

**James**  
**When Life's Not Fair (Part 2)**  
**James 5:7-12**  
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*Tom Pennington, Pastor*  
*Countryside Bible Church*

Well, it's our privilege to return this morning to James 5, and to our study of the reality that life, sometimes, just is not fair. There's so many examples and illustrations of that. In fact, I had someone come up to me afterwards last week and say, "You know, there's really nothing that we've studied that's more imminently practical than this, because every one of us constantly throughout our lives face injustice." I was reminded of one example of it this week.

It was in the late 1700s, upon his graduation from Cambridge, that Charles Simeon was appointed as pastor of the Holy Trinity Church there at Cambridge. It was, in one sense, his dream job, what he had hoped would come about. But it became, for many years, to him, a nightmare. Charles Simeon was a faithful man. He was a man who studied the Scriptures and who carefully taught his congregation all that he learned from the Scripture. But that's not what his congregation wanted. And in fact, they didn't want him! So, they boycotted the services. In a historic church like Holy Trinity Church, there were pews that had been purchased by members (affluent) members of the church. Those members not only boycotted the church, but they locked their pews so that no one else could sit there, either. Simeon, at his own expense, placed benches and chairs up and across the isles, filling every available spot that wasn't locked away. The wardens of the church threw those benches into the courtyard.

They also hired someone else to teach on Sunday evenings. They couldn't get rid of Charles Simeon. So, what they decided to do, instead, was to hire someone else who would come in, in the evening and preach. And they did that for 12 years of Charles Simeon's pastorate there. When he tried to teach his own later Sunday evening gathering, on several occasions, they locked the doors, so that no one could come in. And he finally had to give that up. Unregenerate university students there at Cambridge shouted obscenities at Simeon. They pelted him on a number of occasions with rotten eggs. On one occasion, they even tried to beat him.

The faculty ostracized this man who had an evangelical view of Scripture. They ostracized him and slandered him. This was in the late 1700s; and Simeon endured this pastorate for 54 years! It was only, really, about the last 15 of those 54 years that the circumstances began to change

dramatically. And he ended his ministry after 54 years as a loved and beloved pastor in that church. But for so many years, it just wasn't fair! Here's a faithful man trying to serve Christ, treated like that. You see, life in a fallen world is filled with various kinds of injustice. We all experience that reality every day. But without question, the hardest form of injustice comes, as it did to Charles Simeon, in the form of undeserved, unwarranted attacks from others.

That is exactly what James' first-century readers were experiencing. If you were to read the first six verses, as we have gone through them in great detail, (for those of you who are visiting with us), if you read those first six verses, you discover exactly the circumstances in which these people lived. The rich and powerful in their communities were using their influence and the local courts to abuse these poor Christians, to withhold their pay, and ultimately to destroy their very lives. In verses 1 - 6, James addresses those wicked, rich, unbelieving people who are using their power and influence to destroy these Christian people. And then in verses 7 - 12 of chapter 5, James turns, you'll notice in verse 7 "to the brethren", to Christians. And he explains to them how they should respond to that kind of injustice. In verse 7 he writes:

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.

You'll notice that verse seven begins with the word, "therefore." James is saying "In light of the sinful attacks that are being leveled against you by the influential and rich of your communities, those who are wicked, here's how I want you to respond. And James here gives five specific commands that told these first-century Christians exactly how to respond when like is just not fair.

Now, folks, our circumstances are different. The injustices that we face bear little to no resemblance to the first-century readers of this letter. But our responses should be absolutely the same. James, here in these verses, gives us five responses to the injustices of life: five Godly responses when life just isn't fair.

We examined the first one last week. It's found in verse 7 and the first part of verse 8. "Be patient until the Lord's coming." In the same way that the farmer waits for the harvest, we are to wait for the coming of the Lord and the judgment that He will bring. The end of the story hasn't been written. And you and I are to live with injustice, anticipating that in this life, we will face injustice. But when Jesus comes, He will right every wrong. And as the prophet says, "Justice will flow down like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." We are to be patient until the Lord's coming. Justice will be done; but it'll only be done when He comes.

