

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

Teaching #1838 - Sunday, October 25th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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WHEN GOD DOESN'T SEEM TO BE DOING ANYTHING (continued)

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."

What a text this is! James is unpacking the treasure of *growth in Christ*. He makes this clear in his opening remarks about *fruit* coming from *seeds* - **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.*"

There is "*precious fruit*" God wants to grow in my life and in yours. But that fruit needs *something besides itself* to mature and ripen. Something else must be *added* to make my life fruitful. The fruit doesn't spring automatically from the seed. There's an "*until*" in the process of growing fruit - "*...until it receives the early and the late rains*" (7). Then, in **verse 10** James identifies those early and late rains. He tells us what the rain is - "As an example of *suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*"

Don't rush past these words. James is dealing with something precious - something we all seek after. He's dealing with how everything in my Christian walk moves beyond being *started* to being *fruit-producing and life-changing*. We need to know this.

Last week we looked at two ideas - two *life-lessons*:

First, there is no authentic spirituality apart from patience. And God can't give patience quickly. This, of course is the whole point James drills down into in **verse 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.*"

Second, patience has value because it teaches priorities. Patience *focuses* life. It weeds out what is trivial. The passing of time with faith and courage educates our energies. This is James' teaching, especially in **verse 8** - "You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

The idea here is *pleasure* doesn't make us think about the coming of the Lord. *Trials* do. Be patient about all the other circumstances of your life and be anxiously longing for the coming of the Lord.

This idea of *waiting for the coming of the Lord* isn't some little side bar in the New Testament. It's what salvation - in all its aspects - is rooted in. Waiting for the coming of the Lord is *what we do* as disciples - **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.*"

Finally, we saw that this kind of *faithful waiting* isn't easy to do. And I wrapped up last week examining some sharp edged insights from theologian *Millard Erickson's* little book, "*Where is Theology Going?*"

Here's what this theologian predicted we might see unfolding in the Christian mind-set over two decades ago:

"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, *Erickson* wrote those words back in 1994. We can now see the precision of his guess-work. He's describing the *devaluation* of sound Biblical thinking that always accompanies the *abandonment* of looking toward the coming of the Lord. James says to cling to it. *Why?*

And now we are back to continuing our second point from last Sunday morning:

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

We just started unpacking this point last Sunday morning. What is gained by a mind-set that locks in on the coming of the Lord while patiently following Him against the grain of this world? The Scriptures give abundant answer to that question:

Matthew 5:11-12 - "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

It's true. You are blessed even in the midst of painful and undeserved mistreatment. And you can still rejoice. But only if you remember your *reward* in heaven.

Romans 12:17-19 - "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

Here is the same subject from a different perspective. How do you keep hatred out of your heart when your enemy abuses you? How do you cool the fires of revenge? Paul says you can only do it by remembering a final time of reckoning before the Lord. You rest in that future accounting. All will be made right. That's what enables you to love your enemy even when he's unlovable.

Hebrews 10:32-37 - "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, *you endured a hard struggle with sufferings*, [33] sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. [34] For you had compassion on those in prison, and you *joyfully accepted the plundering of your property*, since *you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one*. [35] Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God

you may receive what is promised. [37] For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay....'"

Here again we see the teaching on the Second Coming linked to practical strength and patient power for the present. What enabled these people to give away their property and share with those in need? They had better possessions in view - eternal possessions. If you forget about heaven, you'll be small and stingy in the present.

And look at verses 36-37 - "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. [37] For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay....'"

So doing the will of God isn't quite enough all by itself. Duty needs a *perspective* to have *endurance*. Even people who do the will of God cleanly and faithfully can lose heart. The will of God is not always a piece of cake. The will of God doesn't always make life easier. Sometimes it's a very costly thing to follow the Lord. And the strength to do that comes from establishing your heart patiently around the reality of the coming of our Lord.

Hebrews 11:23-26 - "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. [24] By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward."

What keeps a person from allowing idols in his or her heart? What keeps a person from selling out for the pleasures of sin and temptation? This text tells us it takes more than stoic will-power. It takes a vibrant hope in the better country, the eternal kingdom of Christ our Lord, the hope of a new heaven and earth.

