

Patience in an Impatient World: A Reflection on James 5

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable to you, O Lord our strength and our salvation. **Amen.**

This evening, I would like to reflect briefly on our New Testament reading, James chapter 5. This epistle was written to a marginalised, persecuted, economically exploited, and vulnerable community of early Jewish Christians who were living under the pressure of wealthy landowners in the mid-1st century. In chapter 5 we see a pastoral and prophetic encouragement to stand firm in faith, despite suffering, injustice, and a temptation to abandon faith. While there are several insights we can learn from this chapter for our Christian life, I would like to focus on one insight: connections between wealth and patience.

First, James begins this chapter with a striking denunciation of the rich who hoard wealth, withhold wages, and oppress the righteous. The cries of the labourers, he says, have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. Behind this harsh warning lies a real-life situation: wealthy landowners enriching themselves quickly while labourers suffer.

And in response to this injustice, James does not call the church to revenge or retaliation. Instead, he calls them to something that sounds almost impossible: patience. “Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters,” James says, “until the coming of the Lord.” At first, this seems strange. Why patience in the face of injustice? Why not immediate action? But James gives an image that helps us understand: the agricultural farmer waiting for the precious fruit of the earth. The farmer cannot rush the seasons. The rain will come in its time, and the harvest will come in its time. James tells the church that living in this world often requires waiting for God’s timing rather than forcing our own.

He then points to Job, who, we know, endured unimaginable suffering yet remained steadfast. Job’s story reminds us that patience is not passive resignation. It is active trust: holding on to God when circumstances tempt us to let go.

However, James chapter 5 does more than tell the oppressed to be patient. It also exposes the spiritual dangers behind unjust wealth. While James asks the church to be patient in the context of wealthy landowners oppressing them, his writing on wealth can also help us understand that there are deeper connections between wealth and impatience. My second and third points are about this.

On one level, the connection between wealth and impatience is obvious. In everyday life we know that impatience can lead to foolish financial decisions – risky shortcuts,

reckless investments, and desperate attempts to get rich quickly. But reading James' warning about wealth can help us to see even deeper connections: that unjust wealth itself can be a product of impatience.

Because, to accumulate wealth unfairly is often to refuse to wait for God's provision. Instead of trusting God for daily bread, the wealth hoarders grasp for more and grasp for it right now. They rush to climb the economic ladder, even if it means cutting corners, withholding wages for their poor labourers, or pushing aside and destroying the righteous. The labourers were denied their wages not only because of the wealthy people's greed, but because the latter wanted to move upward faster. Impatience turns wealth into an idol of speed. It says: *I must have it now, and I must have more.*

But there is also another aspect in the connection between wealth and impatience, which is my final point: That is, wealth does not cure impatience – it often multiplies it. When people accumulate great wealth, they suddenly become aware of how short life is. They begin to worry about how much they can achieve as well as spend before their time runs out, which often lead to luxurious living at unimaginable levels, which James condemns in this chapter. Instead of slowing down, the wealthy speed up. Instead of resting in God's provision, they try to control everything – every investment, every project, every opportunity. Life becomes crowded with urgency.

And when life is crowded with urgency, patience disappears. There is little time to listen. Little time to care. Little time to notice the suffering neighbour or the struggling worker. The wealthy in James' warning have become so consumed with their pursuits that they have lost the patience required for justice and compassion.

That is why James calls the church to a different rhythm. "Strengthen your hearts," he says. Christian patience is not laziness or indifference. It is a refusal to live by the frantic pace of greed. It is the courage to trust that God's justice will come, even when human systems fail. It is the willingness to wait for God's blessing rather than seizing it through injustice.

The patient believer lives like the farmer – faithfully working, faithfully trusting, and faithfully waiting. And in a world obsessed with speed, such patience becomes a powerful witness. Because patience says something radical: that our hope does not rest in wealth, in control, or in climbing higher before time runs out.

Our hope rests in the coming of the Lord – and in the God who hears the cries of the oppressed, sees the injustice of the world, and promises that the final harvest will be just. Amen.