

The Christian Response to Injustice

Epistle of James
By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: James 5:7-11
Preached on: Sunday, November 11, 2018

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bible to James 5, continuing our exposition of the book of James this morning, move to a new section of the 5th chapter. We'll be looking this morning at verses 7 to 11. We're going to title the message "The Christian Response to Injustice." The Christian response to injustice. We're going to see James is going to speak to us and to the Christians to whom he wrote about the injustice that they were experiencing and he gives us the blueprint for how God wants us to respond to injustice. There have always been since the fall, the reality of oppression and injustice but there is a distinctly Christian, godly way to respond to the wicked injustice and oppression that we see in this world and James sets out that blueprint for us in verses 7 to 11.

So a Christian response to injustice. Let's read God's word. James 5:7-11. Well, let me set the context by reading the first six verses too because you're going to note one of the key words that I want you to see is in verse 7, the word "therefore," and we're going to see that it connects verses 7 to 11 with what was immediately preceding it. So I want us to read that in context. Chapter 5, verse 1,

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you. 7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who

spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you might now grant us by your grace just the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit to make your word clear to us. May it accomplish the purpose for which you sent it in each heart. May you bring about conviction. Expose our sin. Lord, show us the way of righteousness, but most of all show us that Christ is that way and that we might run to him. We pray this in his name. Amen.

A Christian response to injustice. How are we supposed to respond to injustice? This is what James is dealing with and I want you to see that. You'll remember that we noted and if you've been with us in the previous weeks when we were looking at James 5:1-6, we explained that we believed that what James was doing in those six verses was that he had turned aside from his main audience who are Christian believing Jews in the first century, those are the people to whom he's writing, he's writing to Christians of Jewish background that he has a pastor's heart for because, remember, James is the half-brother of Jesus who became known as James the Just, who led the church in Jerusalem, who was the essential leading elder of the church in Jerusalem, and so he has a pastor's, shepherd's heart for these Christians who have been dispersed through times of persecution and those who have been spread out throughout that area, the area of Palestine, Syria, and even the broader Roman world, and he writes to them to encourage their faith, to strengthen them. It's a very practical letter. We've noted again and again and again how many imperatives he employs, how many illustrations he employs. He wants to see them do the word, not just believe it, not just accept it intellectually but to truly believe biblically is to do, and so his objective is to have them become doers of the word and he's dealt with all these practical issues throughout the book. But then in chapter 5, verses 1 to 6, he turns aside from his main audience to speak directly to unbelieving, ungodly people who are afflicting the people to whom he wrote. He's speaking to the ungodly rich in verses 1 to 6 and we noted how the only imperative, the only instruction for them is to weep and howl, judgment is coming. There is no positive instruction about repenting. They're told to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them because God is going to judge them. And we noted how this is much like you see in the Old Testament prophets that from time to time the prophet, and he's primarily speaking to the nation of Israel or the people of God, to call them to repentance because they're being judged, they're about to be judged when the prophets are writing, they're about to experience judgment because of their sin. So the basic thrust is, "Turn from your sin, people of God. Look to God. Look to Christ." And yet from time to time you'll have the prophet turn aside and say, "Woe to Philistia for the things that you have done to my people. Woe to Edom for the things that you've done to my people." And he pronounces judgment and promises that his judgment is coming swiftly, but he puts that in a prophetic letter to God's people, you see. He didn't send out leaflets to the people in Edom because the word of God is for the people of God, he's telling for those who will repent and believe. It's for anyone who will come and sit under it and follow him and submit to him, but he's writing

to his people and he's encouraging them to say, "Look, I know that you're dealing with injustice. You need to repent of your own sins but you're dealing with real injustice and oppression and you sometimes wonder does God even notice? Does God care? Is God going to do anything?" And the answer in the Old Testament and the New Testament is that though it may not appear to you that God sees, it may not appear that justice is coming, the message of the Scriptures is God sees, he cares, he is going to deal with all wickedness. He's going to deal with all injustice and all oppression. He will deal with it.

So in the same way the Old Testament prophets did this, James is doing the same thing in 5:1-6. He's turned aside to speak to the ungodly rich who are oppressing the people of God to whom James was writing. He's writing to first century Christians, Jews who were largely poor, and in that particular society, the gap between rich and poor was a chasm and there had become more and more rich landowners, less and less property owners. The middle class had gone away as it had been earlier in Israel when they all had their own ancestral land, their property that they were farming. At this time, it's become more and more the rich landowners and you're basically like a serf working for them and they were being oppressed.

