

James 5:7-12**“Establish Your Heart”**

Imago Dei Church | Sunday AM – 3 Services | 3/11/18

INTRODUCTION

Like most people, I was not the most mature person in my college years, and I occasionally did things that I am not proud of.

One winter a buddy and I were taking a January-term class and, to save some money, we stayed with this gracious family from our church rather than in the dorms.

On one occasion we found ourselves up late talking about something—theology or girls or whatever.

Now, I was actually already in bed, sitting up but getting ready to go to sleep, and my buddy was standing beside his bed (which was kinda in the back of this big room)—folding his clothes.

Well, he finishes folding his clothes, jumps into bed, and then says 6 words that would forever alter our friendship: “Shane, can you get the light?”

Now, I’m not going to pretend like I was asleep, or even that he was just as close to the light switch as I was—I was much closer. BUT, I was in bed already,

and I would have had to at least put one foot on the ground to reach the light.

So that set off about 20 minutes of arguing over the philosophy of who’s responsibility it is to get the light.

Who thinks that, because I was closer and wasn’t actively trying to go to sleep, I should have turned the light off?

Who thinks my buddy should have—being the last one to get in bed?

Well, after my buddy made a few attempts to throw a shoe at the light switch and turn it off...we slept with the light on that night.

Well, once the semester started and our roommates moved back in, we all clarified that in order to be exempt from light switch duty, you had to be clearly **established** in the bed.

One of our roommates never wanted to be stuck getting out of bed to turn off the light, so he would come in right after dinner at like 6pm, run, throw his bag in the corner, and leap in bed. And no lie, mid-air he would yell “Established!”

In the passage we’re looking at today, James exhorts his readers to be “established” with the same vigor that my roommate tried for.

As Tony taught us last week, James’ Jewish-Christian readers were scattered around the Roman Empire—many of them socially and economically vulnerable to the wealthy who might try to take advantage of them.

In the passage directly before this, James rebukes the rich oppressors and warns them that the Lord sees their evil.

In the text we’re looking at today, he turns to the believing oppressed—those who are suffering unjustly in a broken and sinful world at the hands of broken and sinful men—and he wants to encourage them to not give up.

-Is this you this morning?

-Are being mistreated by someone?

-Do you find yourself in a conflict you didn’t start?

-Do you find yourself at the mercy of a job, a culture, a government, a spouse, or a friend—anyone who is taking advantage of you, speaking lies about you, or seeming to work for your harm rather than your good?

Understandably in these situations, our temptation is to lash out, to take revenge, to punish—and we feel

justified because we know we're being treated unjustly.

I suspect that that is or will be all of us at one point or another. We will all experience the hurt of living in a fallen world with fallen people.

Whether you're a Christian or not, you will experience mistreatment in this world.

The question we have to wrestle with is—**how will we respond?**

In this text, we could easily sum up James' encouragement to the oppressed many ways: be patient ... endure ... be steadfast ... don't give up.

But one phrase in this text sticks out to me as particularly descriptive: in verse 8, James says, **"establish your hearts."**

Just like my old roommate wanted to make sure everyone knew he was established in bed, James wants to make sure all of his people are established. Settled ... Unmoved ... Unwavering ... Grounded.

And he correctly identifies where the battle lies: in their hearts.

Many times, especially in times where we are legitimately being sinned against, we are so tempted

to focus on our circumstances, and think, “If I can just change them! If I can just get out of this messy situation...THEN I’ll be able to walk in faithfulness.”

But James knows that the battle for the Christian is not “out there” but “in here.”

Trials, mistreatment, opposition—these **are** going to come at us. And when they do, so many times we get swept away by them because our hearts are not firmly fixed in Christ. We either get crushed by the evil, or we get coaxed into responding sinfully ourselves.

James beckons us to be established—not so easily tossed to and fro by every wind and wave of difficulty, strife, and—yes—evil that comes against us.

Oh, to be the kind of man, woman, boy or girl that is so established in our hearts that we can neither be crushed by evil nor swayed into it!

How do we become such men and women?

The big idea this morning is that Christians are called to respond to evil and oppression by establishing our hearts in the promises and character of God.

