

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part seventeen

Teaching #1836 - Sunday, October 18th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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WHEN GOD DOESN'T SEEM TO BE DOING ANYTHING

James 5:7-12 - "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. [8] You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. [9] Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. [10] As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [11] Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. [12] But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

We'll spend two weeks on this meaty text. The last half of chapter four can be depressing reading. The first verse of that chapter introduced the issue of the "*quarrels and fights*" among these Christians and the whole chapter tells of abusers and abused. These people weren't living like the faithful bride of Christ. They were living like *adulteresses* (4:4). The hurting people did what any Christian victim would do. They "*cried out to the Lord*" (5:4).

And now the teaching of today's text starts to sparkle with relevance. What do you do when you cry out to the Lord in your trouble and *nothing happens*? Have you ever cried out to the Lord and your trouble didn't go away?

James is a *realist*. He's given everything from exhortation, to instruction, to warning in his letter. Now he's wrapping up. In the remainder of the letter he's going to deal with seasons when you don't see God working. You're hurting. Perhaps you're being mistreated. You're crying out to the Lord of Hosts. But none of the hosts seem to be *doing* anything (5:7-12). That's the first thing James is going to talk about. Then he's going to talk about the prayer life of the church (5:13-20).

There's a reason James closes his letter with these two issues. Right away I'm taught two important truths. *First*, not everything will happen as quickly as I think it should in my walk with the Lord in this fallen world. And *second*, I do not have the strength, in and of myself, to be all Jesus wants me to be until He comes. It takes more than *will-power*. It takes *prayer*.

But that's not all James wants to say about the need for prayer. He's going to say something we aren't expecting. He's going to say it takes more than just my *private* prayer to make my walk with God all He wants it to be. It takes praying *together* - prayer *one for another*. This is not the kind of praying we used to sing about - "*I come to the garden alone*." This is the *two or three agreeing together* kind of praying endorsed by Jesus.

1) **LIFE LESSON #1 - BECAUSE GOD LOVES US GREATLY HE DESIRES TO GIFT US WITH PATIENCE. BUT HE CAN'T DO THAT QUICKLY**

James 5:7 - "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how *the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth*, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains."

No doubt, James remembered brother Jesus comparing the growth of the fruit of the Word in our lives with a farmer sowing seed. Almost nothing grows immediately. Seeds *begin* the process of growth, imperceptibly for sure - just as soon as they're put into the ground. You can't pin-point any single moment when absolutely *nothing* has begun in the long process of germination. But you can't identify the exact *beginning* either.

It's like watching the hour hand on the clock. You can know for certain that it moved halfway around the clock's face over the course of an afternoon, and you can know for certain that it *is*, in fact, moving all the time. But you can't *see* any one moment when it actually begins its long journey.

James isn't just giving a lesson in agriculture. Sometimes, indeed frequently, life is like that for you and me. You go through times when you rack your brains looking for something to do to change things, to fix things, to make things happen. Or you look to see where something *has* happened in the way of improvement but there's nothing you can put your finger on.

"Pastor, what can I do?" Those words launch dozens of painful conversations. "So and so is treating me cruelly." "My husband says he's leaving." "My son doesn't want to follow Jesus anymore." "I'm afraid I have a deadly disease."

There **has** to be something to do with these things! And many times there is. James is going to write about the awesome power of diligent, earnest prayer - **"And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working"**(James 5:15-16).

Yes, James **knows** about the power of prayer. Remember, James walked and ate with Jesus as Jesus multiplied loaves, healed lepers, and raised the dead.

But not **always**. That's what makes James such an important book. It's very down to earth and real. The workers getting ripped off at the **beginning** of chapter five aren't getting miracles as they cry out to the Lord. Those praying for healing at the **end** of chapter five are.

Is that the whole story? Is there anything happening for those being persecuted unjustly? Are they getting anything as they, like a farmer, watch the surface of the soil to see anything at all beginning to sprout? What about these people? What do they get? What is James thinking as he writes about them being like farmers waiting for the crop to come in?

James 5:7 - **"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains."**

If they can move their thoughts into the future and anchor them more to the coming of the Lord than the pressure of their present circumstances they will grow in **patience**. And if there's some unspoken objection coming to mind - if there's something arising in your heart that says, "Big deal. Patience. I'd rather have door number two please," then you need to think again.

Patience doesn't just teach us to **pass time**. James and Jesus both said patience **grows fruit** - **Luke 8:14-15** - **"And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. [15] As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."**

Consider this because it's so easily missed in today's church. You may be able to get **answers** without patience. But apparently answers aren't the full package. God wants to give me more than answers. He wants to **grow fruit**. And **growing fruit** is different from getting an **answer**. God loves you and me so much He wants, not only to make my **life more pleasant**, but to make my **soul stronger**. Patience is the slow coming gift that is more precious than diamonds.