So in that context, he spoke directly to the rich and he said, "Listen, you ungodly rich, you who love money, you're guilty," and remember he made four charges, "You've been hoarding up wealth. You're hoarding it up so much that you're wasting it. Moths are eating it. Your food is spoiling. When there are hungry people around you, there are people who don't have clothes and you're letting it rot, you have so much." Hoarding. Secondly, "You're guilty of injustice. You're stealing from your laborers. You who have all this money are stealing and holding back from those who are living hand-to-mouth. And the Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of Armies has heard their cries. He's not only heard their cries, he's heard the cry of the money in your pocket that you've withheld from them." So injustice, it's hoarding. Injustice, then he talks about indulgence, incredible self-indulgence, lavish self-indulgence to the point of just over-lasciviousness, pleasure. Then finally to oppression in verse 6, "You're willing even to kill. You're judging, you're condemning and you're killing the righteous because of your love of money." And the message is God has seen and God will deal with it.

Now so think about that, you're one of the oppressed, you just heard the Lord turn aside and speak directly to the rich and now James says, "Okay, wait a minute, stop cheering for what's going to happen to them and wanting to join, maybe pick up your pitchforks and to charge." What's the Christian response? What is the response for the people who are called to follow Jesus Christ? What is our response to injustice? And you see that it's so clear, the "therefore" right in verse.... "Therefore," it's an inferential conjunction. "In light of all I've told you in verses 1 to 6, therefore I've told you about these four charges of wickedness, that God sees it, therefore what is your response? What are you and I to do?" So the Christian response to injustice in a word, the theme of today's message in a word, the Christian response to injustice is patience.

The imperative is repeated twice in the text, "be patient," there it is in verse 7, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." Verse 8, "You too be patient;

strengthen your hearts." It's an imperative again in that verse. It commands, he's commanding to be patient and he says it twice and the word "patience" comes up two other times in the passage. Verse 7, the farmer who is waiting for the precious produce of the soil being patient about it, the same Greek word, the same Greek root word. Verse 10, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience." Do you see that? Four times in the span of four verses this word "patience."

That's the essential Christian response to injustice and oppression is patience, and it's trusting that God's going to deal with it in his way. God will deal with it through governing authorities. God will deal with it in his time and ultimately we're going to see, God will deal with it truly and rightly at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and until then, no injustice is fully dealt with. We live in a world of injustice, in a world of oppression in which we cannot escape these things and God who sides with the victim is telling us how to deal with that. We're not to be defined as victims, though, we're overcomers because we serve the God who is on the throne of heaven, the throne of glory.

So in a word that the response, the Christian response to injustice is patience, to be patient. Now what I want us to do with the time that we have, I want to consider, we're going to start into as many points as we can so we're going to probably get at least four, Lord willing, today and we'll continue looking at this. There's so much here, we'll probably be working on it at least one more week.

The first thing I want us to talk about is the need for patience. The need for patience. That's the first point in the outline, the need for patience. It's obviously important for the people he writes to. As I said, he mentions it as an imperative, a command, "Therefore be patient, brethren," verse 7, "You too be patient," verse 8, and then he gives them examples of patience so that they can really be patient.

Now the need for patience, basically what James is showing us is we live in a world of injustice and oppression and it's been that way since sin entered the world. The moment sin entered the world, it became a world of injustice and oppression where someone tries to get on top of someone else and put them down. The first thing that we see in the garden, remember when God says to Adam, "What have you done?" What does he say? "It's the woman whom you gave me." And the woman says it's the serpent. Then there's going to be now as a result of the fall, there's going to be a conflict between the man and the woman in the house. She's going to have her desire is for you but you will rule over her, it pictures a power struggle in the home, conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. There's this spiritual warfare that's been unleashed. The world that was a place of harmony and justice and righteousness and beauty, unsoiled, unmixed, perfect beauty and righteousness and glory, has now been sullied and damaged because of sin and we live in a world of injustice. The history of the world is a history of injustice and oppression. You read any history book that tells with any kind of reliability what happened and you see again and again nations trying to rule over nations, people taking advantage of people, and it's what we see in our lives.