There's a second biblical response that I want us again to look at this morning. We'll finish this passage, Lord willing, this morning. But there's a second biblical response when life's just not fair. Not only are we to be patient until the Lord's coming, but secondly, we're to be strong in our resolve. Be strong in our resolve. Notice the second half of verse 8. "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." Now, I have to be honest with you, and I'm sure you feel to some degree the same way. When you first read that, this is one of those commands in Scripture, that on the face of it just doesn't appear very helpful. I mean, you're being unfairly treated, you're looking for sympathy, you're looking for solution, and James says, "Strengthen your heart."

Fortunately, there's another place where this word "strengthen" is used in the New Testament that really gives us a glimpse of just how profound this response really is. Turn back with me to Luke for a moment, Luke 9. You'll see this word in a different context. Luke 9:51, Luke writes: "When the days were approaching for Jesus' ascension," [literally for His "taking up". When Jesus saw that his earthly ministry was reaching its climax and fulfillment at the cross with His death, His resurrection and His ascension when He saw what was coming, notice verse 51, "He was determined to go to Jerusalem...."

That word, "determined" is the same Greek word translated "strengthen", back in James 5. Some translations even describe this as: "He set His face like flint." And the reason they translate it that way is: if you trace this Greek word back in the Old Testament, you find, in the Old Testament this word often translates a Hebrew expression of "set your face", determined. You picture someone steeling their face. And that's a picture of determination that's in their

heart to do whatever it is they've determined to do. Jesus determined to go to Jerusalem. He strengthened His heart to go to Jerusalem.

John Blanchard writes, "Do you see the picture? Jesus knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem. He knew the pressures that were mounting, and that his enemies were growing in number and ferocity. He knew that ahead lay desertion, trials, blood, sweat, tears, torture, and agonizing death.

But He knew something else. He knew that beyond all these lay the resurrection, the ascension and eternal glory. So, He resolutely set out, refusing to yield to the pressure around Him." That's exactly the picture behind this word and James' command to us, back in James 5. You and I are to set our face. We are to determine, knowing that in this life we will face injustice. We are to have a relentless, unwavering grip on the faith and on obedience, even in the midst of trials and persecution and temptation. We are to be determined. We are to have a steel resolve to do what's right, knowing that we will face injustice in this life. Ultimately, only God can produce that kind of spiritual strength and determination.

Back in Romans 16, the apostle; Paul completes his letter to the dear church in verse 25, saying, "Now to Him who is able to 'strengthen', literally." [It's the same Greek word.] "Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel." God's the one who strengthens our hearts like that, who enables us to resolve, to determine to live for Him in spite of what comes.

Peter makes the same point in 1 Peter 5:10. As he finishes his first letter, he says: "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, will Himself, perfect, confirm..." There's the same Greek word: "confirm", or "strengthen" you. God's the one who does it.

But God can use other people to accomplish this in us. There's a very interesting passage in Luke 22 where Jesus predicts Peter's denial. And in Luke 22:32 He says,

"... Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; [Peter.] but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again [when you've repented], strengthen your brothers." [So, ultimately, God is the only One that can do it; but He uses people to accomplish this.]

In Acts 18:23, we read that Paul, rather, on his third missionary journey went back to the churches that he had planted. And we're told he "strengthened" the brethren who were part of

those churches. So, God does it. But He uses others. And here in James 5, we're told to do it. "Strengthen your hearts." That immediately raises the question, "How?" How can you and I generate that kind of spiritual fortitude, that kind of strength and resolve and determination in our hearts that will allow us to respond and to hold on in the faith and even in obedience in the faith, in the face of injustice. How does that happen? How can we do that?

