

## The Christian Response to Injustice Part 2

*Epistle of James*  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 5. We come to our second message on the text we began looking at last week, verses 7 to 11 of James 5, and we titled the message last time "The Christian Response to Injustice." The Christian response to injustice. We noted that here in verses 7 to 11 which we'll read in just a moment, here in these five verses James returns his focus to believers. He turns his focus back from the ungodly rich that he had been talking to in verses 1 to 6, he had turned aside from his normal audience in this letter, he's writing to believers, he turned aside in verses 1 to 6 of chapter 5 to speak to the ungodly outside the church, those who were oppressing the people to whom he was writing; those who were treating with injustice the people to whom he was writing. He spoke directly to them. He turned aside and talked to them in the same way the Old Testament prophets did but now here he turns back in verses 7 to 11 after having dealt with the love of money that drove the ungodly rich that led them to treat the Christians that they were oppressing with injustice and he turns back to the believers now and says, "Okay, how are you to respond to this?" And we know that it's connected to the verses 1 to 6 because of the word "therefore," the first word we're going to read. Therefore having let you listen to what God has to say to them, now what does he have to say to you and me? What did he have to say to the Jewish believers, these Christians in the first century? In light of the injustice that you're experiencing, in light of the oppression that many of you have experienced, how are you to bear up? How do you respond as a Christian to injustice and oppression in the world?

We mentioned last time that injustice and oppression have been present at all times and in all places in some measure. Even in the best societies in the history of the world, you cannot escape the reality of injustice and oppression because sin has brought this about and we should work against those things as much as we can. When we know someone's being oppressed or mistreated, we certainly should not be a part of that and we should try to correct it, but when we can't do anything about it, then James is writing to Christians who couldn't do anything about it, how do you respond, and he has instructions for those of us who can do something about it because of the way we should see, it really helps us to frame how we should see injustice and oppression in this life in light of eternity.

So it's a very relevant question, how do you respond as a Christian when you experience injustice, oppression? How do you respond as a Christian even to others who are victims

of that? How do you help them? How do you understand it yourself? We're not just talking about social injustice or social oppression that is corporate acts in society or by groups of people over other groups of people, or groups of people over an individual, we're talking also about personal injustice and personal oppression. This has application to you. Many people have been victims of personal injustice or oppression. There's all kinds of things. Like I said, this is part of just the fabric of living in a fallen world. People have grown up under tyrannical parents, sometimes just hyper-discipline, rigidity, lack of love, favoritism, things like that that mark and shape you. In other cases, even physical abuse or sexual abuse. So when you've been a victim of personal injustice, personal oppression and this is in the past, there's nothing you can do about it now, how do you respond? This is where, as I mentioned last time, when we know about something like that, we report it to the authorities. You bring someone out of that, you bring them to safety out of that. That's our calling. That's our responsibility and praise the Lord we live in a country that at this point punishes people that do that and so Romans 13 tells us we're supposed to obey every ordinance of man and so we are. The state has an interest in those situations: physical abuse, sexual abuse. But then when it comes to caring for the soul of a person like that, how do you care for a person who is a victim of something like that? This passage has so much to say about how we can be overcomers spiritually in these circumstances. You can have it in less extreme ways. You can experience working for a boss who is somewhat callous, uncaring, insulting, demeaning. You could be the victim of corporate jockeying politics where you've been mistreated by coworkers and stepped on as someone else is making their way to the top. That's injustice. That's a form of oppression. So how do you as a Christian respond to these things? Well, spiritually we have the answers here and that's the most important thing is how you respond to it in your soul before the Lord.

