

The Christian Response to Injustice Part 3

Epistle of James
By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: James 5:7-11
Preached on: Sunday, November 25, 2018

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

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

The reason for thanksgiving is for who God is and that's evidenced by what he has done, that he would die for us. What kind of God is this? Praise the Lord.

Please turn to the book of James, James 5, and continue to look at verses 7 to 11. I want to mention to you to be in prayer for Victor and Erin that we prayed for last week, Victor and Erin T. They're in Cambodia now and in a few hours they're going to be taking their six hour, six and a half hour taxi ride to get to where our missionaries are, the Kanes up in the jungles of Cambodia. So be praying for them. They arrived safely in the capital, that regional capital city and are going to be heading out to visit our missionaries so Victor and Erin.

The title of the message is the same title we've had the last two weeks, it is "A Christian Response to Injustice," or "The Christian Response to Injustice." This is part 3. These five verses, James 5:7-11, address this issue: how are Christians to respond when we are the victims of injustice? When we are the victims of oppression? What is the Christian, the distinctive Christian response to these things? What does it mean? What's the difference that the Gospel makes in our lives that we've come to know the living God; that we've come to know his amazing love; that we've come to know that his hand is governing all things, even injustice, even oppression; that he sovereignly governs? He's not the author of any sin, not the author of any evil but that he's governing these things to his appointed end, what difference does that make in our lives?

So we've said that the Christian response and we see again as we're going to read this in a moment, is in a word, patience. It's the key word in the passage occurring four times. Twice we're told as we read in a moment and you'll see this, be patient. Imperative. Twice it says "be patient." Another time we read the verb "while being patient," and then a fourth time the word patience occurs in verse 10 which we're going to focus on this morning, verses 10 and 11 are the focus this morning, when we consider the patience of the prophets. So the word "patience," to be patient. We said that that word means, the Greek word here makrothumia, makro meaning large when you're referring to size or long in relation to time, makrothumia, thumia means or thumos means anger, wrath, and it means prolonged restraint of anger; that the Christian response is to restrain anger, not

to seek revenge. It's not to demand our rights, it's to trust God. It's not to fight back, it is to entrust ourselves to the one who judges righteously.

So we've been considering this over the last two weeks and we've covered the first five points in the outline so I'm going to review them quickly. This is the previous outline and today is the sixth point. So in the large outline it's just one point today but then we're going to have some points in today's main point. The need for patience, the nature of patience, we saw. The focus of patience being the coming of Christ, that's what we're to keep our hearts fixed on is that Jesus is coming back and he's going to make things right; he's going to bring justice in that moment finally and fully. Then last time, we saw the work of patience; that it's something we have to cultivate in our hearts, that we have to strengthen our hearts. We have to work at this focusing on the realities that God has shown us. Then the lack of patience results in our being unkind to each other.

So when you look at all of these things then we come finally to the sixth point today, we're going to see that the theme today, the sixth point in the outline is the example of patience. The example of patience. An important word in verses 10 and 11 is the word there "As an example." So let's read verses 7 to 11 of James 5.

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.

Father, we ask now that you would be with us this morning as we gather to hear your word. We do lift up our brother and sister, Victor and Erin. We ask for your blessings upon them, your safety upon them, and Father, it's the filling of your Spirit that they might be a great blessing and encouragement to Brian and Lydia Kane, our missionaries. We pray for the believers there that they are going to encounter and for unbelievers that they're going to encounter, that their testimony might be an aid to the Gospel going forth in that area. Now we ask, Lord, that your Gospel would go forth in our hearts, that your word would have its intended purpose would be accomplished in each and every person here for the glory of Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

We're dealing with a passage where we've seen that James has been writing to, he's writing to Jewish believers in the first century who live in and around Palestine in that area of the Eastern Roman Empire, and they are experiencing, his readers are victims of social injustice. They are victims of social oppression, particularly financial injustice and

financial oppression is what he points out in verses 1 to 6, that the ungodly rich have been oppressing the believers to whom James is writing. They have been withholding their pay. They have been taking them to court and victimizing them and they even by their harsh treatment have led to the death of some of the believers. So James says, "When you experience this kind of injustice and this kind of helplessness, this kind of oppression, how are you to respond?" And he calls them to this one essential character attribute of patience; that we are to not return evil for evil, we are not to take revenge. We are to restrain our anger for the glory of God.