Well, the answer is in 2 Peter 1. Turn there for a moment, 2 Peter 1. Here's how to strengthen your heart 2 Peter 1:12: "Therefore," Peter says, "I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established." There's our same Greek word. "You have been strengthened in the truth, which is present with you." Here is how we strengthen our hearts. Here is how God ultimately strengthens us. Here's how He uses other people. And here's how we strengthen our own hearts. Ultimately, our spiritual stamina, our spiritual strength, our spiritual resolve and determination to keep on faithfully living for Christ comes through the truth. As you and I understand the truth of God, as we rehearse these truths about God over and over and over again, we gain spiritual muscle. We gain resolve and determination to live for Christ. We strengthen our hearts by means of the truth.

That's the command: Be strong in your resolve. Now turn back to James 5. Notice the impetus, the motivation that we're given here by James. You'll notice that the impetus "to be patient," in verse 7, was the reality of Christ's return. He's coming! But in verse 8, James uses the imminence of Christ's return. "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." The arrival of the Lord is near. Literally, the "parousia," the "arrival of the Lord has come near". Now as James wrote what is probably the first book in our New Testament, sometime in the mid 40's AD, he argues here that the return of Christ had come near, then. It's been 2,000 years. And Jesus still hasn't returned. So, how could James say that the return of the Lord has come near in the mid 40's AD?

Well, Peter answers this question. Turn to 2 Peter 3. Second Peter 3:3. He says,

Know this, first of all, that in the last days, mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

I thought He was coming back! When's it going to happen? Hasn't happened yet! S' been a long time! James said it was near!" And the argument they use, (notice in verse 4), is an argument called uniformitarianism. That is, basically, they say, "Look, God has never

intervened in human history before. What makes you think He's going to do it now?" Notice what they say in verse 4.

"For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." [Everything's always the same! God's never interjected Himself into human history; so, what makes you think He's ever going to do it?"] Verse 5, "... when they maintained this, it escapes their notice...."

[They forget two great divine interventions: creation and the flood.] Notice verse 5: "It escapes their notice that by the word of God, *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water." [Oh, yes, God has intervened in human history. He started it. He created it. He made this earth. But they've also forgotten that He destroyed it.] Verse 6, "through which [that is, water ...] through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water." They forget that God has intervened with cataclysmic, all-consuming destruction, in a world-wide flood. Verse 7, "but, by His Word, the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the Day of Judgment and the destruction on ungodly men."

You know what Peter's saying? He's saying, "Listen, the doctrine of uniformitarianism is wrong. In reality, God has interjected Himself into the world; and He's going to do it again." Yeah, your life may look like it just goes on and everything's the same. But there is a day coming when the world as we know it will be destroyed by God. Say, "When's it going to happen?" Verse 8,

"But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years; and a thousand years like one day." [Time is totally different to God. He lives outside of it.] It says in verse 9, "The Lord is not slow about His promises, as some count slowness. But ... [He's] patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

Listen, the reason the Lord doesn't intervene in our world with all of its wickedness, with all of its sin, is not because He's lost touch. It's not because He's weak and can't do it. It's because He's patient. And He's waiting for those whom He has loved and set His love upon, to come to repentance. But in the end, He's coming! He's coming.

You see when James says, that “The ... [return] of the Lord ... [has come] near,” you have to understand that “near” in time is relative to the person. That’s what Peter’s saying here in 2 Peter 3:8. Time is different to God than it is to us. Let me give you a little example.

I was thinking this last week about our girls. My wife and I were away, celebrating our anniversary. And we were talking about our girls and how they’re growing up. For me, as a parent, having lived more years than they have, their becoming adults seems very near. I find myself, you know, kind of humming “Sunrise, Sunset,” that little sentimental song about how quickly the years fly past, and how they grow, and before you know it, they’re married and life just keeps marching on. So, to me, their becoming adults is very near. But to them, “very near” means lunch; or it means next week; or it means Christmas. That’s very near. It’s all a matter of perspective. To God the Father, Christ’s coming has come near. And we are to hold on relentlessly to the faith as we wait. We are to set our faces with steely determination.

If you’ve ever had surgery, you understand what’s being commanded of us here. You know all about this resolve and determination. As you’re told you need surgery, you contemplate it, and you realize, “O.K., this is going to be unpleasant. There’s going to be pain. There’s going to be recovery time. But it’s important. So, you face it with resolve and determination, anticipating what it will accomplish. You just set your face to do it. That’s exactly what James is saying. That’s how we’re to face injustice and trouble in this life. We are to be determined, to be strong in our resolve, to continue being true to Christ, even in the face of injustice.

