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## Prayers

### **To God**

*Praise God for the mystery of His ways, and submit yourself to His plan for your life.*

### **For myself**

Lord God Almighty, deal with me today according to Your will. Shine a light into my heart, and reveal the truth about my heart. Lead me on a journey of faith, and take me where I have not been before. Raise me up to do what I have never done before, trusting in Your will for my health and salvation. I trust You, Lord God Almighty, and I place myself in Your hands. AMEN

### **For others**

Weekly theme: Travel

*Name before the Lord those of your family and friends who face journeys either today or in the coming days. Seek the Lord's protection*

## Meditation

When the spirit is low, Christ speaks,  
But the soul finds it hard to hear;  
For sins have hedged themselves around the bruised heart  
Like a barrier of brokenness; a barricade of distress.

We come this low, too often,  
When unawares, life turns wrong;  
The enemy twists the knife through soul and spirit,  
To strike at faith, stop hope, and question life eternal.

We suffer now who seek the faith,  
Yet fail to grasp His Providence;  
For despite what's done, the effort can never be enough,  
Until the heart repents again to God in purest faith.

We seek Him now for potent grace,  
He grasps the hurting soul in love;  
And when the enemy has been exposed and truth laid bare,  
He restores to health the broken soul, in body, mind and spirit.

# Bible Passage

## James 5:7-9

<sup>7</sup> Therefore be patient, my friends, until the Lord comes. Look how a farmer waits for the earth to produce its precious fruits; being patient all through the early and late rains. <sup>8</sup> You too must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near; <sup>9</sup> and dear friends, do not grumble about each other, so that you are not judged yourselves. Look! The Judge is standing ready at the door!

## Review

In so many of the great letters of the New Testament, authors such as Paul or Peter write roughly in the same way. After a greeting, they firstly confront some church problems, then give some advice linking this with the Gospel message, and then lastly, they offer more general advice about Christian living, often by way of encouragement. This pattern is clear in Romans and Philippians, for example, and James is no different. In his letter he speaks out against wrongful attitudes in the church towards the rich (2:1-7, 4:13, 5:1-6) criticising as ungodly what people say as well as what they do (1:26, 3:1-8, 4:1f.). In the course of writing this, James famously calls on his readers to make sure their faith is shown by what they do and how they speak and behave (1:23f. 2:14-26, 3:13). Now, as we come towards the end of the letter, he now offers some more general advice about various aspects of Christian living.

So we have come to the end of James' tortuous complaints against the church, and chapter 5 contains more familiar teaching than that found in the rest of the letter; especially in the final verses where he describes prayers for the sick (5:14f.). This passage, is dominated by two great Gospel themes, that of 'patience' (5:7,8) and the second coming of Christ (5:8,9), and it is interesting to see what James makes of them. Certainly, they help to give the Christian a fresh perspective on a variety of matters of faith. Patience is of course a virtue and one of the famous qualities describing the 'fruit of the spirit' (Galatians 5:22). Indeed, James' use of the picture of '*precious fruits*' in verse 7 suggests he knew something of Paul's great teaching on this matter.

The second theme of Christ's return arises naturally in verse 8. God's people are called to be patient as they wait for the Lord's return, both to show resolve and belief in the truth of the Gospel they have received, and also as a discipline that should hold back worldly attitudes. The coming of the Lord Jesus is an incentive to Christian people to 'stop grumbling about each other' (5:9), and remember that God alone is the judge of all things. The picture of the Lord standing '*ready at the door*' in judgement (5:9) is imposing, and should make us all feel small before the authority of God most High.

Earlier in the letter, James urged patience on his readers (1:2-4) telling them that they would have to endure all manner of trials, and this would enhance their faith. He then encouraged his readers to '*endure through temptations*' (1:12f.), a virtue that would enable them to be measured in the practice of their faith and '*slow to anger*' (1:19f.). He has made a good case for patience as a key to good practical Christian faith, but he now picks up the theme again, and this time, using the theme of agriculture to illustrate the meaning of patience.

In describing the work of a farmer, it may be that James was speaking from personal experience. There is a long church tradition suggesting that in Mary and Joseph's home in

Nazareth, Jesus, as the eldest son, joined his father in the carpenter's workshop, while His brothers either went fishing in Lake Galilee or worked on the land. It is believed that James worked on the land, because this would explain the predominance of agricultural illustrations used in his letter. He speaks of wild flowers and the weather (1:10,11), of first fruits (1:18) and planting (1:21), of training animals (3:3,7), springs (3:11,12), harvest (3:18), and paying workmen in the fields (5:4).

