

From Complaining to Praising

James 5:9-13

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, July 4, 2021

Please turn to **James 5**. Last week Pastor Corey taught on confessing sin and bringing it into the light in fellowship and relationships. Last week I heard a sister in Christ confess to friends her sin of impatience with her kids. A dad a couple days later confessed his sin of impatience with his kids and sinful anger that comes with it. Others have suffered physically this last week and confessed struggles that come along with that. I've heard others confess it's hard to be steadfast in a difficult work situation or temptations. I confess I'm convicted of complaints I give and lack of thanks and lack of prayer. James 5 is for people like us. **v. 16** says confess your sins to one another, more on that next week, today **v. 9-13** takes us from complaining to praising

5:9 Do not grumble [some translations 'complain'] *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.* ¹³ *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.*

This is about **patience and perseverance** as we trust the Lord's providence as Job did. It's about His sovereign purpose that helps us remain steadfast in suffering and to be blessed. It's also about how we speak, how we fall under condemnation in what we say, how the Lord judges us for our grumbling or complaining, but how He's compassionate and merciful if we pray for help.

Col 1:11 prays for God's strength so we'll attain steadfastness and patience

John Piper writes 'Patience is the evidence of an inner strength. Impatient people are weak, and therefore dependent on external supports—like schedules that go just right and circumstances that support their fragile hearts. Their outbursts of oaths and threats and harsh criticisms of the culprits who crossed their plans do not *sound* weak. But that noise is all a camouflage of weakness. Patience demands tremendous inner strength.'¹

God inspired James 5 to help give us weak people that inner strength

Why do we complain in **v. 9**? In this context, it happens if we're not patient:

⁷ *Be patient...* ⁸ *You also, be patient. Establish your hearts...* Then v. 9 says don't complain, and **v. 10** gives us examples of patience. Examples today?

Jerry Bridges: 'Parents can become impatient over the slow response to the training of children and teenagers. "How many times have I told you not to ...?" Or, "When are you going to learn to...?" ...to vent our impatience... siblings are often impatient with one another, and it is a great challenge to parents to train their children, both by teaching and example, to be patient with others... Some Christians are notorious for being impatient drivers. We can become impatient at the slowness of service in a store, at the bank, or in a restaurant...impatience and irritability are closely related...A person who easily and frequently becomes impatient is an irritable person... Are you upset with someone or some circumstance a lot of the time? If so, you may well be an irritable person.'² The impatient are irritable and grumble.

Do you grumble? Or are you grateful? Are you impatient? Easily irritated?

Reformed Expository Commentary: 'a disordered heart leads to a disorderly tongue.' Before James 5:9 is **4:2** where it says if people want something and don't get it, that's why people quarrel or even

kill (or hate, heart murder). If I want what I want when I want it, and don't get it, that's my root problem. It's not the other person, my patience issue is a pride issue. God resists the proud, **4:6. v. 7** says I need to submit to God, not make others submit to me and my timetable. **v. 10:** humble yourself. When I grumble, I'm not humble.

4:13 is about our plans and timing, 4:16 says we must say *if the Lord wills*.

When I focus on getting my will I'm complaining and not waiting on His. It's a sin to not be patient (5:7-8) or to complain in our impatience (v. 9).

Recognize and repent of this sin. Confess to others for prayer to heal, v. 16.

5:7-10 mention **patience** 4x and v. 10 puts **patience and suffering together**. It's in suffering that grumbling often comes out as we talk to others. But **v. 13** says if anyone is suffering, let him pray, i.e., talk to God instead. If we complain, we forget the compassionate and merciful God of **v. 11** and His purpose. God can give us joy in trials (**1:2-4**) so that we praise Him (**5:13**).

Today's text takes us from complaining in v. 9 to praising in v. 13

We need to hear from Jesus through James and Job and the Jewish prophets:

- 1. Think of Bible characters**
- 2. Think of the Lord's character**
- 3. Speak truth that builds character (note order: think before I speak)**

1st it says we need to think of Bible characters (believers in Bible times)

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... Your Bible may say endured. It's **blessed endurance**. KJV 'we count them happy who endure.' **Count it joy** 'when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And **let endurance have its perfect result**...[1:12 says] *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial...*' And then it says blessed is the one who hears and does the Word as he sees himself like a mirror, not a forgetful hearer only.*

There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey

Here in **James 5:10** we need to hear what the Word says in the prophets and be doers of what they spoke for God. Jeremiah: *Why should any...man offer complaint in view of his sins? Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the LORD. We lift up our heart and hands Toward God in heaven; We have transgressed and rebelled...* (Lam 3:39-42 NAS). It's a sin to complain. In view of our sin, why should we? Let's examine (1 Cor 11).

Phil 2:14 says do everything without complaining or arguing. Do you?