When life isn’t fair, we must respond, number one by being patient for the justice that Christ will bring when He comes. And secondly, we must strengthen our spiritual resolve.

A third important response to injustice is found in verse 9. Be gracious toward one another. Be gracious toward one another. “Do not complain, brethren, against one another.” The word “complain,” here, means to groan, or to sigh. It primarily denotes an inner feeling of criticism, often that isn’t even spoken. It’s the blame game inside the heart. And we’re to refrain from doing this, notice, against one another. Clearly the reference here is to each other in the church, to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now with a cursory reading of this passage, it’s easy to wonder why James inserts this verse here. But if you’ll stop to think for a moment, you’ll come to full grips with just how well it fits. Think for a moment of how stress of any kind affects our closest relationships. We are prone,

when we are in the pressure cooker, to lash out at those nearby. Listen to Douglass Moo, great commentator on the book of James. He writes:

“Grumbling against those who are close to us is particularly likely to occur when we are under pressure, or facing difficult circumstances. We vent the pressure from a stressful work environment, or from ill health, on our close friends and family. So, it’d be quite natural if James’ readers, under the pressure of poverty and persecution, would turn their frustrations on one another.”

You see, when our lives are filled with trouble and difficulty, it’s a tragic reality that we tend to lash out at the people we love most. Realize, that when life isn’t fair, you will have that tendency. You’ll have a tendency to blame the people in your heart. You’ll have the tendency to blame the people around you that you love the most. Be aware of that reality, and guard yourself from it. Why?

Well, he gives us two reasons here. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, first of all, because God’s judgment is impartial; so that you, yourselves, may not be judged.

Secondly, God’s judgment is imminent. “Behold the judge is standing right at the door.” This is a powerful image that is painted here. Literally, the Greek text says: “Behold the judge has stood before the doors.” It is a use of the perfect in grammar, to predict something that’s so certain, it’s as if it’s already happened. We would translate it like this in English: “Behold the judge is absolutely standing before the doors. [Plural in the Greek texts: the word door.] It’s a powerful picture. It pictures Christ, standing on the other side of eternity, just about to throw the doors open and enter His judgment hall. It conjures up the picture out of our American courtrooms where the bailiff is waiting for the judge to enter through the side door. And as soon as the judge throws open the door, he says, “All rise.” That’s the picture behind this expression. The Judge is standing at the doors, ready to throw them open and come into His judgment hall. This is the same image Peter uses, as he writes to suffering Christians. In 1 Peter 4:4, he says:

“[You know what, the people you used to run with] ... are surprised that you don’t run with *them* to the same excess[es] of ... [anticipation], and they malign *you*; [They attack you with hateful speech.] but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.



There, Christ is pictured as eager. It's as if He's standing at the door, just waiting for his Father to say, "It's time," and He'll throw the doors open. And He'll make it right. When life's not fair, be patient until the Lord's coming. Be strong in your resolve.

Thirdly, be gracious with one another.

Now our fourth response to injustice should be this: Be encouraged through the example of others. Be encouraged through the example of others. We find this in verses 10 and 11. Notice the fourth command, or imperative, that occurs in this passage. It's in verse 10: "... brethren, [take as an example] of suffering and patience...."

By the way, here, the word "patience" is a different word. And it's important that you understand this. It's a word which is one of my favorite New Testament words. It literally means "to remain under." And the picture, the best picture of this word is weight lifting. If you've ever watched Olympic sports, you know as they, as those great big men lift those weights, they have to jerk them over their head and hold them for a certain period of time. As they hold them, they are [this Greek word] "remaining under" that weight. That's endurance. They're remaining under. And here we're told that there are those whom we should carefully think about and consider as examples or patterns of those who suffered, but who, as they suffered, "remained under." They endured.