The Jews in James's day, as I mentioned, they were experiencing financial oppression. They were being taken advantage of by their employers. They were experiencing in a real personal way. It's hard for us to relate to this. I think one of the blessings of being an American and just being in our day in general but in the West, particularly America, we are so wealthy relatively speaking. It was interesting when I was in South Africa, I was talking to different people, meeting different folks from different parts of Africa, and one of the people there, the Afrikaner which is the white South Africans, he said that the joke is that because he said, "We think a lot like Americans," and he was saying that they basically, the land of Africa with all the wild animals and they had to kind of be pioneers and move out and conquer areas, and there was certainly oppression involved in that too but I'm talking just the actual physical dynamics of eking out a living. They had to go and they had to build a bridge across something so their wagon could go across, then they had to till up the soil that hadn't ever been tilled up before. So he says there's a sense in which Afrikaners think a little more like Americans, "We call ourselves poor Americans. We think like Americans but we're a lot poorer than they are," because people tend to think of Americans as the richest people in the world and I think we are by any realistic standard. Our level of blessing has been probably the greatest in the history of the world and so it's hard for us to relate, then, to people who for them to lose a job, to lose income didn't just mean that you had to turn off your cable or you couldn't buy all the clothes that you want to buy or the things that you want to buy, or that Christmas was going to be down this year, to lose a job meant that you might starve to death; that your children would go hungry, then to realize that this is happening because of the injustice and the wickedness of my ungodly employer. Do you see how it's a whole different thing, isn't it? It's personal.

That's what they were experiencing. They were experiencing financial oppression, not only that they were not being paid but even the guys who were starting to make it a little bit and the merchants and the small businessmen of the day were being hauled into court and taken advantage of by those who had the money to pay the lawyers. There are a lot of things that still resonate even today, don't they? You can see that same kind of stuff happening. It's always happened because that's one of the reasons, one of my favorite lines from, forgive me for those of you who are lawyers, but my favorite Shakespeare line is, "Let's kill the lawyers first," or something like that. Remember, the first thing we do is kill the lawyers when we take over. I really don't mean that but you understand where the sentiment comes from, that the system is made in many ways so that people can gain the system and the people who are making the system work, make it so that you need them to pay them to make sure that you can gain the system. It's just the built-in incentives and it's not that these people are inherently worse than we are, they just happen to be in a position that if we were in the same position we would do the same thing. Why? Because of sin. Because it is the nature of sin to exalt self and to be so self-focused that it doesn't matter to you that you're stepping on other people as you make your way and get what you want.

So this is the need for patience. We live in a world of oppression, and it's not just the kind of oppression we experience is not just financial oppression. This applies to us in so many different ways. It speaks powerfully to those who are living as victims of political

oppression. I think this passage would be especially precious to believers in the Sudan or even in China or the former communist countries, Soviet Union and others that lived faithful for God in a country that actively persecuted their faith and penalized them for being people of faith. But not just in big picture stuff like that, oppression is something that gets very specific and personal. It can be the oppression of growing up in a home where you were verbally abused by your father, you were mistreated by your mother, or you were sexually abused. You were oppressed.

Now when those things happen, let's be clear, the Bible is clear about if that's happening in your life now, you need to report that and you need to open up and share it with an elder and if there's sexual abuse going on or physical abuse going on, we will let the state do what the state does according to Romans 13, you call the police and the state has an interest in protecting the victim. The Gospel is there for everyone, the victim and the perpetrator. Repentance and faith bring healing and forgiveness but it doesn't change the consequences of what someone has done in oppressing like that. So the state has a role but maybe that's far in the past and there's no longer an opportunity for that and you're dealing with the pain of that. Or imagine someone who has experienced the horror of rape and so the person may have been caught, they may have been punished but they're still dealing with the damage that has happened. What has happened? They were oppressed. Someone in power exerted their power over them. That's what James is describing. He's saying, "How do you deal with it when you are in a place where you're under someone else's thumb and you cannot get out from under it?" Like I said, in a free society, you call the police. You do the things that you can do but even then beyond that, what's your heart to be toward what you went through and toward the oppressor.

The beauty of the word of God is so practical and it gives us exactly what we need and the need is patience. We live in a world of oppression and injustice and the clear teaching of James is that the way that you deal with it is patience. So let's talk about what patience is. That's the need for patience, secondly, the nature of patience. The nature of patience.

