

# HEARTS STRENGTHENED BY HOPE, LIVES LIVED WITH PURPOSE JAMES 5:7-12

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever considered the three essences of Christian living as Paul presents them in 1 Corinthians 13. Do you remember them – “now these three remain, faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.” Faith, Hope and Love are key qualities of Christian living. I would submit that we understand a good deal about faith – the necessity of believing & trusting God, I believe we understand the fundamentals of love – living for and enjoying the promotion of the good of another. But I think we have a hard time grasping the importance of hope. For some reason the modern church no longer prizes this quality like it once did. Did you know that about 1 of 13 verses in the NT are on hope?<sup>1</sup> Well, our passage today is on hope and it is my expectation that God will use this to speak to us about the necessity of hope for a fruitful Christian life. So, with that in mind, let’s pray.

***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. 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***

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<sup>1</sup> Motyer, J. A. (1985). *The message of James : The tests of faith*. The Bible speaks today (172). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press.

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***oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. James 5:7-12 (ESV)***

This wonderful text has so much truth to change our lives and sustain us as we walk with God. James has just finished pronouncing God’s judgment on those who abuse their wealth and make life difficult for the poor. Throughout history the people of God have often been the outcasts of society, persecuted and rejected. **Today there are 34 nations where Christians are persecuted. Our sister churches in Cuba still experience pressure from the government and many pastors are not allowed to receive any compensation for their labors. Sovereign Grace Ministries is currently supporting a network of churches and their pastors in Cuba and India who labor amidst great challenges - facing poverty, beatings and even death. These words of James mean a whole lot to these folks. But we must also recognize that although our lives are fairly peaceful and free from gross want, we still face many challenges in life and we can not navigate these without the truth of this passage.** Let me sum it up in a sentence or two and then we’ll dig in. Only a sure hope in Christ’s inevitable and imminent return will establish our hearts to sustain us for the various trials of life. Only hope in Christ, hope, which is faith looking forward to the end, only hope in Christ is powerful enough to keep us walking with God amidst trials. This is true for the persecuted and poor Christian, this is true for the wealthy and comfortable Christian, for we all face trials of various kinds and only hope in Christ will so establish our hearts to grant us success. The title of this message is HEARTS STRENGTHENED BY HOPE, LIVES LIVED WITH PURPOSE. I want to talk about the function of hope from this text. First we will talk about panorama of hope touching on the basic truths behind biblical hope, then we will talk about the persons of hope, the examples given in this text, and then we will talk about the practice of hope, the fruit and lifestyle

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that results form a life lived strengthened by hope – so, the Panorama, the Persons and the Practice of Hope.

## 1. **THE PANORAMA OF HOPE**

James assumes some things of his readers that we can't necessarily assume. You see, to be a believer in the early church was to live in light of Christ's inevitable and imminent return. In other words, they had just last seen Christ ascend from the Mount of Olives with the promise that in the same way he would return. They lived hanging on his words of promise to finish what he had started by returning and making all things new and bringing to completion the arrival of his kingdom. They had just said goodbye to the King who promised to soon return so they lived their entire Christian lives in light of the return of the King. Well, in part because his return has been delayed 2000 years and in part because we often find our comfort more in this life than the next, we have neglected to emphasize his return in the same way that the early church did. So, let's take a bit of time to bring ourselves somewhat up to speed on the truth of Christ's return.

### 1.1. **The Parousia of the Lord**

James says in verse 7, "***be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.***" The phrase "coming of the Lord" is actually a special phrase used by the Lord himself in Matthew 24 to describe his dramatic reappearance in the sky, like lightening flashing from the east to the west, descending on the clouds with great power and the host of heaven behind him. At the hour of his trial, before he was sentenced to death, Jesus said to Caiaphas, when asked to say if he was indeed the Christ, "***You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.***" This was the final word to the Jewish ruling elite that Jesus had before he was sentenced to be crucified – the confident declaration that they would behold him coming on the clouds of heaven in power – his great appearance or coming as translated here.

