

James
When Life's Not Fair (Part 1)
James 3:1-12
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Well, it's a joy this morning to return to James 5. And I invite you to take your Bibles and turn there with me, to James 5.

If you read the newspaper at all this week, you read an article, or you heard on the news, on television or radio, about a significant event that occurred in our state. Tuesday, after twenty-five years in prison, 58-year-old Larry Fuller triumphantly walked out of the courthouse a free man. It was in 1981. If you were alive then, try to imagine and think for a moment, what you were doing in 1981. In 1981 he was convicted for rape, and sentenced to fifty years in prison. He's now been, twenty-five years later, exonerated. He's eligible for up to \$250,000 compensation for wrongful imprisonment. But the money can take months to arrive, and it's heavily taxed. What exactly do you give someone who's been proved innocent, after spending the best part of their life behind bars, wrongfully convicted of a crime that they did not commit? Exactly what do you do for someone like that?

Well, as recently as two years ago, Great Britain's Home Secretary moved to give such people a bill, a bill for the cost of room and board for the time they had spent in British prisons. Believe it or not, the home secretary, (and you may have read about this in the paper at the time), a couple of years ago, the Home Secretary of the Labor Party, actually fought to charge victims wrongfully imprisoned about 3,000 pounds per year they were in prison. That's about \$6,000 a year. The logic, such as it was, was that an innocent man should not be imprisoned eating free porridge (Yes, we all want to be doing that) and sleeping for nothing under regulation gray blankets.

One article reported an example: a man by the name of Mike O'Brian. Mike O'Brian spent ten years in jail, wrongfully convicted of murder. While he was in prison, his baby daughter died. And when he was finally exonerated and discharged from the prison, he was charged 37,000 pounds, or about \$71,000 for room and board, for his time in jail. Vincent Hickey, who was wrongfully convicted for killing a paperboy, was charged 60,000 pounds, about \$120,000 for the seventeen years he'd spent in jail. In that very wry, dry, sense of British humor, he said, "If I

had known this, I would have stayed on hunger strike longer. That way I would have had a smaller bill.”

You know, when you hear stories like that, it just sends a sort of shiver down your spine and you realize that there are certainly times in this life (and there are many of them) when injustice is done, when life certainly isn't fair. And there are other times when life certainly doesn't seem to be fair to us. As I thought about injustice and how common it is, and a part of our world, I sat down this week and just made a really brief list of stories that I have heard from friends through the years, of injustice that they have actually experienced.

You find out, for example, that the person you married isn't at all who they claimed or appeared to be. You end up with a disabled child, because of negligence on the part of the doctor. He'd been drinking before he arrived to care for your child. You're wrongfully accused by a vindictive spouse of child abuse, and locked away for twenty-five years to life. You lose your job through no fault of your own. You're passed over for that long-expected and promised promotion, so that it can be given to the boss's young son who doesn't even half qualify for the job. You lose your retirement, what you worked for your whole life, because of criminal mismanagement among the company's directors. On and on the list could go of the injustices that are a part of this life.

But perhaps the hardest form of injustice is when we bear the brunt of undeserved, unwarranted attacks upon us. You've experienced it. If you haven't, you will. I've certainly experienced it. I have in my files a letter, and there's no need to recount the circumstances to you, of such an unwarranted attack. A letter written about me that calls me a fulminating traitorous turncoat, guilty of the spirit of Judas and Demas. As a believer and as a pastor, not much worse could be said.

That was exactly what was happening to James' first readers. They were bearing the brunt of a full-frontal attack upon them. Notice back in chapter 2, James 2:6, this attack is identified. I noted this for you last week. “Is it not the rich, the ones who oppress you and personally drag you into court?” There were some very wealthy, powerful, influential people in their communities, who were also wicked and opposed to them, who were using the courts to manipulate, to get their way, either to get a sort of vindictive spirit fulfilled, or to gain some financial or political advantage.