The word is so important he repeats it four times in the passage. The Greek word, it's helpful to understand this because this word "patience" in English has many different meanings and the word in Greek is a word which means "to prolonged restraint of anger." Prolonged restraint of anger. It's because the word is "makrothumia." Makro, you may remember if you took macroeconomics or you talked about the macro-picture, the big picture. Makro means in terms of time is long. In terms of space it's big. So makrothumia is long, thumos in Greek is the word for anger and wrath. It's the word for heat. It pictures decisive action in response to something and so makrothumia came to mean, then, the restraining of anger. You have a legitimate reason for anger but you're restraining it and so this word is often translated in the King James particularly as longsuffering; to suffer long. This word in 1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love is patient," actually the better translation is, "Love suffers long."

So the idea really in this word is that you are being offended or you have an offense and you're restraining your anger by God's grace, and the one who is ultimately like this is God himself. In fact, one of my favorite verses is Exodus 34:6, "The LORD, the LORD

God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger." When you look at that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, remember it was written in Hebrew but when they translated it into Greek in the 2nd century BC, they took that phrase "slow to anger" and they put the word "makrothumia" there. "The LORD, the LORD slow to anger. The LORD, the LORD, patient." So you can see this word really means slow to anger as well in our context. "Therefore be slow to anger, brethren. You too be slow to anger, brethren; strengthen your hearts."

It's interesting to compare this. There's another word that's used in the passage that's a synonym for patience and it's the word "endurance." I'm reading the New American Standard Bible and so different translations come up with different words. Some says steadfastness or I can't remember the other one, but patience, I think actually, but in verse 11, "We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job." Those two words are another word that's often translated something like patience and that's the word "hupomeno" and it means "to remain under." Hupomeno means to remain under and so it's interesting, these words "endurance" and "patience," they are very similar. To endure is to have patience. It's to remain under a situation. It's to remain in a difficult circumstance, and to be patient is to remain in a difficult circumstance but the difference tends to be in the Scriptures that hupomeno, endurance, is usually referring to remaining under circumstantial trials. You're going through difficult times, circumstances, you know, an illness or something happens, the economy goes down. The word "patience" that James is using four times, now he uses the word "endurance" too, we need both, but the word that's used four times emphasizes more not that you're experiencing affliction from circumstances, you're experiencing affliction that has its root in another person or persons. Makrothuma, to restrain your anger. You have a legitimate offense against another person who is being unjust to you or oppressing you and your patience is your restraint of that against that person or those persons.

That's the nature of this patience. He says as a Christian we have the power to be patient. Now the world doesn't have that and, in fact, when you look at the history of the world, it's interesting, I mean, you can go anywhere. Like I said, racial issues are there in every culture, at every time. So they're in America, yes. Are they in any other country, you name it? Yes. I remember doing some reading, you know, we had a pastor come one time to preach, you guys remember John Carrick. Some of you will remember he came and preached. He was an Englishman and he came to preach here and at that time we had a member of our church named Chul Yoo, who was a Korean guy and he's a minister in Washington, DC now. So both these guys ministers of the Gospel, well, I was out that week because John would come and preach when I would be out and so John preached and now he's an Englishman so he's got the accent, and he's preaching, but you know how it's hard to pick the accent sometimes, right? I know some of you are skilled enough that you know an Australian accent from an English accent from a Scottish accent from an Irish accent, and some of you can tell even the parts of England. I don't think many of you can but I can't. But anyway, Chul couldn't either and so John Carrick gets through preaching and now John, he knows he's a Presbyterian. He's a professor at a Presbyterian seminary in Greenville and so Chul in making conversation with him, Chul Yoo the Korean brother says to John Carrick, his English brother, "Thank you for the message

today. What part of Scotland are you from?" Because he thought a guy with an accent like that that's Presbyterian, it's a pretty good inference, has to be Scottish. There aren't many English Presbyterians now. So he made a good guess but John Carrick looked at him and without batting an eye said, "I'm English. Are you Japanese?" He recognized Chul was not Japanese, he was Korean and the most insulting thing you could say to him was, "You're Japanese." Because if you look at history, the history of the Japanese and the Koreans is an ugly history.