We've seen that this reality of injustice and oppression that we can experience is not just social injustice or oppression, we've talked about the fact that you can experience oppression and injustice in a variety of ways. Whenever you're in a weaker position and people over you treat you unjustly, oppress you, it can be in a family. You can be the victim of verbal abuse. You can be the victim of physical abuse. Or you may in your past have been the victim of sexual abuse. We talked about the state has a role in all of those things of dealing out justice in our day and we're to report things to the authorities, we're to allow them to do what they are to do, but spiritually, still, what is the response of the Christian spiritually toward the oppressor and before God? And it's not inconsistent with reporting to the authorities. You call the police, that's not an ungodly thing, that's the right thing to do. Romans 13 makes that clear that the Lord has appointed the governing authorities and so that he works through them. So we're not working against him but in our hearts even as we deal with that kind of thing, we can spiritually respond with what James is talking about here and sometimes there is no recourse, you have nothing you can do. You're oppressed at work, maybe your boss is harsh or unfair or you've been the victim of some kind of injustice there. You have no recourse, how do you deal with that as a Christian? Maybe it's like many of James's readers, it's even more pronounced because of your faith. You're the victim of injustice or oppression because you love Jesus Christ and how are you to respond?

Well, we are to respond with patience. We're to trust that God is going to deal with the ungodly in his time. He's going to mete out justice to the full when Jesus returns and we are in our faith in that reality, to relinquish our right to retaliate. This is what the Christian is called to do. We're called to do this every time we're sinned against. We're to release our right to retaliate. We have no right to retaliate because we're to put how we've been sinned against in context of how we've sinned against God. Matthew 18:21-35 makes this clear when we're told the parable of the unmerciful servant. Remember that the unmerciful servant who, first of all, owes billions of dollars, literally billions of dollars to his employer, to the king, and he cannot repay it, he's squandered it, he's lost it, and he's going to be put in debtor's prison and he begs for mercy and the king forgives the debt. Then he goes out from being forgiven the debt and finds a man who owes him \$20,000, \$15,000, something like that. It's that kind of...it wasn't a small amount, it wasn't \$50, it was a third of your salary. So \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000, it was something significant like that. He finds that person who owes him that money and he says, "Pay me what you owe me," and the guy says, "Give me more time and I'll pay you," and he says, "No, I'm not going to give you time," and he throws him into debtor's prison, he puts him away. The master hears what has happened and he calls that man

before him and says, "I forgave you billions and you wouldn't forgive him thousands. I'm going to put you in prison and you will not come out until you've paid the last cent." He revokes the mercy because the man had not really received mercy. If you've really received mercy for billions, how can you hold back mercy for thousands? So if we've received mercy for the great sins that we've committed against God, how can we hold back mercy to those who sin against us? How small the sin against us is even when it's profound compared to the offense that we have made against God.

So this is what James is saying. He's saying, "Listen, you must put it in context of who you are in Christ." That's essentially the main theme of this passage and today we're saying the last point is the example of patience. To drive this home after he's explained the nature and the focus and the work and the lack, he now says, "Look at the example," and the key imperative in verses 10 and 11 is the word "take the prophets." Take the prophets, that's the verb there, "take," and it is an imperative. I mentioned before there are five main imperatives in the passage that sort of unfold the application and this last one is "take the prophets as an example." Take the prophets. Take. Receive is the idea. Receive this. Consider this. It's the same way we say, "Hey, take this, for example." This is what he's saying. "I want you to do this and to see what I want you to do, look at this example."

The word "example" is an important word here, it's the Greek word "hypodeigma," which means literally "to show under." To show under. It's actually related to, it's a word that's used in place of another word, "paradeigma," which we get our English word "paradigm" from and it means "an example to be imitated." It means "a pattern to be copied." So he says take the prophets as an example to be imitated. Take the prophets as a pattern to be copied. In fact, this word "hypodeigma" is used a number of times in the New Testament, particularly by the author of Hebrews. He uses it a couple of times in this particular way. He says that articles in the earthly temple in Jerusalem, the author of Hebrews says this, the articles in the temple are copies of the real articles in heaven, and he uses the word "hypodeigma." So they're copies of the archetypal realities in heaven. These are just copies and so the idea is like when you copy something. You know, if you try to copy when you were learning your letters. Do kids still learn how to write cursive and stuff? I know when I look at some of the young people's writing I think they must not have learned anymore. Now you look at my writing and you say I must not have learned either. Well, I just forgot. I did learn. Do you remember going through and like writing cursive, you learned how to write it the right way and you had to write on the line and you had the lined paper, and remember you had an example of what a J was to look like or an A was to look like, and you were supposed to copy that, take that example and then copy it. This is what he's saying. He's saying, "Look at this example. I want to put it before you. Look at that. Now copy it. Imitate it."