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The word means much more than just a simple return. This word, parousia in the Greek, coming or appearance in English, speaks of the glorious and dramatic appearing of Christ and his presence with us forever. It speaks of all that comes when a glorious King arrives to save the day. Listen to how it is put in 1 Thessalonians <sup>16</sup> ***For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.*** **1 Thess 4:16-18 (ESV)**

**I love good books and good movies. And one of the most dramatic things in literature is when a hero arrives to bring justice and peace to an oppressed people or a corrupt situation. So much of our literature and creativity features this or anticipates this. Think of how much great literature features this as the climax of their stories? Much of Shakespeare, anything by Dickens, Tolkein, Lewis, Hugo, Tolstoy all feature this. The top movies do the same – Lord of the Rings certainly, Star Wars, and most of the old classics like Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and Seven Samurai all feature such plots.**

Why? Why make so much of life and literature revolve around this? Well, I would submit to you that we are all made by God and for God and though we may deny this reality it leaks out of us in all sorts of ways. And we know that there is something wrong with a world where oppression and injustice and evil exist and oppose the good. And so built into each one of us is a longing for the ultimate parousia – the ultimate arrival of the hero. And Christ Jesus is he. He is the answer, he is the culmination of all our hero expectations and he alone will bring resolution at his great appearance – it is confirmed not only by our intuitive expectation but by the face of his victorious resurrection from the dead, victorious over life and death. And so

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to live life is to live ever in the expectation of his return. He will return to bring justice, to judge rightly all mankind and to provide relief to those who have waited for him and victory for those who have submitted to his rightful reign. And he will wipe away every tear from our eyes and no longer will there be death nor any mourning nor any crying nor any pain nor sickness – this broken order will pass away and the real story will just be beginning. With the King on His eternal throne and an eternity in the new heaven and earth as it was meant to be.

Do you struggle with life at times? Do you feel the pain of sickness and death? Do you observe injustices or suffer from injustices? Have any of you been wrongly treated by someone? Are you aware that there is something wrong with the world and something wrong in your own heart? For some of us this awareness is very acute right now. Some of us have chronic illness to deal with, some of us have home situations that are very difficult, some of us have hard work situations. Wait long enough and you will face trials in life –it is the reality this side of Christ’s return and all of us know intuitively that it shouldn’t be so. Although there may be a degree of relief and blessing here and now, our trials and all injustices will not be resolved until the return of the King. And so James tells his listeners to be patient and establish their hearts in this blessed promise. And so must we. We must be careful to never neglect the important truth and essential doctrine of Christ’s imminent and inevitable return. It will grant us the hope to sustain us in our trials, leading us onward in patience and godly living.

## **2. THE PERSONS OF HOPE**

James again uses very real and practical examples to illustrate a life lived in hope. He mentions the farmer, the prophets and Job as examples of those who live in hope.

### **2.1. The Farmer**

Verse 7 says, “**See how the farmer waits for the precious fruits of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains.**” To be a good farmer is to be patient and live by hope. Each

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year farmers had to take a good portion of the previous year's crops and risk it, so to speak. They would plow their field and throw the seed from the previous year into the ground. Now if a farmer was living for the moment it would make no sense to do that. It all could be lost. But a good farmer lives and labors for the future harvest, not just the present one. So a farmer in Palestine sows his seed into the ground during planting season, which would have been in the fall after the summer drought, and then waits for the early rain to grant germination to the seeds and continues to wait until the late rain in the spring to grant the moisture for full bloom of the crop. To be a farmer was to be somebody who worked hard while full of hope.

Folks, this is such a key to life. I so often live my life like a foolish farmer. I want to hoard the seed and find my comfort now. I want to sell the farm and find an easier living. But this life is inescapably full of trials and waiting. God has designed it that way with good purpose: to gloriously redeem and refine a people for himself. And so we must learn to wait and labor not for today but for the harvest that comes after the early and late rains.

George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist perhaps of all time, who almost singlehandedly brought the Great Awakening to Great Britain and the Colonies and changed the course of the history of the English speaking world desired this be written on his tomb in Newburyport, *'Here lies G.W. What kind of man he was the great Day will discover.'*<sup>2</sup>

What great wisdom. Folks, it is certainly appropriate to live our lives planning for the day's events, the week's events, the events of a given season of life and so on. But so much of life does not make sense unless we think in terms of an entire lifetime and even more so, in terms of the entire church age – this time between Christ's resurrection and his return when he rules from heaven. We must see ourselves in terms of millennia and not minutes. You and I will not be able to deal with life's hardships and

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<sup>2</sup> Per Arnold Dallimore, George Whitefield, Volume 1, Banner of Truth Trust, 1995, p. 154,

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challenges, setbacks and disappointments if we are not thinking long term. The farmer who is not looking ahead to the harvest of the crop will not have the ability to do the hard work needed in the mean time. Let us take our lessons from the farmer and labor while patiently waiting for the rains and the harvest.