We’re **not** called to just grin and bear it. We’re **not** called to look inside for the strength we need. We’re **not** called to get revenge. **Instead**, we’re called to walk in the way of Jesus, who himself received the greatest level

of oppression and mistreatment the world has ever known, and for our sakes trusted in the promises and character of his Father.

So, to that end, let me provide 3 aspects of this kind of God-centered steadiness that James is inviting us to.

1) ESTABLISH YOUR HEART ... WITH PATIENT EXPECTATION (5:7-9)

[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. [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.

As I mentioned, the temptation we most immediately and intensely feel when we are mistreated is to get revenge. We all want our pound of flesh.

James knew this would be a desire for his readers, so he encourages them to be patient.

He’s not simply calling them to wait—he’s calling them to *a particular kind* of waiting. A waiting that is not marked by revenge or hatred.

Why? How can the believer experience mistreatment in this world and overcome the desire for payback?

James’ answer is that the Lord is coming. We patiently anticipate the Lord’s arrival.

He provides a simple analogy of how a farmer in Palestine would have to wait for two different periods of rains—one late and one early. When the rains come, they produce **"the precious fruit of the earth."**

The farmer doesn't take matters into his own hands. He doesn't get down on the ground like Happy Gilmore and start berating the seeds for not growing. He waits.

Many of us have a hard time waiting. **We're like a mom who starts "nesting" when a baby is about to come. "How many times are you gonna rearrange the furniture?!" We got to DO something to speed it up.**

James says, "Your job isn't to get payback. Your job is to wait for the promised return of the judge."

This is the great hope of the Christian in this life! It is the greatest source of comfort and confidence in every trial and difficulty!

When we're inclined to get impatient and take matters into our own hands, we can remember that Christ is NOT DEAD and he is NOT DONE. He is coming back to finish what he started.

Consider the words that Christ himself spoke:

John 14:1-3

[1] "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and

prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

The same Judge that is coming to defeat the wicked is coming to deliver the waiting.

And we can wait joyfully because we know his arrival is **"at hand."** It's coming soon. It may not be on my timetable, and it may not be exactly when I want it, but the promise of God is that it is happening, right on time, and without delay.

Just as Jesus told several parables about how he could return at any time, and that his people must be ready and not be caught off guard. Here James picks up on that not as a warning but as an encouragement.

He is coming! It could be any moment.

So don't give into the impulse to seek revenge. Leave it to the judge.

In verse 9 he gets incredibly practical:

In times of hardship we are inclined to turn inward, become selfish, and lose sight of the hope we have in Christ.

When my eyes turn away from Christ and towards myself and my circumstances, I am more likely to whine and complain and bicker.

James reminds us that just because we are being mistreated does not give us license to sin. The Christ we await with eager expectation is the same Christ who delivered us from the punishment and the power of sin.

We must not receive the benefits of his salvation and the comfort of his coming deliverance only to reject his lordship when it is inconvenient.

So establish your hearts with patient expectation.

Wait eagerly for him to return and him to execute judgment. That's his job.

And just like the farmer has other work to do while he's waiting on the rain, so do we.

**2) ESTABLISH YOUR HEART ... WITH FAITHFUL
ENDURANCE (5:10-11)**

If one temptation when we experience mistreatment is to seek revenge, another is to cave. To give in. To flinch.

James reminds his brothers and sisters to remain faithful to the end.

[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.

He ushers in two OT examples for encouragement: the prophets and Job. Both of these examples experienced unspeakable trauma. Yet James reminds us that, though they suffered, the outcome of their lives was worth it in the end.

The Prophets

It was basically an assumption that if you were going to be a faithful prophet, your life was going to be terrible.

No one wanted to be a faithful prophet when they grew up!

- **Elijah** was harassed by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel
- **Jeremiah**—"the weeping prophet" (what a name!)—was beaten, put in stocks, thrown in a dungeon and then into a cistern.
- **Daniel** was ripped from his home and almost fed to lions.
- **Hosea** was called to marry a prostitute to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness and God's unfailing love.
- **John the Baptist** was imprisoned and beheaded.