Now to do that it takes focus. You've got to look at it carefully. You've got to look at the various curves in the letters. Where does this letter start? Remember the three lined, you had the two lines and then you had that dotted line in the middle? Do you guys remember that? And so, you know, some letters go all the way to the top and they touch that top line and they come down and they touch the bottom line, and some letters only go to the

middle line, that dotted line and you've got to pay attention and if you don't get it right, you messed it up. You didn't copy it well.

So he says, "Have that kind of focus and I want you to take and receive this example as something you're going to pattern your life after." That's the basic thrust of the message today, look at this example, imitate it, look at this example and copy it. Now to unfold that a little bit, to unpack it more, we're going to consider our theme of imitating the example of the prophets, the example of patience under two points, two main points this morning. The larger outline, this is 6A and 6B. Okay, it just makes me feel better to make sure that I'm...anyway, forgive me for indulging that, myself in that.

Okay, two points this morning, I'm going to call them 1 and 2. The first point is a consistent pattern. To really imitate this example, he says, "Look at the consistent pattern of how God has worked." Verse 10 to the first sentence in verse 11, 10 and 11A he says, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured." There is this consistent pattern. He says, "Look at all the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Not the false prophets because the false prophets, they always had it easy because when you're a false prophet like the prophets in Jeremiah's day and you say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," you don't get persecuted. "But the true prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, look at their experience," he says, "and what you will see is their experience is one of suffering and patience."

Now it's important to note these are the guys who were walking in the will of God. These were the ones who were obedient, who were faithful, so they weren't suffering as a discipline for sin. Sometimes we can suffer as a discipline for sin, Hebrews 12:5-10 makes this clear. God disciplines those he loves and sometimes when we sin, there's a direct correlating suffering consequence that we experience. Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 11 that can even result in your death. If you're dishonoring the body of Christ, you can suffer death because of that. "Some sleep," he says in 1 Corinthians 11. So there is discipline for sin but the point you want to see here is this suffering has nothing to do with sin. These are the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. They were speaking God's word and yet in spite of their obedient faithfulness, they experienced suffering and they're an example of suffering. We should be ready to imitate their example of suffering. It doesn't mean we go out seeking suffering but we should be prepared for it to come.

This word "suffering" is interesting. It's actually a word which it's a compound word which means "to suffer evil," or you could translate that word "evil, harm, suffer harm, suffer pain." It's the idea of painful suffering so that when you speak the word of God, when you're faithful to God, very often you are going to suffer for it and that is the record of the prophets. The prophets of God, the true prophets from Moses all the way down, suffered. Now Moses was not martyred for his faith but Moses experienced a lot of trial and hardship, but when you look back at the record of the prophets, they were continually persecuted, hated. Think about Elijah and how he was hated by the king and the queen and sought after. Or Jeremiah, put in a cistern and left to starve to death. Now God didn't

allow him to starve to death but he would speak the truth, the false prophets were saying, "Peace, peace," and Jeremiah says, "They're saying peace, peace when there is no peace. God is going to judge us because of our sin." The king says, "I hate what you're saying. Put him in that cistern. Let him waste away down there." That's what happens when you speak the truth.

In fact, turn with me just to see this, look at Matthew 23, Jesus' words to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Verse 29, Matthew 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous." He said, "You Pharisees, you scribes, you guys who are really religious on the outside, what you do is you go out and, man, you go and lay wreaths at the tombs of the prophets, you're constantly wanting to clean up and make the monuments shiny and sparkly to the prophets, but you're hypocrites. Why are you hypocritical? Because you say this," in verse 30, "If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." Do you see that? "Our fathers shed the blood of the prophets." Who were the prophets persecuted by? The people of God. Now they weren't the true people of God but they were the nation of Israel. So when people spoke the word of God, those whom they spoke the word of God to persecuted them.

Look what he says next after verse 30, "If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." Verse 31, "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." He says, "Listen, you're saying you love the prophets, you love those who speak the word of God but I'm telling you, you guys are going to be murdering the people that are going to come speak the word of God to you starting with me, but then all of my apostles." It's the Pharisees and the scribes that were leading the way in killing the apostles, those who spoke the word of God.