And here James gives us two examples. First of all, in verse 10, he says: "Take [notice, or consider] the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord." You know, most of the Old Testament prophets faced suffering. Think of Jeremiah, for a moment. If you haven't read Jeremiah's prophecy, you ought to. Here is a faithful man, true to the Lord, did what he was told, labored in the worst of circumstances. And what did he get for it? Jeremiah was thrown in an empty well, and left to sink down in the mud and to die. In fact, it hadn't been for a Cushite and thirty of his men, who came and rescued Jeremiah, he would've died, sinking in that muddy pit.

But now, almost 3,000 years later, how do we think about Jeremiah and his suffering? Do we pity him? Do we think that he was enduring God's judgment and God's frown? No, absolutely not! Notice verse 11: "We count those blessed who endured." We think of them as occupying a special place of honor and privilege, forever enjoying the smile of God. Is that how you think of yourself, when you suffer injustice? You should. That's what James is saying. They were an

example of suffering and enduring. You follow that example; and you, too, can one day say that you are blessed and have a place of privilege with God. “Consider the prophets.”

Notice the second example of suffering and endurance. It’s in verse 11. It’s Job. “You have heard of the endurance of Job.” It’s an interesting example, isn’t it? We wouldn’t say Job was necessarily patient. But we would say, “He endured.” As one commentator says, “Job’s is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission, Job’s troubled and question and sometime even defied. But the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart.” He endured. You see in Job 1:20, where after everything he had was destroyed, we read,

... Job arose ... tore his robe ... shaved his head ... fell to the ground, and worshiped. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, ... naked I shall return there. The LORD gave, and LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.” Through all this, Job did not sin, nor did he blame God.

In Job 13:15 we read, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless, I will argue my ways before Him.” Job endured. Notice James adds, back in James 5. He says, “... [He] endured. ... and [you] have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings...” Literally, “You have seen the end of the Lord.” It means, “You’ve read the end of the story.” You’ve seen what God had in mind. Now when I say that, when I say to you, you’ve read the end of Job’s story, what comes into your mind? You think of Job 42. Turn there for a moment. Job 42: You think of God’s physical, material prosperity. Verse 10 of Job 42,

The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold. ... his brothers and his sisters ... [come back]. [They each give ’im a gift.] Verse 12: “The Lord blessed the latter *days* of Job more than his beginning; ... he had 14,000 sheep ... 6,000 camels ... 1,000 yoke of oxen, and a 1,000 female donkeys, and he had seven sons and three daughters. [So, now he’s, now has two sets of children: one in heaven and one here on earth. After this (verse 16),]

Job lived 140 years, saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations. And he died an old man, and full of days.”

Is that really the end of Job’s story that James wants us to see? No. That’s not the point. That’s not the end of every story. Sometimes they don’t all live happily ever after. The real outcome of

the Lord's dealings with Job isn't about his amazing new wealth. It's about his amazing new perspective of God. It's about the greatness of his God.

Look at the end of James 5:11. You've seen the end of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. Now turn back to Job 42. Let me show you what the real end of the story is. It's found in Job 42:1.

... Job answered the LORD and said, "I know that You can do all things, that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted." [I now understand, God, that you're in charge, and that you do what's right, and I can trust you. I may not understand. Job never understood. But he says, "I can trust you." That's what he is saying.] 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' [I realize that You know what You're doing!] "... [And] I ... declared ... [what] I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I ... [don't] know." 'Hear now, and I will speak; I will ask You and You instruct me.'" [In other words, "God, You teach me. I've nothing to teach You.] "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eyes see You...."

Now, folks, I want you to notice that when Job says this, his circumstances have not changed. He still has nothing. He still has a grumbling, complaining wife. He still is sitting in ashes, scraping the sores on his body with pieces of broken pottery. So, what does he have? He has a new humility. And he has a new appreciation of who God is. That was the end of God's dealings with Job. And this is what we learn in the middle of our suffering and of life's injustices, as well. We learn about God. We learn that He's in charge. We learn that He knows what He's doing. We learn that He's merciful, and that He's full of compassion, that He can be trusted.