Look at the Baltic states and you remember what happened with the whole war in Bosnia, the Croats and the Serbians and the Bosnians, and it's just a history of them killing each other and then later on you get the power and you kill them, and then you get the power and you kill them. That's the way of the world, but when Jesus comes into your heart and your life, he gives you the ability to no longer have to respond with an eye-for-an-eye. He gives you the ability and the perspective to have patience; to be able to be longsuffering; to have legitimate offenses to really... and God, you see, one of the reasons we can is because we know God actually sees it. We're not explaining it away. We're not playing Pollyanna kind of Christianity, "I'm just going to pretend everything is okay," by the power of positive thinking. That has nothing to do with Christianity. Christianity is not about the power of positive thinking. Christianity is about the power of the truth. We face the truth, the world as it really is but the world as it really is, Jesus Christ is on the throne. Jesus Christ is coming again. That's the world as it really is and so when we put whatever we're suffering in perspective, that is the kind of paradigm shift that happens and redefines the way you see life, the way you see the things that have happened to you, the way you see the things that are happening to you. It transforms it.

The nature of patience, longsuffering, restraining our anger. We're told that we're supposed to do it and we're told what it is, the need for patience, secondly, the nature of patience, thirdly, the focus of patience. The focus of patience. How are you patient? How can you do this? He tells us. Look how he makes this so clear, verse 7, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." Until the coming of the Lord. Verse 8, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." You see "the coming of the Lord" repeated twice there. You may have heard people talk about the Parousia. Theologians or pastors sometimes preaching will say that. It's actually the Greek word that's here translated "the coming of the Lord," and "the coming," it's "the coming," not "the coming of the Lord" but "the coming," and then "of the Lord" is also there in the text. "The coming" is a word which means "to be beside." Par, para, beside, parallel lines, to come beside. It's when the Lord is going to be at our side. It's when the Lord is going to be at hand.

Now think about this, we believe, the Bible teaches again and again and again that Jesus is with us now through the Holy Spirit because God is Triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To have the Spirit inside of you is to have Christ inside of you so that he can truly say to us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. In your weakness, I am strong." He's with you at every moment. He will never abandon you. But there is a day coming, the Parousia, when he will be at hand. What's happening? The physical body, the glorified body of the resurrected Christ is going to come down from heaven to this world and he's

going to be at hand in all of his glory, in all of his might. He's going to come and that's the blessed hope of the Christian.

That's what all history is pointing toward and what he's saying is, "When you are experiencing injustice and oppression, what do you do? You set your focus on the coming of the Lord." In fact, this is one of the most redemptive things about injustice and oppression. What would make us want heaven and Jesus to come back more? I mean, this is one the reasons that I think when we sin, God allowed sin to have the consequences it did. You look at Romans 8:18 and following and he says that the sufferings of this age are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us, and we're longing for that, but he says that in this age, the creation has been subjected to futility by him who subjected it. That is, by God. God subjected the creation to futility, emptiness, difficulty. He did that to show us the reality of our sin. He let sin corrupt everything so that we could see that we're corrupted and if he left everything the way it was, this is why he drove them out of the garden. Do you remember? He drives them out of the garden. Why? Because, "Man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil and he may reach out and take of the tree of life and live forever in his unredeemed state." To live forever separated from God is to die forever. God made us, he knows he made us for himself, that our longings are all satisfied in knowing him and loving him and seeing him. We're made to reflect and radiate the radiance of his worth back to him; to see his beauty and his glory and to praise him and in doing that, find our deepest fulfillment. And we become most human when we worship God.

So now think about that. So he subjects the world to futility. Death becomes a reality, disease, decay, so that we would look around us. I mean, we're so dumb. To be separated from God, we were completely in the dark spiritually. The Bible says dead. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." We have not a clue about what our problem is. We come into the world thinking we're great. That's what the nature of sin. We come into the world thinking that we have it all together. Isn't it amazing how, have you had this experience? I mean, if you're a parent you have and if you have nephews or nieces, you'll have like a 4-year-old trying to do something, maybe put together something and it's something that you don't want to break and, "Hey, I need to help you with that." "No, I got it. I know what I'm doing." I mean, something they have no idea what they're doing. No idea. You don't even know that you have no idea what you're doing and yet you think, why do you think that you do? It's the nature of sin. We think that we're totally independent. We come into this world completely self-centered and completely confident in ourselves. We have a high view of self. We have an incredibly ridiculously high view of self and we have a low view of God and when the Gospel comes and we see, and as you live in the world, one of the things that has to happen is you have to encounter the thing that you just can't fix things. You break things and they don't work and relationships don't work and things just hurt, and that's because God is trying to call you to see that not only is the world messed up, you and I are radically messed up.