Look, he goes on down to verse 37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" It was the persistent pattern as Jesus said. Think about this: the blood of Abel. How far back does that go? What was Abel? Abel spoke the word of God by offering the right kind of sacrifice and what did that get him? Murdered by his brother. All the way to Zechariah, one of the last prophets of the Old Testament, the last martyred prophet of the Old Testament, Zechariah, who was killed in the temple courts.

This is the pattern. This is why Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:10-12 he says, "Listen, Timothy, you have followed my example of teaching, my example of living, my conduct. You've followed it and you're going to follow my example of suffering. You've followed the way I live, you follow what I teach, and you're going to follow what I suffer because I suffer for the Gospel. Indeed," verse 12, 2 Timothy 3:12, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." So it's a part of this fallen world. In the same way James is telling us, "Follow this example," Paul was telling Timothy, "You have followed. Keep following my example. Make your conduct pleasing to God. Speak the truth and be prepared to suffer."

Now this means we're not to seek out suffering, we're not to seek out persecution, we're not to operate with a martyr complex. Some people actually do that. They try to legitimize their faith by seeking out, by offending people intentionally and we're not to do that but we are to not fear persecution. We are to speak the truth and we're to be prepared for it, in other words, we're not to be surprised by it. This is what I think he's telling his believers, "Listen, guys, the consistent pattern throughout history is that those who speak the word of God will experience hardship so don't be surprised by it."

This is exactly what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12-19. He says, "Don't be surprised by the fiery trial as though some strange thing were happening to you." He goes on to show that the question is why are you suffering? If you're suffering for doing evil, well, you deserve it but many times you're going to be suffering for doing good, and when you're suffering for doing good, don't be surprised by it but keep entrusting yourself to God. That's essentially the message in 1 Peter 4:12-19. Keep entrusting yourself to God. So don't seek it out but don't fear it and don't be surprised by it but be faithful to God, speak the truth and be prepared.

Now that's the consistent pattern throughout history. You look at the faithful throughout history, you find a record of persecution, you find that not without exception but that it's the normal pattern that even in days when Christianity is at a higher level of acceptance in the culture, those who still stand for the Gospel find themselves hated by some and hated by most at times, when you really speak the truth, and people don't like it. That may be what we experience. I mentioned last time that I said something about us being kind of a hiccup or something in history, and someone asked me about that and I didn't explain it very well. What I meant was that that's the normal pattern of history is that Christianity is on the outside, not the franchised part of society. It's the disenfranchised, the outsiders. In American history, in a sense, Christianity was sort of the franchised. It wasn't totally because it wasn't real Christianity but the Judeo-Christian ethic, freedom of speech, Christian tolerance, biblical tolerance, not the way the world defines it, the world doesn't understand tolerance. They think tolerance means that you say that everybody's opinion is equally valid. That's not tolerance, that's insanity. That's stupidity, frankly. That's like saying, okay, every doctor's opinion is equally valid. One doctor misdiagnosed you and you die but, "Hey, he just gave his best opinion. It's wrong of you to say that he was wrong." Do you see how ludicrous that is? That guy is going to get put in jail or he's going to get sued, right? And the people who sit there and cry out for tolerance would be the first ones calling the lawyer to sue him. Or, "Hey, it's okay to build a building

however you want to. Whatever is standard, this engineer said this would hold this many people, this bridge would work." Remember that bridge that collapsed in Florida and killed all those people? Well, is somebody at fault? Well, not if you really believe in tolerance according to the world today. "Hey, I thought it would work. You know, that's my opinion. My opinion is valid. Who are you to say my opinion is not valid?" Well, the bridge collapsed. "Well, my opinion is still valid." Well, of course it's not valid. You're wrong.

When it comes to matters of eternity, Christian tolerance is not to say... Christians have always advocated tolerance in a way that nobody else does. Every other culture is intolerant. I mean, Muslims are not tolerant. Hindus are not tolerant. You go there and you'll find they're not tolerant. Every other culture is not tolerant. Christianity, tolerance is not biblical tolerance, it's not the belief that all roads are equally valid or all opinions are equally valid. No, there's only one truth but even those who don't hold the truth we are to treat with kindness. That's tolerance. You affirm the value of other people and their right to be wrong. That's tolerance.

Now, in our culture, though, it's seen as intolerant to believe that you're right about something spiritually. To say that there's only one way to heaven, that's intolerance according to our culture. Well, that's the Gospel. That's the message we preach. So by definition, we are out of step with our culture in the same way that really that was really the problem with the first century too. The reason the Romans persecuted the Christians was that the Christians wouldn't also worship the Roman gods. It would have been okay to say, "We believe in Jesus and we also worship the Emperor." But we believe in Jesus and we cannot worship the Emperor, that was unacceptable.

