



## INTRODUCTION

The IRONMAN Triathlon World Championship takes place annually in the month of October on the Big Island of Hawaii in a little town called Kona. In 2015, there were 2,118 participants in the race. The event includes three areas of competition that are done in succession. First is the 2.4 mile swim through the ocean. Next up is the 112 mile bike ride battling crosswinds of upwards to 60 miles an hour. Finally, the run of a full marathon, 26.2 miles. Someone has summarized the race as, “Swim 2.4 miles! Bike 112 miles! Run 26.2 miles! Brag the rest of your life!”

What may astound many are the finishing rates at this event, despite the tough conditions. This last year (2015), of the 2118 athletes who started the race, there were 1985 finishers. That is a 93.7 percent finisher rate. Which causes one to ponder, “How do they do it?” The answers may be numerous, but it could be summarized in one key word – endurance!

The IRONMAN is a great test of human endurance. For more than 140 miles the participants must “keep on keeping on”. Although the athlete may feel like giving up, there’s satisfaction in overcoming the obstacles and finishing the race. It’s significant that the Christian life is often described as a long-distance race (I Cor. 9:24; Gal. 5:7; Phil. 3:14; II Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 12:1). The course of life may be long, the obstacles many, and the sufferings great, but those who endure will be eternally rewarded (I Cor. 9:24; II Tim. 4:7-8).

We find this theme yet again in James 5. In the first six verses this chapter, James sharply rebuked the wicked rich people who abused the righteous poor. Now, in verses 7-12, he shifts his focus from the persecutors to the persecuted, moving from condemning the faithless, abusive rich to comforting the faithful, abused poor. He is encouraging believers to endure suffering because Christ will soon appear to make all wrongs right, and reward the faithful. James also instructs the suffering poor as to what attitude they are to have in the midst of persecution. He will answer the question, “How can I do right when I’ve been done wrong?” The theme of this section is how to be patient in trials. Real

faith endures suffering. We will discover three principles of endurance that encourage us to finish the race.

### 1. Real Faith Endures with Patience (5:7-9)

“Be patient therefore, brethren”(5:7). Patience is not a natural trait for the average human. We want to take the shortcut and try to bypass the hard parts. When pain and heartache are involved, patience can be agonizing.

Illustration: There was a man who knew he needed patience so he prayed, “Lord, I need patience, and I need it now!”

James uses two different words translated *patience* in this text. The first, *makrothumeō*, a compound word from *makros*, “long,” and *thumos*, “anger”; in modern English vernacular means “long-tempered” (5:7-8, 10). The second, we will return to later in our study, means to “endure or remain under” (5:11). The first refers to patience with people, while the second deals with respect to conditions or situations. Both are essential; patience with people is just as important as patience in difficult circumstances. Patience is the righteous standard God expects all believers to conform to no matter what trial they face. Thus, patience under persecution becomes another test of genuine saving faith for James. He is exhorting Christians to remain patient, no matter how severe or relentless their sufferings.

The patience James first discusses is not so much the brave endurance of afflictions as it is the self-restraint which enables the sufferer to refrain from hasty retaliation. In fact, self-restraint is the key to patience. The patient, long-suffering person puts up with difficult people and circumstances. He doesn’t get mad when abused, but stays in control. When we cultivate patience while keeping our focus on God, the desire to retaliate will not take root.

“Be patient” demands an attitude which shows long-suffering in the presence of affliction and injustice. Believers should show this stamina without complaining, giving up, or retaliating. They should be ready to endure affliction without grumbling and to remain committed in their obedience to God. Patience is not passive resignation, but rather an expectant waiting on the Lord. To highlight his point, James gives us an illustration of what this type of patience looks like.

#### a. Illustration: The Planter (5:7)

The “husbandman” was a planter or farmer. One who worked the land and cultivated crops. A good farmer does not just sit around waiting for the harvest, he works towards the harvest. He does not work by the clock, but by the calendar. He is diligent in what he can do (tilling, sowing), and he is dependent

on that which he cannot do (provide the rains). The early rain and latter rains were essential for effective crop production. But the farmer has no control over the rains, so he works expectantly and trusts God to bring needed moisture.

James's reference to the early and late rains shows just how long farmers had to patiently wait. The early rains in Palestine arrive at the time of the fall planting season (October and November), the late rains just before harvest time (March and April). What convictions enable farmers to wait patiently for rain? It was the expectation of a bountiful harvest. The planter endures the long hours for the prospect and promise of "precious fruit" (5:7). What lessons can be learned from James's illustration? What instruction is being given and must be received?

### b. Instruction: Work Expectantly (5:8)

Applying the analogy to his readers, James exhorted them, "be ye also patient" (5:8). Just as a farmer works expectantly through the entire growing season anticipating his crops, so also believers are to work expectantly anticipating the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Diligence** should mark the work of the believer who is looking for the coming of Christ.