If our hearts are fixed there it will keep us pure in temptation and strong in trial. No wonder James reminds these dear frustrated, persecuted and almost worn out saints - James 5:8 - "You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

What is the *supremely influential* fact about your future? For many it's *retirement*. For some it's *graduation*. For some it's the next *promotion or acquisition*. For others it's *their children's quality of life*. What's the *supremely influential fact of your future*? For the Christian there is only *one* correct answer to that question. Establish all the aspirations and efforts of your whole heart - like the moons around Jupiter - around the coming of the Lord.

3) LIFE LESSON #3 - AS YOU WAIT FOR THE LORD KEEP ALL BITTERNESS AND GRUMBLING OUT OF YOUR HEART

James 5:9-12 - "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.

There's more meat in those words when we remember the context. The first part of chapter five makes clear the kind of abuse and mistreatment these people were suffering. But James reminds them they aren't righteous just because they're victims. They only become righteous in *God's* eyes when they suffer without bitterness or revenge. They aren't even to *grumble* to one another. They aren't to fall into rash, impulsive, perhaps profane speech (12).

Instead, they're to *remember the prophets* and they're to *remember Job*. This is the final part of James' teaching on endurance - "We count those blessed who endured"(11). If you don't know the story of the prophets you are shortchanging yourself in the battle for endurance. A knowledge of the history of the Old Testament is *assumed* in these verses.

Jesus assumed the same knowledge in His own disciples. Speaking on the very same subject - strength and endurance in the face of difficulty and persecution - He said this - "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"(Matthew 5:11-12).

What's assumed in both these passages is the ability to relate Old Testament accounts to present day life. What's assumed is we all **know** all these stories. We can connect the dots between Bible and life.

Read. Make this connection. You can't **live** as you should **live** until you **know** what you should **know**. Crave depth in God's Word. Know the stories. Get into a Christian Education Class. Take notes during sermons - **anyone's** sermons. Read at least **three chapters** of the Bible every day.

Do you know the life story of Jeremiah? He was abused and tortured over and over again, just for delivering God's message. Do you know the story of Isaiah? History tells us he was **sawn in two** just for being faithful to the Lord. Do you know the story of Job. Job had to endure, not knowing what the outcome of all his trials would be. He just toughed it out, probably thinking God would kill him in the end. But James says we know the outcome of Job's life.

Do you know all these things? Or are you trying to endure **unarmed**? There are some things you **don't** know. You don't see the end of your story. You don't know **why** your life is unfolding as it is. All you know is you've done the best you can do. You've planted faithfully. You've sown the best you knew how. You've prayed. You're fighting off anger and bitterness of heart. Or, perhaps you've messed things up royally. You feel it's too late for God to ever do anything good through your life.

Either way, James has the same admonition for you and me. Drive your life deeper into God's Word. Don't cruise the surface of it. Know the stories. Look at the lives. Soak up the examples.

I read a paragraph from **William Kilpatrick** in his wonderful book, **"Why Jonny Can't Tell Right From Wrong."** He quotes the words of **Lynne Cheney**, who was then Chairman of the National Endowment For the Humanities. I couldn't get them out of my mind:

"But what about the other kind of story.....that opens our eyes, wakes us up to the fact that we are part of a continuity extending through time? What happens when these stories are neglected? Let me suggest there are grave consequences when we fail to awaken the time-binding capacity in the young. People who grow up without a sense of how yesterday has affected today are unlikely to have a strong sense of how today affects tomorrow. They are unlikely to understand in a bone-deep way how the decisions they make now will shape and affect their future. It is only when we become conscious of the flow of time that the consequences of action - whether it is taking drugs or dropping out of school - become a consideration. It is only when we have perspective on our lives that motives besides immediate gratification can come into play."

Listen to these tough but sparkling words from James today. And, above all, set your heart - your naturally fearful, bleeding, impulsive heart - set it firmly on the coming of the Lord. Don't chafe. Don't grumble and gossip. Let patience have its perfect work. You can't help but be fruitful there.