So if we find ourselves in that circumstance again, James would say to us, "Don't be discouraged. This is the consistent pattern of the godly. Don't be surprised. Don't be discouraged. Nothing is wrong. This is actually what you would normally expect." That's not a happy message, I know. I don't want that. I don't like pain. It's appropriate for us to do what 1 Timothy 2 says, to pray for our rulers and leaders that we can live quiet and tranquil lives, that we can preach lives, so we can preach the Gospel unhindered. It's appropriate but if not, we're still going to be faithful.

Now that said, a consistent pattern, the second point, the encouraging part, we're not going to end on that first point, aren't you glad? The second point is a compelling case study. James doesn't end on that note. He ends on this note, verse 11B, "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." He says don't focus on your circumstances, focus on who God is as proven by the way he deals with his people. A compelling case study, that's our second point. We saw the consistent pattern, now the compelling case study.

He picks Job, a familiar story for his Jewish audience and one that's familiar for many people who grew up even in America, the idea of the patience of Job is a common phrase. That's the King James rendering of this particular verse, "You have heard of the patience of Job," is how the King James renders it. Endurance is a better translation because it's

not the same word rendered patience the other four times in this passage. It's a different word. It's the word "hypomeno," not makrothumia. It's hypomeno and it means literally "to remain under." The word is translated in the NIV by "perseverance." Here in the NASB that I'm reading, "endurance." So enduring, "to remain under the burden; to stay under it; to endure; to persevere," or as the ESV translates this word, "steadfastness, to be immovable; to stay here under the burden."

So he says, "You have heard of the endurance of Job." I love actually, I want you to observe one thing about this, he says, "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings." You have heard and you have seen. He says, "I want you to recall to mind something that you've heard and you have seen and I want you to consider that right now as you think about the fact that you are experiencing or have experienced injustice, oppression, or you may experience injustice and oppression. Look at this, that which you've heard, that which you've seen."

So let's talk about, "You have heard of the endurance of Job." Kind of 2A, you have heard of the endurance of Job. We'll talk about, "You have seen and you therefore know." There are three subpoints under the second point, a compelling case study. First, subpoint A, you have heard of the endurance of Job. You have heard of the endurance of Job. Now what is the endurance of Job? What was the perseverance of Job? What was the remaining under? What kind of burdens were on Job? He experienced incredible personal loss. I mean, unsurpassed. Extraordinary.

You remember the story, you read the book of Job, it starts off and again, one of the things that's emphasized in the book of Job is that Job is not guilty of anything. Now if it's in context. What you see when you look at the book of Job is Job didn't do anything sinful that led to what God did in his life, okay? Now step back from that but Job is a sinner and he deserved whatever God wanted to do with him. That's another big theme that's going on. We have no right to criticize God based on who he is and who we are. That's another issue going on but it's really important to understand at the very beginning of the book God makes clear that Job is not getting what he gets because he did something wrong directly to account for that.

That's an important thing. I remember hearing this teaching years ago that Job was getting what he feared. Because he feared, remember it talks about he feared that his children might have blasphemed God so he was offering sacrifices therefore God let all this come upon him. His fear opened the door. That is not attested by the text in any way. Complete error because when you read Job 1 and 2 carefully, what you see is it starts off the author of Job says, "Hey, look, Job was a man who lived in Uz. He was a wealthy man, the greatest man in the East. He feared God and turned away from evil." Then God brings him up and on the lips of the Lord himself, God says to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one like him. He fears God and turns away from evil." Now when God gives you that kind of indictment, you can't then say he did something wrong to bring about what happened. He didn't. Look, God says, "Look at him. He's an exhibit of My grace and My righteousness." Job is obviously saved by trusting, that's why he's offering sacrifices regularly, he knows he needs sacrifice. He's

looking to Christ even before, centuries before Christ is going to come, he's looking to Christ and he's a godly man.

Even after the first time, the first assault, Satan comes back to God and God says, "Have you considered My servant Job," again. "Fearing God, shunning evil. He maintains his integrity though you provoked me against him." But he experienced this incredible personal loss. In chapter 1 we read that Satan comes and Satan has some kind of audience with God. The Lord brings Job up and says, "Have you considered My servant Job?" And Satan says, "I'm telling You, the reason he only worships You because You have a hedge around him and let me touch his stuff, let me take away his possessions and he will curse You to Your face." So God then gives the permission. In a sense, the text is showing God had a hedge around Job of protection and God moves the hedge back and says, "Okay, you can do whatever you want to with his stuff." He says, "Don't touch him, though."