Now let's read the text together. We'll read it in context again like we did last week. I'll start reading in verse 1 and, remember, we're reading this just to set the context for verses 7 to 11 which we're looking at. James 5:1,

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 thank you for your word. We thank you that this book is sufficient to make us equipped for every circumstance that we can encounter in life spiritually as you promise in 2 Timothy 3:16, that this book is inspired by you and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped, thoroughly furnished for every good work. We thank you that this passage, Lord, has part of that message that equips us to live faithful to Christ Jesus in the midst of even crooked and perverse generations. We pray that you will bless the preaching of your word by your Spirit, you'll help us all to hear, to understand, to repent and believe for the glory of our Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.*

So how is a Christian to respond to injustice and oppression? In a word, with patience. That's the key word in the passage occurring four times in the passage, some form of the word "patience." Two times it's an imperative command. Verse 7, "Therefore be patient, brethren." Verse 8, "You too be patient." It also occurs in verse 7, the farmer "being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains." Verse 10, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience." So in a word, the call is to be patient and it's "therefore be patient" because in verses 1 to 6 he says to the ungodly rich who are oppressing you, to the ungodly rich who are trampling upon you, God is already dealing with them. Their judgment is right at the door, therefore be patient, God is going to deal with it. Put your circumstances in context of the eternal plan of God.

This is the key. We noted last time, we started off in looking at this passage and so this is part 2. The title of the message, "The Christian Response to Injustice Part 2." Last time we saw the need for patience. We looked at three points: the need for patience, that we live in a world which injustice abounds; the nature of patience, and we said that the nature of patience is seen in the key word translated "patience" here which is "makrothumia" and it's basically makrothume as a noun. "Makro" means "long or large, and in the place of time it means long in duration of time." "Thumeo or thumos" means "anger or wrath." And so we said that this word means "prolonged restraint of anger; that you have a legitimate reason, a legitimate offense, you are being offended, you have been offended and you're restraining your anger for a prolonged period of time." This is what patience means. So we see this is a distinctly Christian virtue. The Christian has the power to be patient. Another way this word is translated at times in different translations, particularly King James, some places, "longsuffering; to suffer long." It is a Christian virtue. It's one of the fruits of the Spirit. Makrothumia. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, makrothumia.

So we looked at the nature of patience, it's that you're being offended and you're restraining your anger; you're not returning evil for evil. Then we looked at the focus of

patience last time, that was our third point, which is the return of the Lord. Twice we see, "until the coming of the Lord," verse 7, and "for the coming of the Lord," verse 8, "is near." That we are to put all of our focus on the Second Coming of Jesus because that is when justice will roll like a river and will be finally realized. God's justice will come in with the return of the King and it will never be realized until then and so all of human aspirations for justice, while worthy, will never be realized fully and it's important for us to see that. We cannot make utopia because sin is messing everything up and we can't deal and remove sin, only Jesus can. So the biblical picture is have realistic expectations. I mean, we should really be surprised that we don't see more injustice and oppression if we're really thinking biblically. This is par for the course. That doesn't mean that we're satisfied with it and we should not do what we can do, of course, but thinking biblically helps us to have a much more restrained response in our souls. It's the grace of God that is prohibiting these things all the time. If not for the common grace of God, people would just be devouring one another because of sin.

So we looked at the need, the nature, the focus of patience last week. We're going to look at two more points this morning and so I'm going to call them 1 and 2 but if you want to put them as 4 and 5, it just helps me to come out with that. I'm a little bit overly worried about numbers, I know, but anyway, forgive me for that. But I'm going to say 1 and 2 so today, the first thing we need to look at this morning is to understand how to really live out this patience we need to see the work of patience. The work of patience. W-o-r-k, the work of patience.

There are five imperatives or there's really, well, there are five main imperatives in the passage. Three times basically you have this imperative that says, "to behold." Not always translated in your Bible but it's there so it's really eight total but five in the original that are major emphases. Twice, the first two are the imperative "be patient." Be patient, verse 7, verse 8. The third imperative is the word "strengthen your hearts." The fourth imperative is in verse 9, "do not complain." And the fifth imperative is in verse 10, "take the prophets." That's basically a really good outline of how to look at this passage. The commands, what do you do, how do you respond? He gives you five commands and the first two are basically one command, be patient, and that's the main driving thing that the others are basically supporting.