## **2.2. The Prophets**

James goes on to highlight the prophets as well in verse 10. He says, ***"As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast."*** Talk about patience and putting their hope in God! Do you know the whole story of Jeremiah? This wonderful book that displays God's amazing patience and mercy to a rebellious people as well as his incredible promises to make a new covenant people after his own heart was written by a man who endured great hardship. He was told to speak to a nation that would fight against him and his words and that is exactly what happened. He was persecuted, imprisoned and, according to reliable tradition, eventually stoned to death by his own people. Isaiah similarly endured opposition from others as well as Daniel and others. Why? Why would they do it?

These men knew their God and they knew he wins in the end. Look at Jeremiah and Daniel and Isaiah – they all had encounters with God – they all tasted his appearing in a profound way and as a result their world was put in a new perspective with God at the center and man and time in its rightful place. Do you have a similar perspective? Is God at the center and men and time in the rightful place? When we have this perspective it gives us the ability to live patiently waiting for God's vindication and answer to our difficulty.

## **2.3. Job**

James goes on to mention Job at the end of verse 11. ***"You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."*** Job too

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endured much suffering in his life. He lost his children, he lost his farm, he lost all his worldly possessions, he lost his friends, he lost his health and his happiness. Yet, after receiving such brutal blows, he did not sin against God yet remained steadfast in his faith. And although greatly tried, in the end God blessed him. James uses this famous Jewish story as an example for us.

And in doing this he points us not just to Job's example but the God behind it all. Just as the prophets saw God and were able to endure great hardship as they put their hope in God, James would have us see God as well. He says **"you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."** We may not have the sort of encounter that Isaiah had but we have the same God and we have a greater revelation of God in the fullness of God's word and the glory of His Son shown to us by his word. Like Isaiah but even more greatly we have seen the purpose of God. We know that God not only rules the beginning of it all, not only rules the in between, but also rules the end too. He is Lord over all time. And he has sent His very Son, God the Son, the Second person of the Tri-unity or Trinity as we call Him. God himself came to earth to endure trials worse than Jobs or Jeremiahs or yours or mine. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, bore the full wrath of God towards sin in his body on the cross. Guys, there is no greater trial imaginable.

Anyone here like scary movies – like Jaws or Earthquake or one of those movies where scary things grab you out of the dark? We may like to taste fear a little bit in movies but no matter what movie you have seen, not matter what horror film you have lived, it does not compare to the horror the Holy Son faced for our sin. We are told in scripture not to fear those who can harm the body but not harm the soul but we are to fear him who can throw both body and soul into hell. Why? Because suffering the eternal consequences for sin is the scariest and most tragic thing imaginable. Being cut off forever from all that is good and worthy left to ourselves and our sin

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forever alone in outer darkness and regret is worse than all. And God the Son not only endured the punishment of one or two but thousands upon thousands. He suffered that just holy wrath you and I deserved to pay and it crushed the almighty eternal God himself. And the unthinkable happened. God suffered and died. But, wonder of wonders, God the Father was satisfied with all that His Son had done and raised him on the third day never to die again. And now he brings complete and final forgiveness and eternal life in his renewed world to all who cast themselves at his feet.

Brothers and sisters, you know the purpose of the Lord more perhaps than James and his original listeners did. You know his compassion and his mercy. The word for compassion could also be translated his hyper-sympathy. If he has given his only Son for you than surely he loves you. If he poured out his wrath for your sin on his most precious Son than surely he cares for you. Stop charging God for your trials! Stop taking out your frustration on others! Stop accusing him of not caring or being unwise! You know that isn't true – you know the purpose of God and his great compassion and mercy – for you have seen it not only in Job and Jeremiah but most of all in Jesus. The anchor of your hope in that he has given you His Son and is on your side and therefore he will give you all things, only hold on to him and wait patiently through the trials he wisely designs for your good.