Hebrews 11:35b-38

[35] ... Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they

might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— [38] of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

But what was the outcome of their life? Those who (a) were faithful to their calling, and (b) remained steadfast—they were blessed. They pleased the Lord.

The greatest way for any life to end is to hear from Christ, “well done, my good and faithful servant! ... Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matt 5:21, 23)

This was the outcome of their faithful endurance.

Job

Job likewise remains “steadfast.” Do you remember the story of Job? He was the man the Scriptures call “blameless and upright”—whom Satan comes to test to prove he only loved God because everything in his life was great.

So one by one, Satan starts to take away any earthly reason Job might have remain faithful to God. Property, children, health—Job lost it all!

What was Job’s response?

Job 1:21

[21] And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked

shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

And then for 35 chapters (!) Job listens to his friends and even his wife come in and—get this—either blame Job or blame God.

How often is this the temptation we face in the midst of trial and difficulty. We either assume we’re being punished or conclude God is not good.

But Job does neither of these things. He remains steadfast.

What is the outcome of his life, according to James? To know **“how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”**

Even in the midst of his suffering, God’s purpose in Job’s life was to show that HE was worth Job’s faithfulness.

Friends, we could lose everything in this life, and knowing Christ would still be worth our faithful endurance. He is our reward.

Philippians 3:10–11

[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Brothers and sisters, we can trust Christ in suffering and even remain faithful to his calling in our lives because his is good for it!

His character is proven.

His promises are sure.

Even in a fallen world living with the opposition of fallen people, we are called to faithful endurance.

Establish your heart with patient expectation ... with faithful endurance ...

3) ESTABLISH YOUR HEART ... WITH HUMBLE REVERENCE (5:12)

[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.

This last verse might seem out of place at first, but I think there is a simple enough connection.

When our hearts are not established in the promises and character of God, we often find ourselves grasping for something solid—for something to hold onto. We need something weighty to anchor us.

In our speech, this grasping comes out by oath-taking.

James isn’t saying we can never take any kind of oath, such as in a court or in the military.

He’s saying there should be a level of integrity in your speech such that we shouldn’t have to dishonor God to shore up your trustworthiness.

This kind of oath-taking was a common feature in Jewish culture of the day, and James is troubled by it.

But he’s especially troubled by WHAT they were appealing to.

Their looseness of appealing to God and the things of God revealed a lack of reverence and appreciation for the character and holiness of God.

Jesus had explicitly made this connection in Matthew 5.

Matthew 5:34–35

[34] ... Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

James is picking up in that exact spot and reminding us that a proper appreciation of God’s awesomeness, his holiness, his greatness guards us against treating him lightly, and frees us up to speak with a clear and God-honoring integrity.

What do your words reveal about your view of God? Do they reveal a lightness, a laziness—or do they reveal a humble reverence.

James warns us against taking the Lord lightly, even with “just” our words—“that you may not fall into condemnation.”

Out of the abundance of our hearts, Jesus said, our mouths speak.

May we not fall into condemnation for our careless words and our irreverent hearts.

The reality is, we *need* a God that is so powerful that he cannot be trifled with, even in our words. For what other kind could promise to make all things new, to judge all evil, and rescue the oppressed.

His gravity and his grace go hand-in-hand.

CONCLUSION

Well, even though we end here with a warning, this passage is, at its core, an invitation.

It invites us to see and trust that Christ is faithful to his promise—he is coming back to defeat the wicked and to deliver the waiting.

It invites us to see his character—his compassion and mercy, his love and justice, his uncompromising holiness.

It invites us to follow in his footsteps.

He is the one who shows us what it looks like to have our hearts established.

That word in verse 8—“establish”—it’s the same word we see in **Luke 9:51: “[51] When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”**

His was a **determination** to go to Jerusalem to take the condemnation that you and I deserve.

His was a **steely resolve** to bear the weight of brokenness that your sin and my sin caused.

His was an **inner persistence** to trust in the Father’s plan, knowing that one day he would return and finally put all our enemies under his feet.

He established his heart to accomplish your salvation. He has promised to bring it to completion in his return.

The invitation for you and for me is to trust the work he has already done, and patiently endure until he returns.