Know what James is saying? You and I are to gain courage from the stories of men like Job and like Jeremiah, and like Charles Simeon. Read the biblical stories. See the end of the stories: how God made Himself known; how He put Himself on display with these who endured suffering and injustice. And gain courage from it to face your own injustices. Read Christian biographies: the story of the great men of the church who suffered incredible injustice, incredible difficulty in trial, and yet, stayed true to God. And let your own heart have courage built into it by their stories. That's what James is saying. God's compassion and His mercy and His faithfulness to others infuses us with fresh courage and endurance, as we follow their example of suffering and endurance.

Well, there's one more response to life's injustices in this passage. It's found in verse 12 of James 5: "Beware of rash vows to God. Beware of rash vows to God. 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 there is a lot of discussion about how this verse fits into the context of James 5. There are two primary options you can take. One is that it stands completely alone. In other words, that it has no relationship to what goes before it and it has no relationship to what comes after it. It is simply one "stand-alone thought" that James realizes toward the end of his letter, he wants to come back to and deal with the tongue one more time. If this is his intention, then verse 12 is a kind of warning, identical to our Lord's in the Sermon on the Mount. Turn back to Matthew 5. Essentially James would be saying exactly what Christ is saying in Matthew 5:33.

"Again you've heard that the ancients were told, YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD. But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, nor by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

Now Jesus was dealing with a problem in the culture. Like in our culture, lying was pandemic. And so, people, to express their integrity, and to try to drive home that they are, in fact, telling the truth, would attach to their statement some kind of oath. And it became this sort of sophisticated system, because here's the way they thought. If you swore by God, then you were really obligated to keep it, because then God was going to deal with you if you messed around with Him. But if you swore by something else, then, there was a loophole there. And you could get out of it in certain circumstances, and there was a lot of wiggle room if you swore an oath by something else. And so, it really came to mean nothing. That's what Jesus is correcting here.

So, if this is what James means, James would simply be warning us not to use oaths designed to give us loopholes, and that are, in and of themselves, patently dishonest. Just speak the truth. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no. That may be all that James intends to say. (By the way, neither Jesus nor James are forbidding us from taking oaths, for example, when we are in a courtroom.) Jesus does that, Himself, before Pilate. Also, that has been true throughout the

history of the church. God, Himself, takes oaths. Hebrews 6 records God taking an oath on His own Word. So, it's not that that kind of an oath is wrong. He's forbidding the kind of oath that's made simply to press home your own word in daily conversation, and perhaps even to give you some room to wiggle out of, if you should so choose.

I don't think that's what James intends. I personally believe that the second option is more likely. And that is, that verse 12 is not simply a stand-alone verse, thrown in the middle of a chapter, with no connection to what comes before or after. I think verse 12 is connected to the verses that immediately come before it. So, in this case, James is warning us about a common sinful response to life's injustices. Now, if I'm right, and this is the right interpretation, then there are two possibilities.

He could be saying, "Make sure that when you're in an unjust situation, that you speak the truth with people around you, perhaps even those abusing you. Don't make commitments you don't intend to keep, and then justify it by some elaborate scheme."

But I think more likely, this is what James means: that verse 12 isn't talking about how we respond to people, at all, but how we respond to God. I'm convinced that this is the option that James has in mind here. You see, when you and I find ourselves in the midst of great difficulty, we are tempted to respond, how? By bargaining with God. Of course the most famous example from all of church history is a young unregenerate lawyer, by the name of Martin Luther, who gets caught in this terrible thunderstorm. And when he's almost struck by lightning, and he's knocked off his horse, he falls down and makes a bargain with God, that if God will spare his life, then he'll become a monk, which he does.

But it is extremely common for all of us, when we find ourselves in tight circumstances, to bargain and to barter with God. And in some cases, even to do so somewhat lightly, with our fingers crossed behind our back, not really even intending to keep our word, but hoping that God doesn't notice. Now I really think this is what James intends.