Paul talks about complaining believers in Bible times before a communion text to say don't be like Israel in the OT. 1 Cor 10:10: don't '*complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*' ¹¹ *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* ¹² *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape...* ¹⁶ *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* ¹⁷ *For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*³

This is important as we come to communion to not come complaining and criticizing your church. That destroys unity in the body today even as Israel was destroyed, take heed lest you fall today.

That temptation is common to man, but it's not beyond your ability to bear, God is faithful to make a way to escape the temptation to complaining, and he does it right here in the text

You don't have to grumble about work or someone who's a piece of work

God patiently calls us back through His prophets who spoke in His name. His Word says: "*For many years you [God] were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets*" (Neh 9:30 NIV). They exhort us and James says they're examples for us, too, real life people who endured real trials as God made His truth real to them to encourage us!

Hebrews 11 says by faith ***the prophets**...shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire* [think prophet Daniel and friends] *... from weakness were made strong...* [don't miss they were weak, he goes on, prophets endured] *'being tortured, not accepting their release... others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword... being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves ...* [examples of patient endurance!] *Therefore, since we have **so great a cloud of witnesses** surrounding us, **let us also** lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run **with endurance** the race...before us...*⁴

As examples of patient endurance in suffering James says **take the prophets**:

- **Isaiah** (patiently kept preaching to those who wouldn't hear, Isa 6)
- **Jeremiah** is the weeping prophet of lamentation, sorrow, suffering
- **Ezekiel** suffered painful bereavement but was blessed to persevere
- **Daniel** was steadfast to pray even if it made him prey for the lions!
- **Hosea** endured faithfully with an unfaithful and very ungodly wife
- **Joel, Amos**, and the other so-called minor prophets had major trials
- As they stoned **Stephen** he said all of the prophets were persecuted

You're impatient with life or family--look to the prophets!

Blessing isn't no pain, look at **v. 11**: we count them blessed because they *remained* steadfast. **v. 11b**: *... You have heard of the steadfastness of Job...*

Job endured great suffering but he had great steadfastness when he said *'the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.'*

His kids were taken away by the Lord and his wife said *"Do you still hold fast...Curse God and die!"* But Job held fast and was steadfast and blessed.

Job 1-2 says he didn't sin with his lips. **He didn't blame God or complain**. It wasn't to the credit of his wife or his friends (who provoke him to sin later). Job knew his Redeemer lived, that helped Job live patiently to the end where all he lost was redeemed. The last chapter of his story says *'the LORD restored the fortunes of Job...the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before...the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.'*

James 5:11 says *You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

We sang how God's dark clouds you dread are actually big with mercy

Go from #1. Think of Bible characters to

#2. Think of the Lord's character

Instead of complaining in **v. 9**, think of the compassion of the Lord in **v. 11**.

NKJV: *the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate...*

KJV: *very pitiful, and of tender mercy...we count them happy who endure...*

NAS: *the outcome of the Lord's dealings, the Lord is full of compassion...*

Job and the best of the prophets were **sinner**s who needed the Lords' mercy.

Our **VBS theme** this week is **Discovering the true God**. Here's a truth about God we'll sing this week that goes from sinful Bible characters to the Lord:

when we read God's Word today, The greatest saints have their flaws on full display
 And it was written down for us in order that we may,
 Recognize that Christ is the only way
 Adam ate forbidden fruit and lost his life, Abraham got scared and lied about his wife
 Sarah laughed to herself when she heard God's promise
 Rebekah encouraged her son to be dishonest
 Aaron used crafts to make a golden calf, Moses got mad, struck the rock with his staff
 David sinned greatly- even lost his baby, And Jacob? He was just all around shady
 The point is not to make light of our flaws,
 But to show that every one of us needs the cross
 So as we read the Bible, it's important that we see this:
 There's only one hero and His name is Jesus
 Adam wasn't good enough ... Noah wasn't ... Abraham wasn't ... It's only Jesus
 Isaac ... Jacob ... Joseph ... Moses ... Joshua ... Samuel ... David ... Daniel ...
 Jonah wasn't good enough [neither are we], It's only Jesus

That's not just the message for the kids, that's for us adults, too. **None of us are good enough.** We can't do enough good works to get to heaven. **Think of the Lord's character**, He's holy and **v. 9** says He's the Judge who's near.

v. 9 says if we grumble at others we'll be judged -- bad news for all of us!

The Lord Jesus said '*on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak...by your words you will be condemned.*'⁵

James 5:9 says that includes complaining words and the Judge is right here.

The Judge is at the door, He's near and He hears every word and thought.

Think of the character of this Lord in v. 9. **He's a just Judge of sin.** At any moment the door of His courtroom will open and court will be in session.

The honorable Judge will bring judgment on all who did not speak to Him as "your honor" and who did not honor Him in life. When this Judge comes out of His chambers, all will not rise in His presence. Every knee will bow. Every tongue that once complained will now confess Jesus Christ is LORD.