2) **LIFE LESSON #2 - THE VALUE OF PATIENCE IS THE POWER IT CARRIES TO TEACH US WHAT TO LIVE FOR**

James 5:8 - **"You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."**

Just because times seem discouraging, doesn't mean they have to be fruitless. **Patience** has power to change **you** even **before** God works in your **circumstances**. Some things won't be solved until Jesus comes again. This is not due to some **weakness** in either the power or plan of God. It seems to be the way He often **delays** in solving some of our biggest problems so He can produce something deeper than our comfort.

If you doubt this, just stop for a minute and consider the way God has **always** done His greatest work in this world. Seconds after our first human parents sinned God promised a deliverer. The **promise** came immediately. The **Deliverer** came **thousands of years** later. When Jesus did finally come He lived on this earth for a total of about 33 years. For the first 30 of those years only a few of His closest family members had any idea this was the Divine Son of God. He never did one thing, never lifted a finger to save anybody.

It is only after those long 30 years were finished that there is any really serious revelation of who He was and why He came. Since He died and rose again He has ascended into glory and, according to the Scriptures, been given a Name that is above every name. But, over two thousand years later, we still live in a world racked with rebellion to our Ascended Lord and full of bruised and broken souls. Nothing seems different at all.

Why does God do things like this? Our God loves *patience*. Here's why Jesus hasn't swept all rebellion and wickedness and idolatry from the face of the earth yet. Here's why He hasn't returned.

Here's why we still wait. Jesus wants, not only to *come again in power*, but to *wean our hearts from the false joys of this world before He comes*. This is the only way our *hearts* can be trained in holiness and devotion *before* Jesus comes and forces all enemies under His feet. He wants *us to willingly deny them before He openly defeats them*.

The *waiting* isn't an accident or afterthought. Waiting for Jesus' return is actually presented as the *definition* of genuine conversion in the New Testament - **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** - "**For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**"

Notice, this "*waiting for His Son from heaven*" is the longing true conversion generates. This isn't something emotional or frivolous or extra, and the church needs to see where she's missing this key element of New Testament Christianity.

I have a deep inward fear we're veering way off track in the modern church. I've been thinking lately of some profound words from theologian **Millard Erickson**. They're from his excellent book, "**Where is Theology Going?**" (Baker Books). Remember these prophetic sounding words were written in 1994:

"In the area of **Christology** we can expect the uniqueness of Jesus to receive less and less emphasis. There will be a growing accent upon His humanity. And His unusual characteristics will come to be seen as very much like those of other outstanding leaders and teachers."

"**Humanity** will be understood increasingly in natural categories and hence as having great affinity with the other members of creation ('Pets are people too'). The value of the human race will not be seen as conferred from above, by a God who made us in His own image and likeness, but as coming from below, humans being the highest product of some form of evolutionary process."

"**Sin** will increasingly be a social and psychological concept rather than a religious one. It will be thought of less as violating God's law or falling short of His standard for us, and more as a matter of failure to live up to one's potential. The whole idea of **actual** guilt will be increasingly displaced by **feelings of emptiness and estrangement**."

"**Salvation** will accordingly be thought of less as a supernatural or otherworldly matter, and more in terms of adjustment and self-understanding. The struggle to achieve **wholeness** will replace the pursuit of **holiness**."

"**Evangelism** will lose ground to personal counseling and social protest and action. Further, salvation will not be viewed as restricted to those within the church or those with a conscious and explicit faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Other world religions will be seen as leading to the same goal, and all persons of good will who are noble in their concerns and actions will be thought of as brothers and sisters."

"**Eschatology** (this is the relevant point for our text from James) will increasingly lose its futuristic and otherworldly character. The present and earthly dimension of the kingdom of God will be emphasized more than the future and spiritual aspect. The emphasis that the kingdom will be introduced by the supernatural, **personal coming of Christ** will yield to the idea that it will be brought about by human endeavors."

"We conclude with an observation on the practical level. Given the shifts in doctrinal emphasis that we have mentioned, **preaching** will be more horizontal than vertical. It will be more geared to meeting human needs and comforting human hurts in the here and now, than to glorifying God and declaring His expectations of and promises to us."

Remember James' words in **verse 8** - "**You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**" James says something is deepened in your spiritual mind-set as you wait for **one thing more than you wait for anything else**.

Waiting faithfully isn't easy. The Apostle Peter tells us many religious people will actually turn into **mockers** while waiting for Jesus to return. That's what happens if we wait **impatiently**. That's what happens when we allow **doubts** and **frustrations** to replace **hope and love**.

No wonder James says ***“Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”*** Feed your waiting. Don't grow slack in ***nourishing*** your waiting. Consider deeply the way everything else grows weaker and fails with the passing of time. Look at the emptiness of all this world anchors devotion to. Waiting can be powerful for your faith. We'll consider this more next week.