So the work of patience is found in that third imperative, "strengthen your hearts," is how it reads in the New American Standard. The King James and the ESV translate this, "establish your hearts." The NIV says, "stand firm." Literally in the Greek the word "your hearts" is there. It says either "strengthen" or "establish your hearts," trying to translate that verb. It's the "firm" that the NIV points out but it kind of leaves out "the hearts." It says, "strengthen your hearts." The idea is your hearts need to be strengthened. If you're going to be patient, it's going to take effort. It's not going to just happen. You're not going to just naturally as a Christian, you're born again and now when people do injustice to you and oppress you, you just.... Now it is the fruit of the Spirit but one of the things that we see in the New Testament is that you don't grow in Christ by just letting go and letting God. The fruit of the Spirit is grown as you till the soil of your hearts by God's power and God's grace, with God's word, God's Spirit acts, but sanctification is a synergistic process

in the New Testament, that is, we work along with God and we know even as we work, we should trust in the power that he's giving us. That's what gives us the power to work. So you work prayerfully, you work dependently, but nevertheless you work and if you want patience in your life, you must work for it.

He says, "strengthen your hearts." This verb translated "strengthen," or as I mentioned, "establish," it means "to make stable; to set fast; to fix firmly; to make immovable." He says this is what you're to do to your heart, you're to make it steadfast, you're to make it immovable. The object, you do this to your hearts. Your hearts need to be fixed, firmly set. Your heart needs to be made immovable, especially when you're going through oppression, when you are being dealt with injustice.

This tells us it's a work that we must do, it doesn't just happen. It's also interesting to note in the text in verse 8, I'm reading the New American Standard, as I mentioned it says, "You too be patient, strengthen your hearts." There is that "you," y-o-u is emphatic in the text and I think the word order actually literally reads like this, in the Greek it says, "Be patient and you, yourselves, strengthen your hearts." The word order can be moved around when we translate it into English so you see the translators take it different ways but it could read just like that. The word order literally is, "Be patient and you, yourselves, strengthen your hearts." I say you, yourselves, because the y-o-u there, the pronoun is emphatic. In Greek the pronouns are normally contained in the verb themselves. They're always contained in the verbs so that you don't need to add the word y-o-u in Greek, it's already there, the second person plural pronoun is there. The "you" is there. But here the author adds the pronoun "you" on top of that and it gives it the force, "you, yourselves, do this," and it comes right before the command to strengthen your hearts. So the emphasis is, "you, yourselves, be about this, strengthen your hearts." He didn't just say you strengthen your hearts, he wants to say it emphatically, "you, yourselves, strengthen your hearts." You and I are called to get to work, to strengthen our hearts.

It's interesting to note this, you're to strengthen your heart. You know, the Bible in the picture of the heart we looked at a number of weeks a couple of months ago a series of messages on the heart, right? And we saw that the heart is the inner man. The heart is where you think. The heart is where you feel. And the heart is where you choose. All of those things make up the heart and the Bible has a lot to say about the heart but one of the things that the Bible never tells you to do as a Christian is to follow your heart. It doesn't say just let your heart go. Here it says work to strengthen your heart. If you let your heart go, your heart will be weak and you will tend to let go, and praise God he's holding us fast, but we're called to hold on to him and so he says, "strengthen your hearts; don't follow your heart."

In fact, I want you to turn with me to Proverbs 23:19 for a moment. Hold your place in James. Verse 19 of Proverbs 23 says, "Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way." Wisdom is to direct your heart. You don't follow your heart. In fact, the King James actually translates that word "direct, guide." So don't follow your heart anywhere, guide your heart where God wants it to go by his word. You see, that's the work of the

Christian life. We let the word of God continue to change our hearts, to change our thinking, to change our affections, to change our will. In fact, it's interesting to look at that, if you look at that in context, Proverbs 23:17 he says, "Do not let your heart envy sinners." You see, your heart would envy sinners. Don't let it to do that. If you let it go, that's what's going to happen. What do you do? Don't let it do that, guide it into the way.

