison because of addiction; his mom is in a nursing home without getting any better; his brother-in-law has cancer; his sister just kicked him out; he wanted to be a good father to his 14-year old son, but he had no job, no money and no strength since he himself had numerous surgeries. His pain was so much that he even tried to end his life. He couldn't stop crying while we were praying. How would you pray for him? What would you say to him? Will you say, "that is life"?

We know God loves us. He doesn't want us to suffer. That is why He talks about our suffering and pain in the Bible. We may not fully understand about sufferings, but we still need to look at His Word because God cares for us. As a matter of fact, our attitude about suffering is James' main point. He began his letter with a call to be patient, as he said, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*" (1:2-3). He encourages us to endure trials because we will receive "the crown of life" (1:12). After talking about some practical matters, James comes to a conclusion. As we expect, he talks about patience once again. He teaches us what to do when we face sufferings.

James says, "be patient." I wish James would have a magical word for our comfort, but he said again, "*Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming*" (v.7a). The reason for patience is that the Lord is coming. What does it mean? Does it imply Jesus' second coming (*Parousia*)? It may, but I like to see it as Jesus' presence in our difficult situations. The Lord Jesus is surely coming in the future, but he is also with us today. "*The Lord is full of compassion and mercy*" (v.11c). He doesn't leave us alone. People may not know how much you struggle, but Jesus knows it, as he said, "*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep*" (John 10:14-15). In order to know you and in order to protect you, Jesus laid down his life. His presence alone should comfort us. His presence gives us strength to endure.

James uses an example of a farmer. "*See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains*" (v.7b). In Palestine, rain usually comes in late autumn and early spring. The autumn rain prepares the soil for the seed. Then, the spring rain helps to produce good crops. The rain in both autumn and spring was necessary. It implies that God provides the need in time. We may not understand God's timing, but we need to trust in his providence. Also, James' illustration of the farmer implies that we Christians are here to prepare good soil. We are here to sow and plant, and God alone produces fruitful crops. Even

in our sufferings, we pray that God may bear fruit in our lives, and that requires our perseverance. The fruit will be our joy in this world.

While we are to be patient, we also need to “*stand firm, because [again] the Lord’s coming is near.*” “Standing firm” literally means “establishing or strengthening our heart.” It means to hold our faith in the midst of temptations and trials. The same verb “strengthening” (στηρίζω, *stērizō*) appears in Luke 9:51, where “*Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*” He knew that the persecution and the cross were waiting for him, but he strengthened his heart to face those trials. Likewise, when we face trials, we need to be determined and persistent. Here, James warns us against our inconsistency. When we believe in Jesus, I am sure we all committed our lives to him. We promised what we would do for His kingdom and his church, but under stress and hardship, we become inconsistent. Again we need to make our minds. We need to imitate the steadfastness of the Lord. Fix our eyes on the Lord who is with us and who will come.

We also need to be careful about what we say. When we are under stress, we tend to blame others. Actually, we don’t need stress to blame others because blaming is our nature. As you may know blaming is the first sin that Adam and Eve committed right after they sinned against God. Since then, we all tend to blame others for our discomforts and struggles. That is why, as James says, we need to do our best not to grumble against each other. If we look at 1 Corinthians 10, we can see Paul’s warning for Christians from Israel’s history. He said there are three reasons for Israel’s failure: idolatry, sexual immorality and blaming (cf. 1 Corin.10:7-10). Particularly, we know from history that those who complained against God and Moses had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. They couldn’t enter the promised land because they blamed. “*Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*” (v.9)

The Lord is compassionate and merciful, but he is also the Judge. James mentioned earlier that we will be judged according to how we speak and act (2:12). We must not forget that the Judge is standing at the door. When he comes, he will judge both believers and non-believers. Our judgment is not about salvation which the Holy Spirit has already guaranteed, but the Judge will ask us how we have spoken and acted and how we have used our tongue and talents. Those who persevere under trials will receive the crown of life, but those who grumble against one another will be judged accordingly. Those who have persevered will be blessed.

James uses Job as an example. As you may know Job had to suffer without knowing the reason. God allowed Satan to test Job, and Job lost all of his flocks and children. He had to suffer tremendously both physically and spiritually, but at the end, he was blessed even much more than before. Why? Regarding Job, William Barclay says in his commentary, “Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart” (Barclay, *Letters of James and Peter*, pp.147.). Yes, Job complained against his friends and even against God, but he never abandoned his faith. Job was not always patient, but he did determine to endure whatever might happen to him. In the midst of his incomprehension, he kept his faith and hope in God (cf. Job 1:21; 2:10; 16:19-21; 19:25-27), and God rewarded Job for his faith.

I don’t think anyone is exempted from the sin of blaming. We all have blamed at some points in our lives. Particularly in the church ministry, it is easy to complain about someone. If we try to

find a reason, I am sure we will find someone to blame. Sometimes, yes it is necessary to know the reason, but often times there is no clear reason. Just as Job did, in the midst of unknowing and uncertainty, we need to trust in God's sovereignty. God doesn't like grumbling. He will punish those who grumble, but He will reward those who trust in Him even during difficult times.

Lastly, we should not swear. Swearing doesn't seem to have anything to do with patience, but in times of stress and affliction, we tend to swear to escape the difficult situations. Swearing is an evidence of impatience. Swearing is abusing God's name. For example, some people falsely vow, saying, "I swear to God" or "God is my witness." We often hear some people using even God's name in their cursing. We hear people habitually use some phrases, "Oh my God", "For Christ's sake" or even "God bless you." They may claim, "I don't really mean anything when I say 'God' or 'Jesus.'" That is what James is talking about. Why do we use God's name without really meaning it? We should never use an oath to prove that we are speaking the truth. We just need to be honest and true. When we say 'yes', we should really mean it, and same for 'no.' It is one of the Ten Commandments, "*You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*" (Exodus 20:7). So, what is God's name? Jesus taught us His name, "*Our Father, who are in heaven. Hallowed be Your name*" (Matthew 6:9). God's name is holy. We should praise His name. We should revere God. God doesn't deserve our double-minded. We should whole-heartedly serve Him, love Him and worship Him.

Brothers and sisters, we talked about a few things today. Everyone suffers in this world. The Lord is coming. He is not only Love but also the Judge. How we live in this world will determine what we hear from the Judge. James encourages us not to lose our faith in our difficult times. Do not grumble. Do not misuse God's name. Instead, trust in Him. I know it is not easy to keep faith when we are under trials, but we will together persevere. We will walk together until we hear from the Lord, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*" (Matthew 25:23) Let us be patient! Let us develop perseverance! The crown of life is for you. Amen!