Be Patient Until the Lord’s Coming

James 4:13 -5:11

Keyverse 5:7

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

In the last lesson, we learned that if we live after greed and worldly pleasure, we will turn to be friends of the world and eventually become enemies of God. In today's passage, James warns against the greed for money and the boasting of wealth. And he admonishes God's children who were suffering under trials and oppression, to be patient by putting their hope in the Lord’s coming.

1. If it is the Lord’s will (4:13-5:6)

Let’s read verse 13. Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." James addresses Christian businessmen. They seem to have been talking about their business in the church congregation. At that time, many rich people run their trade businesses and made a lot of money. The business trip was very common to them. In their conversation, however, James points out and rebukes the critical problem that lies at the bottom of their heart.

Look at verse 14. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

First, you don’t know what will happen tomorrow. Backing to the 2019 Christmas day, we did never know that the Covid-19 would disrupt the whole world. Since then so many people have been suffering from losing loved ones and their jobs. Even now we do not know how it will end or go worse. We don't know what will happen tomorrow. We should acknowledge that God holds our future and humbly ask God in prayer for his protection and guidance day by day.

Secondly, we should know what human life is. In the Bible, Moses said, “Our days quickly pass, and we fly away” (Ps 90:10). King David said, “For my days vanish like smoke...My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass” (Ps 102:3a,11). James says, “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (14b). A mist is a vapor, a fine liquid droplet, which can disappear suddenly. When we realize that our life is a mist and God is the eternal One, it humbles us to consider seriously how we live in this world. If our life is a mist, our success, career, and wealth are less than that a mist. Knowing this, we will not seek or boast of anything that will vanish like a mist. Rather, we will seek which lasts forever: God’s kingdom with our faith, love, and hope. We will exalt and worship the Eternal God.

Let’s read verse 15. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." God is the sovereign Ruler over our life. God’s ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher and deeper than our thoughts. God’s word will not return to him empty, but will accomplish his desire and achieve his purpose(Isaiah 55). God has his plan and purpose for creation, and he always works for the good in all things (Ro 8:28). His will is good, pleasing, and perfect (Ro 12:2b). Therefore, we ought to seek to follow (Not my will) but His will in everything, including my study or work. If it is God's will, we will live tomorrow. If it is God's will, we will do this. If it is God’s will, we will give up that. That is why we pray: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus taught us “Seek first his kingdom and His righteousness". Then God always guides us in the best way for his glory and our good. So we should always keep in mind and confess the words, “If it is the Lord’s will.”

Look at verse 16. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. The root cause of their problem is boasting. Boasting is the expression of self-centeredness and self-glory seeking. When I was first invited to UBF church, what surprised me was this: Whenever receiving compliments from anyone, the faith seniors reflexively said this. “It is by the grace of God.” Having good grades, receiving a scholarship, playing Ping-Pong well, cleaning well, or whatever, we all confess that it is by God's grace. All members only boasted of the work of the Lord and spoke of God's grace. As we all know Apostle Paul had much to boast about. He had many fruits in the Lord as well as his career and educational background. But he regarded everything as garbage to gain Christ Jesus. If he had anything to boast about, he boasted of the suffering and persecution he endured for the sake of the Lord. And he said that “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”(2 Cor10:17)

Look at verse 17. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. James said that all such boasting is evil. Boasting is not an expression of love for God and our brothers and sisters. So if we know that we ought to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, love brothers and sisters as ourselves, we must do it.; otherwise, we sin.

Third, you rich people! Weep and wail. Let's read 5:1. Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Here, James directs rich oppressors to weep and wail because misery is coming upon them. In Matthew 19, Jesus said that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It is misery. They have to weep and wail in repentance.

Let's look at verses 2-3. “Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days”(3b). Their wealth will be vanishing before their eyes. Since they did not use their wealth to serve God and needy people, but only for their pleasure, they will face God’s terrible judgment. Their flesh will be eaten by the fire of hell (Rev 21:8).

Look at verse 4. The labourers and their families depended on their daily wages to survive. Their cries reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. Look at verse 5. Though they had far more than what they needed, they never shared with anyone. Instead, they indulged in luxury and pleasure-seeking. Look at verse 6. In truth, they were murdered by the rich.