That's exactly what James is saying in chapter 5. He's saying you must work on your hearts. He's saying don't listen to your heart, speak to your heart. Like Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, I love his quote, our greatest problem is that, or one of our greatest problems is that we listen to ourselves when we should be speaking to ourselves. We listen to the things that come out of our hearts rather than speaking to our hearts to tell our hearts the truth. We listen to our hearts, "Hey, why did they say that to me? They were really insulting me. I should be really upset about that." I'm listening to my heart. Speak to my heart, "Well, did I hear them correctly? Maybe they're having a bad day. I need to pray for them. I need to go ask for clarification rather than let my mind, my heart just go on and on and on. I need to go talk to them." To be diligent to pursue peace because that's what God says we're supposed to do. I need to love them. I need to be gentle and forgiving and gracious. I need to turn. A gentle answer turns away wrath.

So anyway, that's the point. He's saying establish your heart, strengthen your hearts. You need to make them immovable. They won't naturally be this way and to do that, he gives us some windows into how here in the text. A couple of subpoints under the work of patience, the work is to strengthen your heart, to establish your heart, but how do you do that? Well, first of all, behold the farmer because this flows right out of verse 7 when he just gave us this illustration that we haven't yet unpacked. In verse 7 he says, "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. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts." One of the ways that we strengthen our hearts is to hear the word of God and the word of God tells us, "Listen, waiting for justice, waiting for the correction of all that is wrong is like a farmer. Consider the farmer. Look at the farmer."

Literally the word for "farmer," it actually literally says "one who tills the soil." So the guy is getting down into the dirt and he's hoeing it. Modern farmers, you know, driving their big equipment, okay, they're still doing that but this is more earthy. He's down in the ground. He's tilling the soil. He's turning it over. It's a man who works the soil. He's a man who tills. He plants the seed. He weeds. He waters. And here he waits. That's what the farmer does. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil. He has to wait a long time and he waits being patient about it. That's our word again.

Now here, no one is directly assaulting him. It's not a personal thing that he's having to have patience with but he's having to have patience with a lot of things. I mean, think about it, when you're trying to till the soil and you've got hard ground. Don't you hate it when you're trying to dig a hole and you find the hardest and it's got to be here and this is the hardest spot in the yard. And not only is it like clay, and then it's rock, and then you get that rock out and it's another rock. Well, it requires patience to keep working through that. I'm not going to get angry and lose my temper, I'm going to take this as from the

Lord and just keep working, or I'm going to move the hole. One of the two. "The hole would really be better right over here."

Not only that kind of thing, I mean, tilling the soil requires patience but then you have weeds that grow up and try to choke it out and you've got to continue to work, you've got to continue to labor. Maybe there's no rain and you've got to work to irrigate, certainly something that Judean farmers and folks in that area knew well as he makes clear because of his reference to the early and late rains. The way that it was in Palestine and Syria, you get rain twice a year. You get rain in October/November, you get rain in April/May and other than that it doesn't rain so very very very rarely.

So you have the early rains and they would plant their seeds before the fall rain so that the rain would come and germinate the grain and then the late rains would come in time to facilitate the maturation process so that it would bring it all the way to harvest. So the farmer waits for the weeks and the months to pass between all of that and he does so with patience and he's waiting for something precious, he's waiting for the produce, the precious fruit. It's going to come from all of that labor and you think about that, how you wait and you deal with the fact that maybe it rained so hard, no that wouldn't make sense, not there. The animals came through or the weeds have grown up and you have to deal with that but you deal with it and you know you're not going to get anything from it for weeks and months. That's the way the Christian is to live. You deal with difficulty and difficulty, oppression, injustice, and ultimately you know it's not going to be dealt with until that precious fruit is realized, and for the Christian it's when Jesus comes back.

That is how we are to deal with it. He says, "Look at the farmer. You can't fight this. This is just how it is." I mean, you think about that, the farmer might think living in Palestine, "Man, I hate this idea of this, you know, fall rain and spring rain. I'm sick of it." Well, he can be sick of it all he wants to, it's not going to change it. It is how it is. Deal with it, right? It does no good to kick against things that cannot be changed and so in the same way the Christian, we might wish that justice would come more quickly but it is how it is and rather than fight it, we know that God is doing it exactly the right way. In fact, 2 Peter 3:9 makes clear the reason injustice is not being corrected quicker is because God is so gracious and merciful and he wants to have more people get saved because the only way the books can be balanced is for Jesus to come back and the end of time to come, but 2 Peter 3:9 says God is patient, the same word, "makrothumia," not willing for any to perish but for all men to come to repentance. He restrains his anger. His anger against sinners, he restrains it allowing time for them to come to faith in Christ.