And then last week we looked at James 5:1 - 6, and we saw these people for who they are. They were even in verse 4, withholding the pay from those day laborers who counted on that pay to feed their families. These believers were being treated unfairly. It's just unfair! So, how should they respond, when life was to them patently unfair? Or more to the point, how should each of us respond when life just isn't fair?

Well, I can tell you how we most commonly respond. There really are three common, sinful responses that we have to injustice. The first of them is to accuse God of injustice and unfairness. There are a lot of people who wander our earth, literally holding a grudge against God. They understand that God is all-powerful, that He's in charge. And so, when injustice comes into their lives, their first response is to blame God and to hold Him responsible. And literally, there are people who live their lives in a state of settled resentment and anger against God for something that has happened.

A second sinful response to injustice that we face in our world is not turn to God, but turn at the people that are behind that injustice. It's harboring anger and bitterness toward those who have mistreated us. This, too, is a very common, sinful reaction to injustice. "I'll never forgive that person!" I've heard that over and over again in my life as a believer and as a pastor. Someone who has been wronged say words just like that: "I can never," or "I will never forgive that person for what they have done to me."

A third sinful response is taking our own revenge, just getting even! "I will get back at that person! They won't know where, but they will know why!" is sort of the common response. You know, I thought about this recently. It really is surprising, in a sense, how this theme dominates so many of the films and movies of our culture—this theme of revenge—someone who has been unjustly attacked, getting even. Because there is within the human heart a desire to exact revenge, to get my pound of flesh for how I have been treated.

Now, all of those three are absolutely the wrong ways to respond. In James 5:7 - 12, James tells us exactly how it is that we should respond when life is not fair, when injustice comes to us. Let me read these verses to you. James 5 beginning in verse 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. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you, yourselves

may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 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. 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.

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

Now notice that verse 7 begins with the word "therefore." James is about to apply "to the brethren," he says in verse 7, what he has described in the first 6 verses. "In light of," he's saying. "In light of the sinful attacks leveled against you by the wicked, filthy rich, and powerful. Here's how I want you to respond. Therefore, in light of their actions, you respond like this. The basic connection between verses 1 - 6, and 7 - 12 is this: verses 1 - 6 describes the injustice that the wicked, rich, and powerful had caused in the lives of these first century Christians. And verses 7 - 12 gives us the flipside: how the righteous should respond. He says, basically, "We should wait in patience for the coming of the Lord. The wicked will be judged. All wrongs will be made right."

Describing the connection of these first twelve verses, John Blanchard, an excellent commentator on this book, writes this:

"In the opening six verses of this chapter, James has been exposing and challenging the lives of the wealthy, ungodly men, who defrauded and persecuted the poor, and who lived in self-indulgent luxury." [We looked at them last week.] "Now," Blanchard says, "he turns from the oppressors to the oppressed, tells them how they should behave under pressure, and encourages them to look for the Day of Deliverance, that will one day be theirs.

This is, throughout the Scripture, a common biblical approach: to say, "Let's rehearse what your opponents, what your oppressors are doing, and now let's rehearse what your response should be. You should wait for God to act." There's so many examples I could show you, but let me take you to one.

Turn to Psalm 37. Psalm 37 reflects this same sort of theme. David is rehearsing the reality that we face opposition. We face oppression. We face the wicked, who are out to hurt and do us injustice. Notice verse 12. Here's the wicked. "... [They plot] against the righteous And gnash[es] at him with ... [their] teeth." Verse 14, "The wicked have drawn the sword and bent the[ir] bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct." That's the place and plan of the wicked.