Adding to the command to "be patient" comes another word of admonition, "stablish your hearts" (5:8). This phrase speaks of strengthening the inner life and **devotion**. You could paraphrase it, "Put iron into your hearts". It is one who does not waver or stumble in even the midst of hardship. In Luke 9:51 this term is used to describe Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem, although He knew He faced death when He arrived there. It is a word denoting resoluteness, firm courage, and an attitude of commitment to stay the course no matter how severe the trial. This person is not "double-minded" (1:8) but devoted in heart to the Lord. So, working expectantly means doing so with diligence and devotion. Christians are to be firm in their resolve to patiently wait and work until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, patience includes **deference** towards others. James says, "grudge not one against another" (5:9). The word *grudge* (*stenazo*) means "to groan within oneself," or "to sigh." It describes an attitude that is internal and unexpressed. It is a bitter, resentful spirit that manifests itself in one's relationships with others. Often internal struggles give way to external frustrations that result in criticism and faultfinding with others. Living with difficult circumstances can cause believers to become frustrated, lose patience, and complain against one another, especially against those who appear to be suffering less than we are or who seem to be adding to our trouble.

James adds a final aspect of working expectantly in verse 12 when he commands, "swear not" (5:12). This points to the **dignity** of those who are patient. Although these words prohibit profanity, they are not chiefly concerned about "taking the Lord's name in vain." The Jews were careful not to break the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment. So instead of using God's name in their oaths, they would swear by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem. James was teaching that it is impossible to avoid God in such oaths. Heaven is His throne, earth His footstool, and Jerusalem is the "city of the great King".

"Swear not" is a prohibition against the careless use of God's name to guarantee the truthfulness of a statement. This logically follows the discussion of suffering because Christians who face suffering can be easily tempted to make a frivolous appeal to God's name to bargain their way out of trouble or difficulty. Above all, during our stress, we should not resort to flippant oaths that communicate something to the world about God that we do not intend. We must be people of integrity and dignity.

There was a day not so long ago that a man's word was his bond. Not so today. A signature is required to purchase a pizza on credit, and stacks of paper must be initialed and signed to acquire a home because many have found legal loopholes to renege on their promises. As followers of Christ, we should always live in a way that our word is impeccable. Our reputation should be such that nothing is needed to back up our word. People should never have to worry about the "hidden message" behind what we say.

This verse is not referring to times when the law requires us to take an oath, such as before a judge. It is talking about being utterly trustworthy in all our business, family, and other relationships. We ought not to be like the child who makes a statement but fails to honor it because their "fingers were crossed". The principle is that true Christian character requires few words. The person who must use many words (including oaths) to convince us he is speaking truthfully has something wrong with his character. A true Christian, with integrity and dignity, will only have to answer "yes" or "no" to be believed.

### c. Incentive: Christ's Coming

James instructs and illustrates the need for patience, but he also gives us proper incentive to endure suffering while working expectantly. We can endure with patience because of the imminent return of Christ. Three times James will focus our attention on Christ's coming. In verse 7, he speaks of "the coming of our Lord". This "coming" is the *parousia*, an important New Testament eschatological term which emphasizes Christ's physical presence. The word literally means "being alongside of." Perhaps the best English

translation would be "arrival." The church's great hope is the arrival of Jesus Christ when He comes to bless His people with His presence.

*Parousia* was used to describe the official visits of a monarch to a city within his dominion. It is used in this way fifteen times in the New Testament with reference to Christ's return, denoting "the physical arrival of a ruler." The significance of the word as James uses it here is that these suffering people longed for the presence of Christ their King. They knew that when Jesus came to be with them, everything would be all right.

In verse 8 he continues the theme by saying, "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh". To draw nigh (*eggizō*) means "to approach", or "to come close." The return of Christ is the next event on God's prophetic calendar and could happen at any moment. Here, James emphasizes the imminent return of Christ and offers this reminder as hope for the hurting. To further emphasize to the truth of Christ's imminent return verse 9 states, "the judge standeth before the door". This is a dramatic image: The Son of God, to whom is committed the judgment of the world, is at the doors of the judgment hall, ready to throw them wide open as he strides to the judgment seat. As believers, our works will be judged to discern their eternal value (II Cor. 5:10). What incentive we have, to be found working expectantly while suffering patiently. We should be living in readiness for Christ's coming. Instead, too often we behave like a group of students fighting in a school classroom while the absent teacher walks rapidly toward the room.

Application: Jesus is coming! How are you living? Are you patient in suffering, restraining the fleshly urge to get bitter at God and angry with others? How could we hold on to such attitudes when the Judge is standing at the door! How inappropriate it is for Christians to be fighting when the return of Jesus is a certain event. Jesus will bring with him a complete knowledge of our feelings, thoughts, and reactions. May we work expectantly in light of Christ's Coming.

Transition: Principle number one, real faith endures with patience. Like the farmer who anticipates the rains, real faith works with diligence, devotion, deference, and dignity expecting the imminent coming of Christ. Principle number two, real faith endures through persecution.

## **2. Real Faith Endures through Persecution (5:10)**

James moves from one illustration on patience to another. Here he draws our attention to godly saints of the past, specifically the prophets, as examples "of suffering affliction, and of patience" (5:10). To further encourage believers to endure unjust suffering, James pointed out the example of the prophets who had endured persecution.