Our sins have separated us from God, the one who gives us life and until that is restored, we are just broken and truly spiritually lifeless without God, without hope. So the Lord uses our afflictions to remind us that there's something more here and that's why the

circumstances of injustice can make us long for the coming of Christ. It helps us remember, "Wait a minute, I'm not home yet." This world is not what we were created for, even at its best. We long for the day when Jesus will make everything right. The focus of patience, what gives you patience is to look to the coming of the Lord, now what that means is, first and foremost, you can trust that God has seen the affliction, the oppression, the injustice, he has seen it and he has noted every detail and he is the only one who can make it right and he's determined to make it right.

I mean, think about that when you're really the victim of wicked oppression. Often we're victims of people who, you know, they're sinners and they're selfish but they don't mean to do the damage they do. It's not the intention. They're guilty, yes, but we're all guilty. But there are sometimes where people are just wickedly wanting out of malice to hurt you. God knows that. That's why he says, "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay, says the Lord." And at the coming of Christ, when he comes back, he is coming to deal with all of the oppressors.

I mentioned the history of oppression and the whole Japanese/Korean thing. I mean, you go back to what happened before WWII as part of the lead-up to WWII, the oppression of the Korean people by the Japanese, the wicked, awful things that were done by many soldiers. Not all Japanese, of course, but there was a lot of incredibly wicked things done. I remember hearing about, reading about a missionary who had been ministering over there and saw a Korean church just growing in the Lord, and one of the things they did, they felt burdened to do, was they heard about a need in Japan and they gave to that need and they went over and ministered to those Japanese people. This was like in the 70's, so a few years out from the war but there were many people who had been a part of that oppression and they were talking about how incredibly powerful it was that these believers who had all the reasons for animosity and yet the Gospel brought them together. There's something about the affliction, though, that reminds us that we need the Gospel.

So the focus of patience is the coming of the Lord. Jesus is coming again and when he comes, he's going to make everything right. He's going to deal with injustice and he's going to bring us to the fullness of life as it is intended to be lived. One of the passages I love, speaking of the Second Coming, is Malachi 4, a wonderful word picture. The last book of the Old Testament, the last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi. Here again, here's the prophet writing to the people of God who live in the midst of oppression. When you look at the history of Israel, especially after the Babylonian captivity, through the Babylonian captivity and then afterwards, I mean, they were oppressed by the Persians, they were oppressed by the Greeks, they were oppressed by the Romans. It was a history of oppression.

So Malachi writing to them during the time they're being oppressed by the Persians, he reminds them, chapter 4, verse 1, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace." What is the day that he's talking about? The day of the Lord. The day when Christ comes to make everything right. "'The day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,' says the LORD of hosts, 'so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear

My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts." So the wicked will be those who will not worship God and who hate God and who hate us because we love God. God will deal with them and until that day, we're to continue to plead with them to return to him, to come back to him, that he's a God of mercy, full of compassion. We're to witness to them for their salvation, but if they will not believe, then God will deal with them.

I love that word picture in verse 2, "you who fear My name." When the sun of righteousness rises and sets ablaze the wicked, it's not a terrible thing to the believer, it's not a fire setting us ablaze, it's the sun rising "with healing in its wings, and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall." I love that picture, calves skipping. I mean, you never see cows running. Cows are just sitting there looking dumb most of the time, right? Moving slow. Except for a calf, a calf before he's gotten all heavy and all of that, being let out of the stall filled with joy. It's like, "I've been bottled up. I've been bottled up. I have all this energy, all this energy. You let me out of the stall." He runs leaping. He said that's what it's going to be like when Jesus comes back if you know Christ; that even the best moments are like you're penned up in a stall, you're not what you're supposed to be, it's not like it's supposed to be. Everything is still wrong in this world. You see injustice around you. You see wickedness. And more than that, you see injustice and wickedness still in your own heart. That's the thing that we need to be set free from, is the sin in our own hearts. Even after we come to understand that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe and we repent and place our faith in him and we're declared righteous forever because of what Christ has done and his righteousness is imputed to us forever, we still have this treasure, the knowledge of God in earthen vessels, we still have a sin nature, we still battle with the flesh every day. We battle with oppressive tendencies ourselves. We battle with injustice in ourselves. The enemy is not just, he's not just upon you, he's within you.