But what's our temptation in response to that? When we see those who are prospering in our world, who thumb their nose at our faith, and perhaps, in some circumstances, and certainly in other parts of the world, at us personally, and the attacks get very personal, how are we tempted to respond? Look at verse 1. We are tempted to fret, because of evildoers. We are tempted to be envious toward them. Notice verse 7 again, the middle of the verse. We're tempted to fret "because of him who prospers in his way," to worry about them because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. That's our temptation: to respond in one of those two ways: either to worry, or to envy. Well, what's the solution? Verse 7,

Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; Verse 8, Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; [Seek] Do not fret; *it leads* only to evil doing." [How can you have that kind of attitude? How can you face injustice like that? Well look at the next verse, verse 9.] "For evil doers will be cut off, [for those] ... who wait for the Lord will inherit the land. Yet a little while and wicked man will be no more; ... you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be *there*."

David says, "Just think for a moment about the end of those who oppose you. Remember that the end of the story has not yet been written. The last chapter is not yet in the book!"

Verse 15, you see this same point made. "[The wicked] ... sword will enter into their own heart, And their bows will be broken." Verse 20, "... the wicked will perish; And enemies of the Lord will be like the [grassy flowers] ... of the pastures. They vanish - like smoke they vanish away."

Verse 37, "Mark the blameless man, ... behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity." [He will have an end. That is, a good end.] "But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off."

This is the consistent message of Scripture. If you want to deal with the injustice of this life, don't bother looking for justice here. Look to the future. There's justice coming. There's justice coming.

And that's exactly the message that James has for us. Turn back to James 5. In James 5:7 - 12 he identifies for us here, our proper response to life's injustices. In fact, he identifies five different responses that you and I should have to the injustices of life. You'll notice, if you look in this paragraph, that there are five imperatives, or five commands. Each of those commands tells us exactly how we ought to respond to the unfairness of life.

Now, I want to spend all of our time today on the first response to injustice, because it is the focus of this passage. And it's also absolutely foundational. "When life isn't fair." And I want you to think for a moment about your own life. Think about injustice that you have suffered, or are suffering. When life isn't fair, our first response should be this: Be patient until the Lord's coming. Be patient until the Lord's coming. Notice verse 7: "... be patient brethren."

By the way, this is another strong argument for verses 1 - 6, referring to unbelievers, unbelieving, rich and powerful people who are oppressing Christians. Because if we're talking about Christians in verses 1 - 6, then what would James' practical application be? If those are Christians doing those things, in verses 1 - 6, primarily, he's not going to apply that by saying, "Be patient." His application is going to be, "Repent! Get your heart right! Mourn!" Just like he says back in James 4. So, it's clear here, that this is a transition. Verses 1 - 6 addressed to unbelievers, wicked unbelievers who are oppressing Christians. Verse 7, we are now talking to Christians. And to them he says, "Be patient!"

Now there are a couple of words in the New Testament for "patience." This one is usually translated as "patience," and it refers to "being patient with people". The other word for patience occurs later in this passage, down in verse 11. It's the word translated "endurance". It means to "endure bad circumstances". So, patience is being patient with people. Endurance is enduring difficult circumstances.

Now, what does this word "patient" mean? We're to be patient. Well, it's the opposite of being short-tempered. It literally is being "long-tempered." D. Edmond Hebert, in his commentary writes, "It's an attitude of self-restraint, that enables one to refrain from hasty retaliation in the face of provocation." The noun form of this word is often translated as "long-suffering," to suffer long, without responding in revenge or retaliation. So, obviously implied in this "Be

patient” is “You don’t have the right to take revenge.” Part of being patient means, “Don’t try to get even! Don’t try to settle the injustice here.” You remember Paul’s words to the Romans, in Romans 12:19, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*. for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE; I WILL REPAY,’ says the Lord.” Never take your own revenge! Instead, James says we are to (instead of taking revenge, instead of getting even), we are to bear with them. We are to suffer long, in the same way that God suffers long with people.

Now, there are two contexts in which you and I need to be patient with the injustice that comes to us from others. Or let me put it a different way. Injustice comes to us for two different reasons. When you and I suffer injustice, it comes from one of two reasons.