The Bible says that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil(1Ti 6:10). We may think that we can serve God and money. God 90% and money 10%. But Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” The world now is driven by money. The power of money gets stronger. Over time, people will love themselves and love money. We should serve only God 100%.

1. Be patient and stand firm (5:7-11)

Now James turns his attention to Christian brothers and sisters who were suffering under trials and oppression. In this part, the words 'patient' or 'persevere' are repeated six times. In chapter 1, his first message was: consider many kinds of trials pure joy because the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete. Paradoxically, our life is like a mist that soon disappears, but we feel our hardship so heavy and long-lasting. Why don't the trials and hardship fade away like a mist? King David cried out, 'How long, Lord? How long?' God teaches his people and his servants *patience* because patience in the Lord forms godly character; and character produces heavenly hope(Ro5:4). Another meaning of patience for God's children is *waiting*. Patience is waiting for the Lord. To endure today means to wait for the Lord today. How difficult it will be for virgin brides to wait for the bridegroom who is being late at night. How painful it is to be patient while experiencing harsh treatment in a frustrating situation, tempting us to give up and live in fatalism without any hope. But James exhorts us, “Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming”. Wait for Him day after day, moment by moment. We need to think beyond the present moment to an entire lifetime and even into eternity.

Then when is the Lord coming? We don’t know when the Lord will come. The world scoffs at the Lord’s coming. Even sadly many Christians fall asleep in the world in saying that ‘not today Lord! I am not ready’. Jesus promised that he would come again many times. Heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will never pass away(Mk 10:31). When the Lord comes in power and great glory, he will bring justice. He will reward those who keep their faith; at the same time, he will judge those who do evil. This is our hope. When we have this hope, we can be patient until the Lord's coming. We can wait for him patiently. James gives three pictures of patience.

First of all, be patient like a farmer. Verse 7b says, “See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.” Weather is the most important factor in farming. But it is beyond human control. While helping my father farm, I have seen the powerlessness of humans in front of the power of nature. The wind blew away all the greenhouses several times and the flood swept away everything. The farmers depend on sun and rain, neither too much nor too little. As the early and late rains fall on the soil, the crops ripe in the warm sunlight. Farmers wait patiently for the harvesting time, trusting God and working hard day after day. While we are waiting for God to fulfill his promise, we should keep on doing what we know to do-praying, believing, planting the Word. In that waiting, his words will grow, and when the time comes, God will harvest the fruit of his words.

James stressed again, “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near” (8). Knowing the Lord’s coming is near strengthens us to stand firm, no matter what happens, and to overcome trials and hardships. As I studied the book of Revelation, two messages came to my heart. First, God drew a vivid picture of his kingdom in my heart. Second, he planted the promise of the Lord in my heart. 'Yes! I am coming soon. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.' These gave me the strength to persevere. Day by day, in tension and pressure, I shout to myself and confess to Jesus. "Jesus, you are my Christ. Yes, you are coming soon! Amen! Come, Lord Jesus." I pray that I may persevere and wait for the Lord by doing God's will diligently like a farmer waiting for the rain.

Look at verse 9. James says, “Don’t grumble against one another, brothers, or you will be judged.” When pressure from the world is strong, it is easy for Christians to grumble against each other in frustration. This doesn't please God and makes things worse. There is no excuse for complaining or blaming others. Those who do so will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Secondly, be patient like the prophets. Verse 10 says, “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” When the prophets spoke the truth in the name of the Lord, they were persecuted, put to death by stoning and by the sword (Heb 11:37a). Nevertheless, they spoke the word of God faithfully to the end.

Thirdly, be patient like Job. Verse 11 says, “As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.” Job’s suffering was so severe. But he persevered. He said, “I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end, he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I will see God” (Job 19:25-26). He also confessed, “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). With this faith, he persevered through all the trials. Finally, God blessed him even more than before.

God does not only see our sufferings from afar. He suffers together with us. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. He comforts, encourages, and strengthens us. As we depend on him, we can be patient and overcome all things. Let’s be patient until the Lord’s coming!