So when Jesus comes back, the most wonderful thing for the Christian is he's going to set you free from your sin and you will know what you were created to be like never before. How wonderful it is to be clean when you've been dirty. Think about that. Now multiply it by a trillion. It's going to be something like that. To have put off sin forever, to see our Savior and realize we're accepted not because of who we are or what we've done, but because of what he's done, and to realize he's dealing with everything, he's made it all right. And the most even wonderful thing is that we not only know that he's going to make things right but that he's even used the affliction and the oppression and the injustice that has been done. If you belong to Christ, every act of injustice and oppression that you have ever experienced or ever will experience God will use to make you like Jesus and you will see in heaven the wonder of it all; that every stripe, every pain, every moment of agony came from the heart of a loving God who was drawing you to himself, who was purging and purifying your faith, who was loving you. Some of these things happened before you were a believer. Of course they did, but yet God who loved you before the foundation of the world and chose you to be in Christ, predestined every act of everything that's happened in our lives so that we can say like Joseph said to his brothers,

remember he was a victim of injustice and oppression, Joseph, of his 10 brothers who hated him, he could say to them what we can say to our oppressor and they may not want to hear it and sometimes you don't get to say this but in our hearts we know, "You mean it for evil or you meant it for evil but my God meant it for good."

This is what it means to be more than a conqueror in Christ. No matter what comes, we walk, he leads us in the train of his triumph and what does Jesus' life look like? He was, what? A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He was afflicted. He was stricken and yet he was a mighty victor over sin and he has conquered sin, he's conquered death. He stands forever as King of kings and Lord of lords and he says, "Follow Me. I'm going to use suffering in your life, even though I'm going to measure it out carefully and not give you more than you can bear, but I'm going to use it, the sufferings of your past, the sufferings of your present, to bless you and to draw you to Myself." And to know that and, "What you're doing, Lord, through this injustice presently at the moment that I'm really angry about as I look at the wickedness of that person and the hatred, the terrible attitudes that they're displaying to me, the vicious things that they've done to me, you're using that to remind me that I'm not home yet. You're making me want your return more and you're loosening my hold on the things of this world."

So that is good. That is wonderful. If God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how are we not together with him freely give us all things? If God put Christ on the cross for you, if he loved you enough to do that, you can know that everything that happens in your life is an expression of his love and kindness. That's the message of the Bible. This means that we can have hope every day something good is going to happen. I don't know about you, but isn't it funny how sinners, I wake up, I want things, my good things to happen and I have a clear definition of what good looks like. It's having something good to eat. First of all, it's having coffee, good coffee, not instant coffee like we had in South Africa. It's having good food. It's having things go well. It's having every light become green right as I approach it so I don't even have to slow down. It's people agreeing with me. It's things going well. And you know, I find that that just never happens and when I understand that it's really not God's purpose for that to happen in this world, it makes it so much easier. I have to remember that continually. His purpose is through difficulty and trial to make me know how much I need Jesus because when I go through difficulty and trial, I remember that I am not adequate for these things. I need Jesus, and going through difficulty and trial reminds me I'm not home yet. This world is not going to be right. It's not going to work. Everything is not going to be perfect. We're supposed to do our part each day, yes, to make things a little better, we're to do that but ultimately until he comes back, it's not going to be right and knowing that, I can rejoice, especially that he's coming back. For all those that love his appearing, that day is going to be a glorious day.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the truths of your word, that you have not left us in the dark. You have allowed us to see in your word how things really are, that you really are governing every molecule in the universe. You're not the author of sin. You're not

tempting anyone to evil but you're governing the actions of free agents, evil spirits, people who sin and do horrible things. You're still using those things to accomplish your purposes in the same way that the most evil acts that ever happened were the acts of Herod and Pilate and the Jewish Sanhedrin that nailed your Son to the cross, in those most heinous and evil acts, you had foreordained before the beginning of time to bring about a great salvation. So that means that everything that happens in our lives, no matter how random it appears, you are doing something good and beautiful and that when we see it, we will say like the Psalmist said, "The Lord has done it and it is marvelous in our eyes." Father, increase our faith. Help us repent of our impatience. Help us repent of our hatred and our anger that we've expressed or that we have not brought before the cross. And help us be like Christ, to be truly patient with those who hurt us. And Lord, let us work through the means that you've chosen when it means we go to the police and we trust in those things at the appropriate level but ultimately trust in you. And Father, we pray that you would use everything in our lives that is hard to make us long for heaven more. How often I think to myself or express to you I don't want heaven enough. Lord, make me want it more and thank you that you're determined to do that and the work that you've begun in us, you will complete to the day of Christ Jesus. We pray that you would be glorified in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.