So remember what happens? If you haven't read it before, read it. Job 1, he's there and a servant comes in and says, "Listen, I was tending your sheep and," I can't remember who, the Chaldeans, the Sabeans, these different tribes come in and, "so the Sabeans or whatever came in and they took all of your sheep and they killed all of the servants and I alone escaped to tell you what happened." While he was still speaking, another guy comes in and says, "Hey, I was tending your oxen and the Chaldeans came in and they stole all of them, killed all the servants. I alone have escaped." The next guy comes in, "They took your donkeys and I alone have escaped. They took your camels and I alone have escaped." While he's still speaking, another guy comes in and says, "I was a servant at your son's house. He invited all of his brothers and sisters, seven sons, three daughters were all gathered together eating a feast and a great wind came up and the house crashed down upon all of them. All 10 of your children are gone. All of their families are gone. All of your servants are gone. I alone have escaped."

Now think about that. Can you imagine all of his wealth gone in an instant, his whole family gone in an instant other than his wife and the Bible says that Job falls to his knees and says, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." The author of Job gives us this editorial comment, "In all this Job did not sin with his mouth or blame God." What he's saying is what Job says exactly right. It's true that the Lord gave and the Lord took away. Well, what about Satan? Well, God allowed Satan to do that. Remember, he had to move the hedge. Satan had asked for permission. So truly the Lord did it. "Naked came I from my mother's womb, naked shall I return," he says. "I came into this world with nothing and I go out with nothing. I have no claim upon anything. God gave, God has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." He passes that first test.

You think that would be enough. Remember the next chapter, chapter 2, Satan again has an audience with God, again God brings up the subject of Job. I mentioned this earlier. God says to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job who fears God and shuns evil and who maintains his integrity though you incited Me against him." And Satan says, "Skin for skin. He only praises You because he has his health. Let me touch his body and he will curse You to Your face." And God pulls back the hedge even farther and says,

"You can touch him, only don't take his life." So he pulls back the hedge just to Job's life. The text tells us that Job then is covered with boils from his head to his toes, the bottoms of his feet. He's in such misery that he goes out in such pain and agony, probably itching, burning, aching, you imagine the worst case of shingles that a person has ever experienced. Those who have had shingles talk about the pain goes down to the bone. He has shingles from head to toe basically. He's in misery. He's out on the trash heap. He goes out to the garbage heap and he's scraping himself because of the itching, scraping himself in misery. His wife comes to him and says, "Why do you maintain your integrity. Please, honey," I'm adding that please, honey, she says, "Curse God and die. Commit suicide by cursing God. He'll kill you. You'll be out of your misery. I can't bear watching this anymore." And Job says, "Why do you speak as one of the foolish women? Shall we accept good from the hand of the Lord and not adversity? This is from the hand of the Lord. I must accept what He gives me." Again, the author adds in that editorial comment, "In all these things Job did not sin or blame God."

Now he's giving God, God's responsible but there's no blame to God. God's not wrong in what he's done because I deserve to go to hell. If I got what I deserved, I would be in hell right now. That's the teaching of the Bible. If you and I got what we deserved and we really wonder what we deserve and we demand what we deserve from God, we would go to hell. We would not have life because we came as sinners from our mother's womb. I mean, beautiful precious babies, the one thing that is true about them is they're completely turned in upon themselves. They don't care about mom. It's not like the baby thinks, "You know, really I'm hungry but I know mom needs to get some rest." No, complete self-centeredness and they just learn as we grow up, we learn how that doesn't work to just cry every time you want something. You've got to learn to manipulate people, how to make friends and influence people. You've got to learn that if you're going to make it in the world as a sinner and the only thing that can deliver us from our self-focus is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we deserve and we want to live life apart from God, we want to be our own god, that's why we're so angry, that's why the child wants to do what he wants to do. Even the parent says, "Don't touch the light socket, the stupidest thing in the world is to put your finger in the light socket," and yet the child wants to do it. Why? Because that's sin. "You as my parent are an authority and I hate God and his authority and I therefore hate authority that imposes itself upon me."

Job understands that and he passes the second test. Here he is in pain, now his friends hear about what has happened to him and they come and visit him. He has three friends that come and visit him and they start off really well. They come and they see him in his misery and they stay with him for seven full days and they don't say a word. They just hurt with him. That's really how we ought to initially address people's suffering, isn't it? Just come and hurt with them, mourn with those that mourn.