But those who didn't bow to His Lordship in this life will be sentenced by Him for the next life. The Bible says every mouth will be stopped and will be found guilty at the bar of justice. The verdict: eternal hell with no parole.

Jesus said to even grumble 'you fool' makes us guilty of hellfire, and even what we don't say, hate in heart is murder, lust is adultery of the heart, **Mt 5**

Exhibit A of Guilt is James 2:10 (guilty if we don't keep God's whole law)

Exhibit B is James 4:17 (when we don't do good things, not just doing bad)

The Judge can throw the book at you, the Book of the Law. But **v. 11** says the Lord is also merciful – mercy means not getting what we deserve. It's not based on the merits of our case, it's the merits of Another, the one who Corey taught about last time in **1 Jn 2, the Advocate**, Jesus Christ. That's a word for a defense attorney who chooses to represent you before the judge.

Not just pro bono, **Jesus actually pays the legal penalty**. I have no defense of my own, no argument, no other plea (my plea is guilty), but it is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me. He pleads for me His own blood that pays the wages of sin that are death. It's paid in full by His death and He lived a perfect life for me I couldn't. There's a plea arrangement and it's my guilt exchanged for His grace. God the Judge allows your fine to be paid by a Substitute Savior who replaces your rap sheet with His righteousness!

That's **the great exchange**, the great transfer: **my sinful life for His righteous life**. Jesus served my sentence and took my punishment. I did the crimes against God, but He did the time on the cross. So justice is served on Jesus so I don't face justice. My words condemn me, **v. 9** says, but in my place condemned He stood, and there's now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. That mercy is for all who beg for it, who turn from their sin to trust Him. Think of the Lord's character in **v. 11**: compassion and mercy.

What is our hope in life and death? Christ alone, Christ alone.

What is our only confidence? That our souls to Him belong.

what will keep us to the end? ... The love of Christ, in which we stand.⁶

How does thinking of the Lord's character in v. 11 help us with complaints?

In light of God being full of compassion and mercy **Col 3:12** says we must put on a heart of compassion or tender mercies, listen to **Col 3:13**: *if anyone has a complaint against another...* [sounds like James 5:9, instead what to do?] *forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do...*

Think of the Lord's character,

3rdly finally: speak truth that builds character

2 parts of this last point:

- Speak truth to others (v. 12)
- Speak truth to God and about God (v. 13)

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 ...*

We actually condemn ourselves if we have to appeal to something higher to get people to believe us, or to make promises by oath we can't deliver on.

This isn't about swearing like curse words, this is about speaking truth to others without having to swear (by the moon and the stars in the sky, etc.).

You don't have to sing "by the shadow that's by your side, I swear I'll be there." Just say yes, I'll be there, Lord-willing. You don't need to swear on grandma's grave, or a stack of Bibles, or cross your heart, hope to die and stick a needle in your eye! It's ok to swear to tell the truth in court, but we should anyways and always tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but.

So help us, God, let's speak the truth to others, and build character that way

Let's speak truth to God, too. ¹³ *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.* Tell God the truth in prayer or praise. Don't complain to others when you're suffering (**v. 9**), cry out God in prayer (**v. 13**). Go to God first and foremost. Don't run to others or any human refuge, run to God as your refuge, pour out your heart, **1 Pet 5:7**

Tell God the truth in prayer, tell Him about your sin, suffering and sorrows. He already knows the truth anyways, why not tell Him? Prayer is a means of grace, a channel of mercy. As we speak truth to God and truth about God our grumbling can turn to gratitude. It takes us from complaining to praising

The end of **v. 13** in the NKJV uses the word *psalms*. Psalms show us how to take complaints to God, laments to the Lord instead of grumbling to others.

Ps 64 starts with '*Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint...* [he talks about the wicked but then the truth of God and the end of it moves from complaint to praise] *Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him!*'

Ps 55 '*I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted... My heart is in anguish within me... I will complain... And He will hear my voice. He will redeem... Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you*' (NAS)

Ps 77 '*I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed ... I am so troubled that I cannot speak... I said, "This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples.'* (NKJV)

Ps 102 *Prayer of the Afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.* ¹ *Hear my prayer, O LORD!* [doing what James 5:13 says, he's suffering and he prays His complaint to God for 11 verses] ... ¹² *But You, O LORD, abide forever... You will arise and have compassion ... the LORD has built up... This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the LORD* [complaining to praising]⁷

Ps 142: *I cry out to the LORD... I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me ... Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul. I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion... Bring my soul out ... That I may praise Your name..."* (NKJV). He goes from complaining to praising

¹ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1995), 173.

² Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 117–120.

³ NIV.

⁴ NASB.

⁵ Matthew 12:37-38.

⁶ Getty Music, "Christ Our Hope in Life and Death."

⁷ NASB.