So the first thing we need to see there to strengthen our hearts is to see the farmer. The second thing, the second subpoint, we're still on the first point, the work of patience, look at the farmer, secondly, the emphasis is on the Second Coming, the coming of the Lord. He brings it up again here in verse 8, "strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." Literally, "for the coming of the Lord has come near." It's actually "has come near." It's already come near. It's not here but it's come near. On this side of Calvary, on this side of the resurrection, on this side of the ascension, the New Testament treats the

coming of the Lord as imminent. There's nothing else that has to happen in the big plan of God before Jesus comes back.

It's just God's timing and we're to see it that way but not only are we to see it that way, the coming of the Lord is near, I think he's saying, "fix your heart." The way that you do the work of patience, the way you create patience in your heart is you understand this is how it is, this is how we have to wait, but you set your eyes on the Second Coming. And putting this phrase together, "the coming of the Lord," with the verb that we've been talking about, "to make stable; to set fast; to fix; to make immovable; to strengthen your heart; to establish your heart," that same verb that is translated "strengthen your hearts" is used in Luke 9:51 where we read this, "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem." "Was determined" is the same verb here. The ESV and the King James say this, "When the days were approaching for his ascension, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus, this same idea, he made stable, he set fast, he fixed, he made immovable his face aiming at Jerusalem so that in reality our Savior living a true human life, he fixed his countenance as a man, he set his eyes on Jerusalem. In fact, the word for "set" is "face." The word "face" actually eyes is the key part of that word. It's a countenance, including the eyes and so to set your face is to set your eyes. He set his eyes on Jerusalem. He's in Galilee but he set his eyes on Jerusalem. "I'm going to Jerusalem." It's the days of ascension are drawing near, the days of his resurrection, his ascension to heaven are drawing near and so he set his determination to go to the cross.

So what he's saying, then, to strengthen our hearts is when we suffer injustice or oppression whether it's large scale if we go through as Christians, persecution. I mean, honestly every day it seems like we're getting closer to that, doesn't it? If you really look at the flow of society, I mean, the one thing that you can't do is proclaim certainty. That's the most offensive thing that you can do is be certain and what do we preach? A message, a certain message. There's one way to heaven and that one way is Jesus Christ and there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved, and we proclaim that and that's the good news. God has spoken and he's told us that the best way to live is to follow his law and if we love people, we'll tell them that. So we tell them. "It's not that we find these things distasteful, that's not the reason that we don't want you to pursue a same-sex relationship. As a friend I'm telling you not because I care about, I mean, that's irrelevant. God has made you in his image and he knows how you're to operate." And to say that is to do the most offensive thing you can do in this climate of pluralism, isn't it? Add to that just the ebb and flow and you can see that those things appear to be coming. Unless the Lord sends revival, at some point that will happen and that's been the norm actually throughout history. We've lived in the hiccup of history when that wasn't the norm.

So when that happens, what do we do? When we suffer injustice or oppression, it is a wonderful opportunity to set your eyes, to fix your gaze, to establish your heart, and to look not to Jerusalem but to the coming and return of the King. This is what we're called to do, to ask the Lord in the moment, "Lord, let me long for His appearing." You know, I was talking to a believer the other day and they were saying this and I agreed with them, they said, "You know, I don't long for heaven enough." And I said, "I don't either and



that's why we need to pray for that." But the Lord has determined to make us long for heaven and one of the ways you're going to do it is by letting us experience things like this. You experience injustice, you experience oppression and it makes you long for heaven.

So we have to, though, actively set our hearts. This is what the New Testament makes so clear. This is how the believers in Paul's day and the New Testament all understood this. I mean, here are some verses to think about. Philippians 3:20-21, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." He said, "Listen, when Jesus comes back, He's going to subject all things to Himself. He's going to do justice and He's going to change you and me. He's going to transform our sinful bodies into conformity to His holy glorified body." And our citizenship is in heaven, so that shows that we aren't supposed to get so worked up about what's happening here. It doesn't mean that we don't care but it means that comparatively it's small potatoes compared to our citizenship is in heaven. We're just passing through.