Number one: It comes, simply out of the overflow of the fallenness of people. In other words, it’s not that we’re being persecuted for our faith, or anything like that. It’s simply that we’re around people who are fallen, and that fallenness overflows into our lives, and spills injustice. You remember Paul said, “Unbelievers are hateful and hating one another.” And so, you and I can sometimes suffer injustice simply because we live in a fallen world; and fallen people are prone to injustice, because they’re prone to promote themselves.

Turn back to 1 Peter, 1 Peter 2, 1 Peter, in the second chapter, and notice verse 18. Here we have injustice like that: injustice that is simply the overflow of someone else’s fallenness. And we get hurt by it. Verse 18, here, Peter is talking about how we’re to respond submissively in the midst of suffering. And he says, in verse 18, “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect; not only to those who are good and gentle; but also to those who are unreasonable.” Now the word “unreasonable,” the Greek word for unreasonable is the word “skolios”. You recognize that word. It’s a word we use to describe the curvature of the spine. It’s a word that means “crooked.” He says, “I want you to submit yourselves, and be respectful to those who are over you, who are crooked, who are unreasonable, who are wicked.” Verse 19,

For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there, if when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if you do what is right [in other words, if you’re just doing what you’re supposed to do and in this case, your employer. Let’s apply it to our modern terms. Your employer is a wicked person. And you get treated unjustly because of that.] and [you] suffer *for it* [patiently] you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. [So sometimes

injustice comes into our lives simply as the overflow of the fallenness of the people around us.]

But sometimes, secondly, injustice comes into our lives deliberately and purposefully because of our faith; because you're a Christian; because of what you believe. Turn to Matthew 5. And Jesus addresses this form of injustice that can come to believers. Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness...." Here it's not just the overflow of somebody's fallenness affecting our lives. It's intentional, designed to get at us, because of our righteousness because of Whose we are. Verse 11,

"Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

You know, it's interesting. You and I don't encounter a lot of physical persecution. In fact, none, that I have ever encountered and perhaps you haven't, either. Perhaps a few have been pushed or shoved in the process of sharing the Gospel, or street preaching, or whatever. But largely the persecution we endure is what? It's verbal, just like Jesus said here. It's insults. It's saying all kinds of evil against you "Because of Me." And this is how injustice comes at us. It comes either from the overflow of the fallenness of people around us, or it comes because of our faith. But either way, we are to respond with patience.

Patience, by the way, this Greek word for "patience" is the same word that's often used of God's patience with sinners. In other words, we are to exercise the same kind of patience God does. James says, [Not for a day, not for a week, not for a month, not for a year, but] "we are to be patient" [notice verse 7] "until the coming of the Lord." Just be patient. Be long-suffering until the Lord comes! Bear with them, until, and in expectation of, the coming of the Lord.

Now this word, "coming," if you've been in the church anytime at all, you'll recognize this Greek word, even if you don't know a lot of Greek. It's the word "parousia." It's one of three primary New Testament words describing the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It literally means (this word), "to be alongside of, to be alongside of." He says. "I want you to be patient until the Lord comes alongside of us" would be a good translation of it. In secular Greek, this word was used to describe the arrival of a king or a monarch, at one of his cities. It really is more than coming. It has in it the idea of one's presence, the monarch's presence. Probably the

best English word used to translate it is the word “arrival.” “I want you to be patient until the Lord arrives.” In fact, fifteen times in the New Testament this word “parousia,” or “coming” is used to refer to Christ’s return. Let me just show you several of those.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Corinthians 15:23, he says, in terms of the resurrection, which is what Paul is talking about here. He says, “Christ was the first fruits of resurrection. After that, those who are Christ’s, (that’s us) at His “Parousia” (at His arrival, at His coming). There’s going to be resurrection. Now, you and I are going to look in some detail, the first of the year, on Sunday nights, at the Doctrine of Last Things. So, I’m not going to take apart all the different elements of how this unfolds, right now. I’m just going to talk in terms of the second coming as one great sweeping event; when the Lord returns, when He arrives. And we’ll take it apart in a little more detail in January, Lord willing. But He’s coming! And when He comes, resurrection comes with it.