We can never know for sure if James was a farmer by trade, but it is a reasonable assumption. We do know, however, that the rainy season of the land in that century came early and late, early to enable seeds to germinate, and later to help the grain swell and produce a fruitful crop. We read these things ignorant of the supreme importance of such things, by which the people of those days lived or died of starvation. In reality, farmers had to be people of great patience, who tended the crop carefully and were dependent on these precise rains for their harvest yields.

But the picture lends itself very well to the associated theme of the coming of God's Kingdom. When James speaks of patience in matters of faith, he does so because of his own confident hope in the harvest of God's Kingdom when Christ would come in glory (5:7), like a farmer waiting for the harvest, which, like the seasons will surely come. It is too easy for us to be distracted by the world and forget the fact that Christ will indeed come again in glory, like a fixed season of eternity that will surely come. We only see time passing without this future hope of a farmer, but James encourages us to expect this season of God's appointing with confidence, saying, '*strengthen your hearts...*' (5:8)

The teaching of this passage is of great interest to us, especially if we have no connection with farming! James believed that maturity of faith showed itself in two things, patience and expectation of God's 'parousia', that is, the coming again of Christ in glory. Such a faith was the very opposite of the grumbling and judgemental attitudes James saw burgeoning in the life of the church; he said, '*do not grumble about each other, so that you are not judged yourselves*' (5:9).

This is a highly pertinent verse of scripture, for in some parts of the church, complaining about brothers and sisters in Christ has become a truly deadly disease, and Satan has weighed into this with considerable success, creating unhappiness and division amongst God's people across the world. However, James indicates that the best defence against this is to be so focussed on Christ that harsh judgements and grumbling are removed from the life of God's people. Indeed, Satan cannot stand the dedication of those who are patiently waiting for Christ's return, because this constitutes a threat to his very existence (Rev 20:11-15)!

James' imposing words about the Judge standing ready at the door (5:9) echo those of John in his great Revelation; '*Look, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice ...*' (Rev 3:20). For some, this picture presents a frightening prospect; but for those who are waiting for it in faith, this is the wonderful consequence of salvation and redemption. For those whose lives are already committed to a God who saves them, this is one of the most exciting things one can read about in the Bible! It is all hope realised and every expectation fulfilled!

## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***Farming illustrations***

Farming illustrations abound in the Bible, but they are certainly more prevalent in James than the writings of Paul, for example. This passage is a powerful example of Jesus' own teaching method, which observes facts of God's creation and then sees in them something of the heart of the Creator and His will for humanity.

It has been argued by many people greater than I that the reason why we find it so hard to grasp some aspects of faith is because in today's world, many of us are divorced from the land and unable to appreciate the richer meaning of the Bible's great illustrations. We say 'the Lord is my Shepherd', for example, without having a clue about the complex work of a shepherd. We speak of harvests without ever having harvested crops even in our own gardens.

Now this may be a pity, but it does not signal the death of any understanding of the Bible. As ever, the Christian must always be ready to understand more of the life of the people we read about in the Bible, and getting to know something about their agriculture is part of this. Secondly, there are many wise moves even within settled city suburbia, to get people back to having some contact with the land and with more of creation, for at least the good of their secular souls, if not of their spirits as well! The virtue of patience, with all its spiritual benefits, has much to commend it and it is essential for those who work with nature or the land.

### ***Patience and a critical spirit***

Patience is a virtue! There are plenty of occasions when I have prayed and asked the Lord to return in glory more because of my own impatience or my own personal troubles than because of any sense of spiritual conviction. I also know that like others, I can be very critical and judgemental; you give sin half a chance and Satan takes a mile out of your life! Personally, I know that I must stand back and be patient in the Lord's judgement and His coming again because this is the route to my eventually completed salvation. I know I need to take hold of this and believe it.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- What must you do to become more patient? Whatever issues they are, write them down and place them before the Lord in prayer. Do this regularly over a period of time and listen for what the Lord would say to you about these issues.
- Spend a day or two in fasting for the church, the people of God. Fast either by abstaining from one meal in any day, or by refraining from food for a defined period of time such as a day or two.

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. How can this passage assist us to live a godly life and aspire to higher things, for the sake of our own faith and the good of all God's people?
2. Discuss how we can help each other cultivate patience within our lives.
3. In what ways does grumbling effect the life of your church. Where does it come from and how may it be overcome.

## Final Prayer

May we find our peace in You, Lord Jesus; carpenter of Nazareth, teacher of Israel, servant of all and healer of the sick. Bless our work, teach us the truth, lead us where we should go and help us in our need, we pray; Lord Jesus, Son of God, Saviour of the World: AMEN