2 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith; there is in heaven for me laid up for me the crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, has reserved for all who love His appearing." So Lord, make me love your appearing, and when you pray that and he allows you to experience affliction, he's answering your prayer and suffering is the path to glory. That's just the way it is.

Now, that's the work of patience, set your heart to work for patience, and the second point this morning is the lack of patience. The lack of patience. This is verse 9. At first glance it almost seems that James has started a new section because we read out of verse 8, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brethren, against one another." Wait a minute. He does that, remember from section to section he doesn't always make smooth transitions. He's talking about one thing, he moves on to another but we know that he's not talking about a new subject because he immediately follows that up with, "so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door." Then in verses 10 and 11 he goes back to patience, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets," look at Job.

So this "do not complain," the fourth main imperative that I mentioned earlier, this "do not complain, brethren," is related to patience. How is that? Well, the word itself, "complain," some translations translate it "grumble against," King James, "grudge not," the same word is sometimes translated in the New Testament "groan." Three times in Romans 8 this is the word that's translated "groaning" and we groan within ourselves; the Holy Spirit groans with us; and this word comes from a root word which means "to be in a straight or narrow confined area," and it speaks of the emotional distress that comes from being confined, pressed in, weighed in upon something tightly, to be hemmed in. So the word means, the verb means "to sigh; to groan," and it can mean "to grumble; to

murmur; to complain," but the idea is that you're suffering, you're pressed in, but this pressing in leads to this complaining against one another.

It's also interesting to note, I mentioned there are five imperatives, the five imperatives, four of them are in the aorist tense. This particular imperative is the only one in the Greek present tense. Now when an author uses like that the four, all five, you know, you would expect they all would be the same, aorist tense, he's using the Greek present for emphasis and, remember, aorist tense in Greek, tense is more about the kind of action than the time of action. The aorist tense, he emphasizes punctiliar action, point in time, finished or decisiveness of the action, okay? Present tense, again not time but kind, emphasizes continuous ongoing action.

So on this verb when he says, "do not complain," he uses the Greek present and the idea is "don't go on complaining," which really could be translated this way, "stop complaining against one another. You're already ongoing, this is your manner of life, stop it. Or this is what you're doing right now, stop it. Don't let this continue to be a part of your life." So you're feeling, and so it fits in because when you are under injustice or oppression and you have nothing that you can do about it, you feel confined and naturally you groan under it, you sigh under it, but this groaning and sighing can be hurtful to your brothers and sisters. That's why he says, "against one another." Stop this. So I think what he's doing is he's saying, "Listen, you've got to work at patience and if you don't work at it, this is the inevitable result. If you don't work at cultivating patience, if you and I don't do that, we will find ourselves groaning against our brothers and sisters." It's the inevitable consequence of not setting our hearts, strengthening our hearts, making them steadfast, immovable by setting our eyes on the return of Christ.

So the lack of patience. Think about this, when you're the victim of injustice and oppression in an ongoing way, the natural response is to groan, to sigh. Even when you don't strike out, you can't strike out against the person that is afflicting you, when you're in pain, we strike out at people around us, don't we? Have you had the experience of when you're sick, you're less pleasant to be around, right? I mean, I feel bad and because I feel bad, I'm going to just share the wealth, you know, spread the enjoyment. That's the natural disposition of the heart, sin nature. Misery loves company but that's not the way of the Christian but we have to cultivate our hearts not to do that.