Turn over to 1 Thessalonians in the letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul mentions this “Parousia”, or this coming, often. First Thessalonians 2:19, “... who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His [arrival at His] coming? Chapter 3:13, [he says, “I’m praying that God would] establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of the Lord Jesus, with all His saints.” Chapter 4:15, [Here’s the most well-known usage of it:] “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the [parousia of the Lord] the coming [the arrival] of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.” Chapter 5:23, “Now may the God of peace, Himself, sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Second Thessalonians 2:1, “Now we request you brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you be not quickly shaken.” There was false teaching that had caused these people to waver in their confidence in the coming of Christ that He’d already come. And Paul says, “Absolutely not!” Don’t waver in your confidence.

Down in verse 8, he refers again to the appearance of His coming. In 2 Peter 3:4, Peter refers to this. And he does in in the context of: Some people are saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” There’s scoffers saying, “It’s been a long time! Is He coming, really? When’s He gonna come? Why hasn’t He come yet?” Peter said, “Don’t let that shake your faith.” God doesn’t march to man’s timetable. He is coming! In 1 John, 1 John 2:28, John writes: “Now,

little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame, at His coming.”

What I want you to see, and the reason I’ve led you through all of those references, (and there are many others), but what I want you to see, is that this event should be the constant preoccupation of our minds. Are you aware that some nearly 2,000 times, 1835 times, the second coming is referenced in Scripture? Three hundred times in the New Testament! That means one in every thirteen verses in the New Testament refers to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Puritan, John Trapp, said, “This is penned as a badge to the sleeve of every true believer: that he looks for, and longs for, Christ’s coming.”

Martin Luther wrote, “I preach as though Christ died yesterday, rose from the dead today, and is coming back tomorrow.” Is that how you live? Is that how you embrace the truths of the Scripture that we so love? Do you really think of Christ as having died yesterday, being raised today? It’s so much a reality to you, that it’s as if it happened today? And you’re anticipating His return tomorrow? We are all to live our lives, “looking!”

Turn to Titus 2, Titus 2. Many years ago, when I first discovered, through the instruction of one of my professors, expository teaching and preaching (really the first time I had ever attempted to do it), it was this passage that I came to and first taught, with those new tools that I had been instructed in. I love this passage. Titus 2:11, Paul writes to his young son in the faith, “For the grace of God has appeared....” This is probably grace Incarnate: a reference to grace coming in the person of Jesus Christ. “He has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” That is, He had made salvation available to all men.”

Now watch verse 12. It focuses on us. “instructing....” this grace that has come in Christ teaches us; that is us who’ve come to embrace that grace, who’ve come to enjoy that grace. That grace “instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.” And it instructs us “to live sensibly, righteously, and godly ... looking....” Verse 13. In other words, the grace of God, brought to us in Christ, instructs us, or teaches us, to live, “looking”. “Looking” is a verbal. It is not a main verb. It’s modifying, rather, the main verb. In this case, an infinitive. We have been instructed to live, “looking”.

Is that how you live? Is that really? Think for a moment. Ask yourself this question. “Do you really live, day in and day out as a Christian, “looking” for the return of Jesus Christ? He goes on to say, “looking for what?” “Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of

our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” That’s what grace teaches us to do, to live here in this present age, “looking”. I have to tell you. I hate to admit it to you. As I searched my own heart this week, I cannot honestly say before the Lord that I live my life consistently, “looking”.

You see, in our culture, in the Christian culture, here, heaven is not a popular topic. Why is that? You know, several weeks ago, Seth chose heaven as a theme for our music on a Sunday morning. And he and I lamented that there are practically no songs about heaven being written today. Why is that? Why don’t we have songs about the second coming of Christ and about His return and about heaven? Why don’t we long for heaven like Paul did? Well, I think one of the reasons is the difficulties of this life make believers long for heaven: and we frankly have it pretty good, here! “I want Christ to come back, but I want to be married first.” “I want Christ to come back, but I want to have children first.” “I want Christ to come back, but I want to see my grandkids first.” “I want Christ to come back, but…” You fill in the blank.