They start off really well but in chapter 3 Job starts speaking and basically his message is, "I don't know why this is happening to me. I don't know what God is doing." And his friends say, "We do know." And so for the next 30+ chapters it's a dialog. Job and Eliphaz, then Job speaks, then Bildad, then Job speaks, then Zophar, then Job, and basically Job's message is, "I don't know why this has happened to me. I'm not guilty of

any heinous sin." They say, "Look, nothing like this ever happens unless you're guilty of some secret wicked sin and it's time for you to come clean." Job says, "I'm serious. I'm not." And the next guy gets up and says, "You surely are." And this is basically the whole point, they are accusing him, they are assassinating his character and so on top of all his personal loss, on top of all his personal pain, now he experiences personal character assassination. "No, you are wicked and it's time to come clean." That's what they say to him and it goes on, we don't know how long, probably months because Job talks about a couple different places in his book, "For months I've been going through this." It apparently didn't last a whole year, it doesn't say years, but he experiences months of this agony and these different conversations. It must have happened over the weeks. They come back and, "Let's try again." Job talks. They talk. Job talks. They talk. They go away. They come back and they do it again. He's falsely accused of all this wickedness and God is not there to vindicate him. God is silent to him.

Now Job starts struggling because he really does start blaming God later on in the book. He basically that verse that we quote often, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," that's really an accusation against God. Basically, "You know, God's just going to keep doing these bad things to me but I'm going to keep trusting Him. I'm better than God," in that sense. He's almost talking like that.

"You have heard of the endurance of Job," but he keeps on enduring, he keeps on enduring. He doesn't ever curse God. He wonders. He really complains. He asks for an audience. That's basically his drumbeat gets to be, "I want the Lord to come and talk to me and explain what He's doing. If I could only have an audience with the Most High, I could get justice."

Well, he finally gets what he's asking for. The Lord shows up, chapters 37 to 41, and the Lord starts off saying, "Hey, who is this fault-finder? Will the fault-finder contend with the Almighty? You're finding fault with Me. You state your case to Me." Job is like, "I, I, I, I don't..." and God starts speaking to him. He says, "Let Me say this, if you know how the stars work in the universe, if you know how, were you there when they were created? Do you teach the mountain goats when they're to calve? Are you the one that has put together the fabric of this whole universe? Do you understand how genetics works? Do you understand how astrophysics works? Do you understand biochemistry? Do you understand the intricacies of all those things and how they all got put together? If you do, then you can find fault with Me." And Job then, there's an interlude and Job says, "I don't know what I was talking about." And God then jumps in a second round and says, "Look at these great creatures that I've made." And finally Job repents in dust and ashes and says, "Surely I spoke about things too wonderful for me. I didn't know what I was talking about. I repent before You in dust and ashes."

Now that's the story of what happened, the endurance of Job, but "you have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings." This is the wonderful part. Literally in the Greek it says, "you have seen the end of the Lord." End, telos. The ESV translates it, "you have seen the purpose of the Lord." "The outcome of the Lord's dealings" is a way of translating that. "What the Lord finally brought about" is how the NIV says it. But the idea is that the

Lord had a purpose. When he did all of this, he had an end in mind when he first said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job?" God had a purpose and an end in view. He wasn't randomly responding to the circumstance. God's not capricious. He doesn't do things like that.

He had an end in view and he says, "You have heard of the perseverance of the endurance of Job, you have seen the end of the Lord." What is the end of the Lord? Well, one of the things when you look at Job 42, the last chapter of Job, you find that when you compare chapter 1 and chapter 42, chapter 1 you're told Job has 7,000 sheep, he has seven sons and three daughters in chapter 1, he has 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys. He is the wealthiest man in the East with that. God takes it all away in a moment, including his children. In chapter 42 after Job repents and God restores him it says Job had seven sons and three daughters after that. God gave him back new children. He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 donkeys. God gave him back double his wealth. That was the end that God had in view.