George Stulac, in a commentary, paraphrases this passage this way: "Above all, don't fall into swearing, as if you could manipulate God by your oaths. Instead, speak honestly and directly." I think James is saying the same thing Solomon said back in Ecclesiastes 5. Turn back there with me. Ecclesiastes 5:1. Solomon says,

“[I want you to] guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; ... Don’t be hasty ... [in what you say,” (verse 2).]

Notice verse 4: He gets to the heart of the issue. “When you make a vow to God” [Now a vow was something that was allowed and was part of the Old Testament law. It’s found on both New Numbers and Deuteronomy. It was simply a voluntary promise to God. It could be a promise made in hopes of a blessing from God. Or it could be a promise made in gratitude for a blessing from God. But either way, if you make a vow, Solomon says, “Don’t delay and don’t evade.” Notice verse 4.]

“When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He *takes* no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!” [You see, there’s a real danger of bribery when we find ourselves in distress.] “It is better,” verse 5,” that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger *of God* [probably a reference to the priest. Don’t say to the priest, “Aw,] ... it was a mistake. [You know I really I was ... it was a bad time and I didn’t really mean it. That isn’t what I should’ve said it was a mistake.” Why? The end of verse 6, “... Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?” [In other words, God doesn’t take it lightly when we take Him lightly.]

The solution’s found in verse 7: “Fear God.” I think this is exactly the point James is making in James 5:12. “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.” Don’t make bargains with God. And for goodness sake, don’t make bargains with God you don’t even intend to keep. Why? The end of verse twelve: “so that you may not fall under judgment.” As I’ve said before, God doesn’t take it lightly when we take Him lightly. Make sure that you’re being aware of the problem of rash vows to God in the time of injustice.

Now I want you before you pack up, I want you to stay with me just for a moment because I want to apply this to where we are. I want you to think, right now, of some recent occasion, or perhaps current occasion, when you found yourself thinking and saying, “It’s just not fair! It’s not just! It’s not right!” How did you respond? Or how are you responding? Are you responding in anger toward God? “God, how could you let this happen to me?” Are you responding in bitterness toward the person that lies behind the injustice? Maybe an employer?

Maybe a friend? Family member? Are you responding with revenge? You just decide, “Look, I’m going to get even! They deserve what’s com’n!”

Those are sinful responses. How should you respond? How should you be responding? How should you have responded to that last situation? James tells us here. First of all, you should be patient until the Lord’s coming. You will face problems and injustice in this life and it will continue your whole life. Wait for justice, for the coming of Christ.

Secondly, you should be strong in your resolve. You should have a steeled will, resolve to live for Christ, regardless of the injustice that comes.

You should be gracious toward those around you, because there’s a real temptation and tendency we have, to strike out at those we love when we find ourselves in these difficult circumstances.

Number four: we should be encouraged by the example of others. Look at those in the Scripture and those through church history who have faced suffering, and they have endured it. They have stayed under it. They’ve been an honor to Christ through it. And be encouraged. Have courage breathed into your own soul by their example. And beware, in the midst of injustice, of making rash vows to God.

You know, the key truth of this passage is that Christ is coming. And wait ’til He comes! I think when we fail to respond correctly to injustice, more often than not, it’s because we have forgotten that Christ is standing at the doors, ready to throw them open, and make everything right.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for this imminently practical passage that reminds us that Christ is coming, and we’re to live in light of that coming. We thank You that there’s a day coming when every wrong will be righted, when justice will roll like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. And Father, we look forward to that day.

But as we live here, in a fallen world, characterized by injustice; help us to respond like this, in a way that brings honor to Your great name and for the name of Your Son, who is coming.

Father, I pray, as well, for someone here this morning, who is not ready for Christ to come. They know that when He comes, He will, even as He promised, deal out retribution on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray, that today would be the day that You would open their eyes to their true condition, that You would give them a heart of repentance that longs to leave their sin, to turn from their sin to You. Lord, that You would give them faith as a gift where they would embrace Christ as Lord and Savior, the willingness to follow Him. Father, I pray that You would do all of this for their sakes; but even more important, for the sake of Your great name, as Savior.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.