This actually, I think, can mean two things, this "grumble against one another or complain against one another," it can be two ways. I think you can groan or grumble against people directly. You can somehow blame them, "I'm suffering injustice and it's your fault. You haven't done what you need to do." So you strike out at someone else, not the oppressor but this bystander, "You should have done more or you should be more understanding," or whatever and you begin attacking them. It can mean that or it could mean this, that as we are experiencing oppression, we're experiencing pain and that tightness that you feel and can't do anything about it, you grumble and you complain not against them directly, you grumble and you complain against God but in doing so, you're going against them. Your anger with God is an assault on your brothers' and sisters' faith so that the groaning that's not turning its heart toward God, I mean, the Lord allows us to

groan to him. I love that, I mentioned the word "groaning," we groan, it's part of living in a fallen world according to Romans 8. Read Romans 8:18-26 for encouragement. There we see we groan, the same word, we feel the pain of living in a fallen world. We can't help but groan within ourselves, longing for our adoption and the experience of the glory that is coming, and we even sometimes, we're groaning so much we don't know how to pray. We don't know what to pray for. That's where we have that precious promise that the Holy Spirit, he prays for us. He intercedes for us. How does he intercede for us? How does he pray for you when you don't know what to pray? When you're groaning under the weight of the circumstances in your life that are oppressing you and you don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit prays for you in groanings too deep for words. That is astounding. Why would the Spirit of God groan? He has no need to groan in himself. He's not disturbed about anything. Everything is right on course, right on exactly the plan. It is being fulfilled perfectly every day. The Father, the Son, the Spirit have nothing but pleasure and delight because they know where this is all heading. Why does the Spirit groan? Because he loves you and he groans with you.

He enters into our suffering with us and Paul says take comfort in that. This is your God. But when we don't take comfort in that and we groan against God, we complain against him, we damage other people. This is the message of Psalm 73. Remember the Psalmist? He looks around him and he sees injustice in the world, he sees, he's apparently the victim of oppression, he's a righteous man who never has, he feels like he doesn't have the blessings at all that he would expect that he would have and he sees the wicked, they are prospering and he says, he concluded after looking around at all the data points in his life, he looked at the wicked, they're prospering, he looked at the righteous, they're suffering, and he concluded, he made an inferential analysis and he said, "Surely in vain have I kept myself pure." Are there times in your life when you've felt that and that really does seem to make sense? "Surely in vain have I kept myself pure." You look at the world.

The Psalmist says that and then he says this, "If I had spoken thus," listen to this, "If I had spoken thus I would have sinned against the next generation." If I had voiced my displeasure with God, if I had expressed this, you see, what I would have been doing would have been doing something awful against the faith of other people. So hush your mouth when you feel like that. Get alone with God.

The next verse is the turning point. He says, "If I had spoken thus I would have sinned against a generation but I entered into the sanctuary of God and then I understood. Then I saw surely you have put them in slippery places, surely in a moment judgment will come upon them." He says, "When I entered into the presence of God, that's when I saw." What we do when we're under these things is we run to God. Set your eyes on Christ, the return of Christ and run to the Lord knowing the Holy Spirit meets you in your suffering. He's there with you. Turn to him and he will open your eyes and he will give you an eternal perspective like that Psalmist gained. That's a beautiful passage. I would encourage you to read Psalm 73 this week.

After he says that, he says, "Surely I was like a dumb animal before You. I spoke like a dumb animal. I made that inferential analysis and I was just like a stupid donkey evaluating my circumstances. When I came in and saw what You really see, You gave me eyes to see. Now I understand." And from that, this is where those precious verses are, he says, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." What a transformation. It happened through him looking at injustice and oppression but not grumbling aside to other believers, not slandering God's name, but going to the Lord.

James is saying, "That's what I'm telling you to do. You've got to take care of your hearts and if you don't take care of your hearts, the inevitable consequence is, the evidence of you not caring for your heart is you will be spouting out this kind of garbage around you, polluting people that you should love and care about." In both cases whether it's saying something directly, "You're my problem. I wish that you would do things differently." Groaning directly against them, or if you're groaning against God, in both cases the essential problem is that we are inordinately focused on this world and we are encouraging other believers to be inordinately focused on this world too. Jesus said in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world," he's talking to Pilate, "If My kingdom were of this world, then My people would fight for Me; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

This gives us a window to how we're to deal with injustice in our lives whether it's socially or individually. We can do what we can to stop injustice around us and we should be a person who would defend someone that we see being beaten in a parking lot, we should go and either call 911 and then get yourself in there and don't be taking a video of them like all people do nowadays, like this is what I do to protect people, I take a video of them. It's not bad to have a video, have someone else take the video, somebody has got to stop this person from beating that person. We should do that. We should be active. We should when it comes to in a free society like we have, we should be politically active. We should vote in ways that promote righteousness, that promote law and order. Essentially 1 Timothy 2 gives you a good guideline for that, that we should pray for our leaders. Why? We should pray that they would rule us in such a way that we would have peaceful tranquil lives, and then he goes on to say for there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. What he's saying is pray for government to rule well so that the Gospel can go forth unhindered.