You see, God doesn't just take things away for the fun of it. He took it away to do something wonderful for Job because what Job had wasn't so much this, now this is pretty amazing. I mean, God gave him children in his older age. He might have been, you know, 60 or 70, back then they lived to be, he lived 140 years after that. Speculation is probably 70 when it happened and God gave him 140 more years. We know he gave him 140 years, we don't know about the 70 before. But he gave him double the blessings financially, but more than that, he vindicated his name. When God shows up and God deals with Job and God deals with Job sternly, God doesn't just deal with Job, God goes to see Job's three friends and God goes to Job's three friends and says, "You have spoken about Me falsely. You basically have been false prophets because you were basically saying that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people and you don't know what you're talking about and My wrath is not burning...you were saying My wrath was being expressed against Job, no, My wrath is stored up for you three guys and you'd better go ask My servant Job." Think about that for the people that were falsely accusing him, "You go ask, not the guy that was guilty of sin, you go and ask My servant Job if he will offer a sacrifice for you." He puts their faces down in the ground and says, "You guys who were standing up above him, you exalted yourselves, I'm humbling you." Job was humbled. He's being exalted.

That's the God of justice and righteousness. He always does what is right but not only that, not only did he get the vindication, more than that he got to know who God was. In chapter 42, verses 1 to 6, he says, "I spoke those things I did not understand. I had heard of You with my ears, now I've seen You with my eyes and I repent in dust and ashes. What I had heard about, now I see. Now I know You. I love You." And if you were to ask Job, "Job, would you trade anything about what you went through?" There is no doubt he would say, "No, the Lord is good and His ways are right." He would say with Isaiah, "His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts." That's true but as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts. Everything he does is right.

So what that says is when you and I suffer injustice, when you and I suffer oppression, when we suffer in any way like that, God has a good end in view for you. He is doing some wonderful thing that if you could see it, like he said to Habakkuk, "I'm doing something so wonderful in your day that if you could see it, you would be blown away." That's the God of this Bible. That's the God who has made known his glory in Jesus Christ. When he lets his people suffer, he doesn't do it absent-mindedly, he doesn't do it capriciously, he does it lovingly.

I heard someone say one time talking about the hedge, remember the hedge that had to be moved back? Satan said, "I can't touch him. You have a hedge around him." So God moved the hedge back from his possessions just to Job himself, his life, his body, and all hell broke loose. He said, "Move back the hedge a little farther, just to his life." And so then all hell broke loose in his body. I don't know who it was that said this the first time, when you understand this, that the hand who holds the hedge in your life has the imprint of a nail in it, you can trust him. Jesus holds the hedge. He's the one who is ruling over our lives and so if he allows something to come into our lives that we see as the most painful, awful circumstance, look from the circumstance to the cross. A God who would die in the place of sinners, a God who would show his amazing love that we sang about earlier, how can it be that thou, my God, wouldst die for me? Paul says in Romans 8:32, "If God did not," this is the love of the Father that's also holding that hedge, "If God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not together with Him freely give us all things?" He's arguing from the greater to the lesser. He says if God would give you the most valuable treasure that he has, his own Son, and would deliver him up as an offering for your sins, if God would pour out his wrath upon his own dear Son, if he would show that kind of love, then everything he will ever give you in your life is an expression of that same love. He's proved his love and when we persevere, when we endure, we will count as blessed those who persevere. Oh, how happy are you when you persevere. You will see the glory of God.

That's what God is calling us to. Many of us are going to go down paths that we never imagined that we would ever go down but you know whom you have believed. If you know whom you have believed and you're persuaded that he's able to hold that which you've committed to him, he will see you through to a better end, a glorious end.

Let's go to him in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for your faithfulness, your goodness. We thank you for proving your love by sending Jesus Christ to die in the place of sinners, to bear your holy wrath against our horrible offenses against you; that he suffered the death that we should have died; he experienced the wrath that we should have experienced so that we might be made righteous in your sight that we might have eternal life. Lord, help us to trust you. We know, Father, that you know the suffering of every person in this room. You know the suffering of those who've not told anyone. You know it all. You know the burdens that we're carrying. You know the bitterness that so easily fills our hearts that cripples us emotionally. Lord Jesus, set us free. Help us turn from that to truly trust and entrust ourselves to you and to trust you, that where justice needs to be meted out, you will do it

in your time and it will be perfect. In the meantime, give us, Lord, in our hearts the ability to forgive and more than that, help us to see that even in things that happened before we were believers, things that may have happened years before we came to faith, that you, O God, who purposed our salvation from eternity past, you have a good end in view for every ounce of suffering that we would ever experience and you can take it and help us come to know you and to see you in a more wonderful and glorious way. Father, may we be people who are more than conquerors through him who loved us, that we go through trials and tribulations, we feel the weight of it, we feel like we can't go on, and yet give us grace to persevere, to endure, to have patience, to keep looking at Christ and to wonderfully overcome and to show love to those around us for your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.