You see, James is not just reminding us of the hope we have in Christ so we can feel better about things. James is calling us to the practice of a life full of hope all throughout this text. Do you see all the exhortations here?

### **3. THE PRACTICE OF HOPE**

#### **3.1. Gracious Speech Not Grumbling**

The fruit of a heart established by hope is one who speaks gracious words and not grumbling words. James in verse 9 warns about not grumbling amidst trials and so bringing God's discipline and unfavorable judgment. If we live in light of his imminent and inevitable return we will

watch our hearts and our mouths and avoid grumbling while we put our hope in Him and live like George Whitefield for that final day.

### **3.2. Humble Integrity Not Oath-Making**

James also calls his hearers in verse 12 to avoid oath taking. The speech and lifestyle of one with their hope set on Christ and his return is reflected in humble integrity and not boasting and making declarations that have to be substantiated with an oath, a common practice in that day. If we have our confidence in Christ and what he thinks of us we will not live to impress men with our words and we will live humbly and reverently in our speech. When people do not believe us we will be content to let it ride and will not feel we need to vindicate ourselves by saying, "I swear to God its' true!"

When we are setting our hope on Christ and our final vindication before the throne we will live for his opinion first and foremost and so speak and conduct ourselves. Fear of man will fall away to a God centered love for others. So James links hope and holiness.

### **3.3. Patience & Peace Not Anxiety**

He calls us to patience and strength in hope. The very first word in the section is the command. ***Be patient!*** Again in verse 8 – ***be patient!*** And then another command, "***Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand!***" Folks, it is entirely unacceptable for us to live amidst trials charging God and complaining. The good news of Christ as Savior and King must and will produce the fruit of patience in our lives. We are called to patiently endure when people mistreat us because God is in control and he has given us all we need in Christ and he will shortly return and deal with all things. James calls us to establish our hearts. That is, we are to have sure and strong hearts anchored on the hope we have in Christ that are able to stand strong amidst the tide of trials and difficulties. This isn't something we just do by picking ourselves up by the bootstraps. We establish our hearts because the coming of the Lord is at hand, because we have Christ as our Savior and King, because he works all things for our good, because he

uses trials to make us mature in him as James taught us earlier. We establish our hearts because we have incredible promises from God to encourage us. We establish our hearts because our fellowship with others reminds us of the good news of Christ. We establish our hearts because the living God himself speaks to us through his living word. We establish our hearts because this one who is soon returning listens to us in prayer and grants us peace. We have tasted and seen that he is good. We have experienced the love of God poured into our hearts. We have felt him our midst. We have heard his voice as he speaks softly to us. He established our hearts in Him. Is your heart established? Are you able to endure difficulties or do you fall apart when life gets tough? Well, left to ourselves we all do this – and all too often. But as we come to the living God together we find our hearts established.

**I know you have seen this in others, I have. There are so many believers that have endured great hardship because they have their hearts established in God. Our friend Renee' Barowski in one of the greatest examples in my mind...**

Perhaps you are not experiencing an established heart because you have not yet given your heart to the God of all hope. Even now, entrust yourself to him and look to Christ alone for forgiveness of all your sins and let him be the Lord of your life. He will grant you strength in your innermost person to endure and even be fruitful amidst hardship. Perhaps you do know Christ but you are not connected to him and thus are not fed the daily sustenance you need for a strong heart. Get with his people – join a caregroup, build healthy relationships with other believers here in the church – that is why we do this – that our hearts might be strengthened and we might walk with God together. Perhaps you are doing this yet still struggle – then perhaps you need to connect with God through regular time in his word, remembering his promises and praying. It only takes me about 30 minutes to drift away. I need to continually pray and continually remember

Christ and his life given for me and the hope of new life I have in him. Do these things and as we rely on the Holy Spirit he shall indeed strengthen and establish our hearts.

So we must realize that there are a thousand implications of setting our hope on Christ. As we conclude can you consider some aspect of your life where you struggle with sin – maybe trying to impress others, maybe grumbling, maybe just be exasperated with trials. Think about this and then think about how a greater hope in Christ's return will affect that struggle. Share this with someone this week and pray together that your heart might be strengthened in hope to live life with heavenly success. Let's pray.