So you do that and when you see those things working against us like we've seen in so many people who want to slam and end free speech like we're seeing so many clamor for, well, you could contend for it and vote for it and you can even talk about it and reason with it, but keep it in perspective. What's more important? Winning an argument with this person or winning them to Jesus? What good does it do if they become convinced of now a new understanding politically or something and they go to hell? The Gospel is what is supreme. That's what James is trying to tell us so that personal injustice, being the victim of something like that isn't as important as the Gospel.

"My kingdom is not of this world." I mean, we don't want to settle for this world, do we? Think about how good you could make, you can make the best thing that you want to make in this world and it's never enough. It's never enough. I was reading, actually I heard a sermon in South Africa from Tedd Tripp and I commend those to you. You can find the ACBC sermons from South Africa that we went to, you know, we facilitate, our missions team facilitated ministry of two different ACBC, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors conferences in Africa and we were in Pretoria and in Cape Town and our folks did such a great job of taking care of the kids in both places so all the adults could be there. Well, I got to speak and got to also be there for most of the messages, almost all the messages myself twice because they were so good I wanted to hear them all again. Tedd Tripp preached some messages on Genesis that were outstanding. You can Google it on YouTube and you can find it, or maybe the website has it now too. But anyway, he had a message on Jacob in which he brought up how we have these aspirations, we think things are going to be a certain way and they never are, even the best circumstances. And he read a quote from C. S. Lewis related to this where he said think about how you have anticipated something in your life, "I'm going to get married. It's the perfect person. And then I'm going to be happy. I'm going to get a new job. I'm going to have this new opportunity, the new house." And Lewis writes essentially and when you get there, it's never what you hoped it would be. He said, "I'm not talking about the worst times, I'm not talking about the worst marriages or the worst jobs, I'm talking about the very best." Whatever you long for is never what you get in this life even when you get the very best this life has to offer because all of our longings are for heaven.

So when you realize that, we start letting go of the stuff of this world and so if God allows it, we get persecuted and they take away our stuff, we need to be like the Hebrews the author of Hebrews writes to, that you receive with joy the confiscation of your property. "If that's what you allow, Lord, you're really helping us get ready for heaven. How good of you to remind us." And in America where we have so much and the Lord does it in different ways, just regular suffering, just the suffering of illness, the suffering of difficult circumstances, the suffering of fires that go out of control, all of it is telling us, "You are not home yet. Set your eyes on home and that'll give you the strength, that'll give you the ability to magnify Christ in your relationship with even the most difficult people by his grace and for his glory."

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank you for the glorious Gospel, the reality that you have made known a way of salvation for sinners like us who deserve nothing but wrath. We don't deserve to be alive, Lord, and our hearts have turned away from you from our mother's womb, even, not honored you, not loved you, not put you above everything else as we should just as creatures, we should have done that, and yet you have made a way of salvation by giving your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in the place of sinners to bear your righteous wrath in himself and to take away the punishment that was due to us, and then raising him from the dead, exalting him to your right hand and giving us the opportunity to have not only a not guilty verdict but a righteous verdict, that those who believe in Jesus are righteous forever in your sight, and we will escape not only the ugliness of this*

*life, we will escape the punishment of hell, we will escape all that we deserve and we will enjoy the glory of heaven in your presence being clean and pure, able to stand, and even now we're able to come boldly into your presence because of the blood of Christ. Lord, help us to set our eyes truly on heaven. Help us to not be so distracted, continually forgetting what matters most. Forgive us, Lord, and do whatever is necessary to keep turning our hearts toward you that we would be like Jesus. We pray this in his name. Amen.*