Life is good. Ellen Thompson wrote, “Life is too comfortable; and things too important for us to want to leave this world,” making it hard to sing with integrity,

“On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan’s fair and happy land
Where my possessions lie.”

We can’t sing that with our hearts. But let me tell you: when people are hurting, when they’ve lost a family member, when you hear that a child has terminal cancer, when a family has been destroyed by divorce, when a person ages, and their body begins to literally decay around them and fall apart, so that living is effort and trouble and work, Heaven and Christ’s return begins to have a new and a fresh luster. James says, “Be patient until Christ comes.” You see, suffering people long for the presence of Christ, their King.

Here’s the point. Listen carefully. Here’s the point James wants us to get. You and I, as we face injustice in this world, we are to find in the return of Christ an anchor for our souls in the midst of an unfair world. And to help us understand his point, James uses an illustration. Look back to James 5:7. “The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.” Now an agriculture society, like that of the first-century and James’ world, they would immediately understand this.

The land of Israel was dotted with farms and with tenant farmers. This would have been a relatively poor tenant farmer, the word used here. What does a farmer like that live for? ... the precious produce of the soil. In other words, the harvest. That's what he lives for. But if he wants to enjoy the harvest, he has to wait! He has to be patient. He waits, being patient about it, James says. He has to be patient. Before he can enjoy the produce, a lengthy process has to take place that includes even the right kinds of rain. Here it's called the early and late rains. Again, a person from Palestine, the land of Palestine, which all of these people were. They'd originally been in James' church in Jerusalem. Now they're scattered because of the persecution. They would have understood this.

But let me give you a very brief geography lesson, so you understand this land. In Israel, there is little to no rain, from June through September. Then, beginning in late October and early November, they get what they call the early rains, usually in a series of dramatic thunderstorms, downpours. And these wet the soil, so that the farmer can come and plow that hard, what was hard, ground. Now it's been wet, and it's pliable. It's open to the plow, and he can prepare the soil, and he can sow the seed. That's the early rains.

Over the next couple of months, after he sows, between December and February, the land of Israel gets 75 per cent of their annual rainfall. And then in late April and May, they get what are called the late rains. These are not usually terrible thunderstorms, but rather light showers, that enable the crops, the grain, for example, to mature to its fullest extent and be ready for harvest. You see, both the early and the late rains were crucial to a good harvest. And when they came, it was because of the faithfulness of God. It was in evidence of His faithfulness. The people were to pray for the early and the late rains, so they could have a good harvest.

James' point in the illustration is that reaping a harvest requires time and patience. It started with the early rains in October, and you didn't see any harvest until the next summer. That's exactly the perspective we need when we're treated unfairly. Just be patient!

But I think James chose the picture of a farmer and a harvest for a very particular reason. You see, the image of a harvest is a familiar Jewish picture of judgment, of God's judgment. Turn to Joel, the prophet Joel, for a moment. In Joel 3, you have here the description of Armageddon, as Joel prophesies the coming Day of the Lord. And in Joel 3:13, well, back up to verse 12:

Let the nations be aroused
And come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat,
For there I will sit to judge
All the surrounding nations. [The nations will gather. "There,"

God says, “It’s like a courtroom.”] [And verse 13] Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley ... [awaiting God’s verdict.] For the day of the LORD is near in the Valley ... [where they await God’s verdict. Here judgment, God’s judgment is described as a harvest.]

And when you come to the New Testament, you see the same image. In the ministry of John the Baptist, in Matthew 3:12, Jesus is said to have “His winnowing fork ... in His hand ... He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; ... He will gather His wheat [in] ... the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

So, this image of a harvest is an image of coming judgment. And when you understand that, it makes James’ illustration much richer. James is saying, “Listen! Be patient. Judgment day is coming when all will be set right!” Notice back in James 5:8, that James applies the illustration to us. He says, “You too be patient....” [in the same way that the farmer waits for the harvest, you wait for the coming of Lord and the judgment that He will bring.]

Folks, Listen! Don’t expect justice in this world. It’s not going to happen. We live in a world known for injustice. “But Jesus Christ will come,” James says. And when He comes, He will make everything right. There will be justice.

This is exactly how Paul taught the Thessalonians to think. Turn back to 2 Thessalonians 1, 2 Thessalonians 1:4, he says, “... we speak proudly of you among the churches ... for your perseverance and [your] faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions, which you endure[d]. He says, [Listen! You’re treated unjustly. You live in the midst of injustice.] He said, “But (verse 6) there’s coming a day when

“God ... [is going] to repay with affliction those who afflict you and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted....”

And to us, as well. He says, “Listen! Understand! You’re not gettin’ justice here. But justice is coming. When? Verse 7,

... when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those

who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.” [It’s coming! Be patient until the coming of the Lord!]

My sister, Sarah, one of my nine siblings, my next oldest sibling (I’m the youngest of ten). My next oldest sibling is four years older than I. Her name is Sarah. She was always the baby of the family in the true sense of the word. She was always spoiled as the baby. And she milked it for all it was worth, let me tell you. I, of course, having a sinful little heart, resented her status as the sort of resident Hatshepsut, you know, Queen of Egypt. And I can remember times, and I know this is going to shock you. But I can remember times when, in order to get even, I would do things intentionally, to get at her.

Now, kids, let me tell you, don’t do this. But I learned early on that my sister, Sarah, and she still is, by the way germophobic. And so, occasionally, I would wait while we were all gathered around the table. And this worked especially well when the food wasn’t served family style, as it usually was. But occasionally my mom would actually put the food on the individual plates, and put them in front of us. So, I would wait until my dad would say thanks for the meal. And then I would gently kick my sister under the table, to get her attention. And when she looked, I would very ceremoniously, and with all the pomp I could muster, blow across the table on her food. (laughter). It was perfect, because she couldn’t say anything, or she’d’ a been looking during prayer, which was an offense in my house.

Well occasionally, those were, those were sort of the minor occurrences. But occasionally, during the day, while dad was away at work, I would really cross the line. And I’m not going to give you any of those ideas. But when that happened, I still remember to this day, that her greatest threat to me was this: When that happened, she would say, “You just wait until Dad gets home!” Now the clear implication of that statement was: “I’ve been wronged; and when Dad gets home, he is going to make it right.”

Folks, that’s exactly how the Bible urges us to think about the return of Jesus Christ. When we’re wronged, when we are treated unjustly, when we suffer injustice in this world, either as the overflow of the fallenness of the people around us, or persecution for our faith, either way, there’s coming a day when Dad comes home. And it’ll all, will be made right. Just you wait!

Let’s pray together.

Father, we confess to You that we are so tied to this world that it's hard for us to anticipate and think of heaven, and of our Lord's return. Lord, we do, but we confess to You that it's not, as it was for the first-century church, the pre-occupation of our thoughts. Lord, I pray that You would give us a renewed expectation and anticipation of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to live "looking" for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Father, I pray that while we anticipate His coming, that we would be patient, that we would be long-suffering, just as You are toward those who reek injustice upon us. Help us to have a gracious forgiving spirit. Help us, even as our Lord, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; but kept on entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. Lord, help us to live like that.

And Father, I pray as well, for the person here this morning who is not ready for the coming of the Lord. I pray, that even today, You would bring them to that awareness, to that realization. By a manifestation of Your grace, open their eyes to see the danger that lies before them. And may this be the day that You draw them to Yourself in faith and repentance in Christ.

We pray all of this for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray with John, "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus." Amen.