### **a. Illustration: Prophets**

The OT prophets were called of God to be His spokesmen to mankind. They faithfully delivered God's message despite the consequences. The prophets frequently suffered for the faith, but with patience they continued to proclaim God's Word. Suffering (*kakopatheia*) is a compound word from *kakos* ("evil") and *pathos* ("to suffer") meaning "to suffer evil or wrong". The patience under trials exhibited by those faithful prophets should provide encouragement for believers to run the Christian race with diligence and faithfulness, no matter how severe the persecution.

We can recall the faithful witness of prophets like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and even John the Baptist. Let's consider Jeremiah for a brief moment. He is an outstanding example of one who suffered ill treatment as a messenger of God. He was beaten and put in stocks (Jer. 20:2), placed in prison (Jer. 32:2), and thrown into a muddy cistern (Jer. 38:6). These prophets accepted evil treatment and did not abandon their faith in God or performance of their ministry. Their obedience to proclaim the Lord's message under His authority and direction did not exempt them from suffering.

In fact, it seems that James wants us to understand that very point. Those who speak "in the name of the Lord" are not exempt to persecution but rather its target. The task of witnessing of Christ's person and work provokes the world's opposition. James calls these prophets "an example" (5:10). These are objective illustrations that we can hold before us as a model to spur us on to pursue the conduct desired.

The Savior Himself used the OT prophets as examples of patience in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10-12). They were persecuted because of their faith and faithfulness. We must remember that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). The prophets are both examples and encouragement to us in reminding us that God cares for us when we go through suffering for His sake. Being faithful in times of suffering is a testimony to others around us.

### **b. Instruction: Witness Faithfully**

Just as prophets were called of God to be messengers of His Word, so a Christian is called to be God's messenger to the lost today. Jesus said of His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth" and "ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14). Friends, we have been called to be salt and light. Salt because the world is decaying, and light because it is living in darkness. We have the Good News and our Savior has commissioned to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15).

With the assignment comes the assurance of Christ's presence and the Spirit's power. Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world". As we make disciples through sharing the gospel, Christ's very presence is with us.

Along with the promise of His presence comes the assurance of His power through the Spirit. In Acts 1, Jesus is about to ascend to His Father. Before He goes, He assures His followers that "ye shall receive power (ability), after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). What a promise to those who faithfully witness for Christ.

### c. Incentive: Christ's Calling

The task of faithfully witnessing for Christ is a high and holy calling. However, it is not one that comes without a price. Jesus warned us "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (Jn. 15:18). We ought not to be surprised when in a heart of love we witness, and our words of compassion are met with hatred. This is not a new phenomenon. In his sermon to the Jews, Stephen said, "which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52).

Yet our willingness to continue faithfully witnessing while enduring suffering and persecution yields God's blessing. James says, "Behold, we count them happy which endure" (5:11). This word happy is the same word translated "blessed" in the Sermon on the Mount. It is there that Jesus encouraged His followers, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12). Those who endure suffering are going to receive a vast reward. Paul put it this way: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Those who endure persecution for Christ are blessed.

How are they blessed? Because through persecution, they have come to know and experience the "fellowship of his suffering" (Phil. 3:10). In Acts 5, the apostles have been beaten for preaching the gospel and commanded to cease

from witnessing. As they departed from the unjust council, they "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:41-42).

Application: We have been called to faithfully witness for Christ. This is a high and holy calling, but it comes with a price. Persecution is to be expected for the Christian. The question is, when the persecution comes will you faithfully endure it? As the prophets of old, we can endure suffering as we remember the promise of Christ's presence and power in our witness. May we rejoice to be "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name".

Transition: Principle number one, real faith endures with patience. Like the farmer who anticipates the rains, real faith works with diligence, devotion, deference, and dignity expecting the imminent coming of Christ. Principle number two, real faith endures through persecution. Like the prophets who faithfully delivered God's message, real faith is faithful to Christ's calling to be His witnesses knowing it brings His blessing. Principle number three, real faith endures with perseverance.

### 3. Real Faith Endures with Perseverance (5:11)

James utilizes a different word that has been translated *patience* in verse 11. The thought now moves from patience as a non-retaliatory spirit to patience as a steadfast endurance. This usage of *patience* (*hupomonen*) means "to remain under the load". We might think of it as perseverance. However, you cannot persevere unless there is a trial in your life. There can be no victories without battles; there can be no peaks without valleys. James is teaching that there is blessing after we have endured for "we count them happy which endure" (5:11). He uses Job, a very familiar OT patriarch, to illustrate his point.

#### a. Illustration: Patriarch

It would be difficult to find a greater example of suffering than Job. His consistent obedience under trial was legendary among the Jews. We have all heard of his sufferings, but frankly do not wish to experience any of what he endured. With God's permission, Job went through incredible hardships at the hand of Satan. His finances were wiped out in a day. His family was tragically killed in a natural disaster. His flesh was afflicted with painful boils. His friends turned against him, believing sin was the cause of his great trial. Yet Job remained under the load God placed upon him. He endured abject misery, incredible suffering, insensitivity from friends, and misunderstanding at home, but he continued to trust God through it all. We read his words, "Naked came I

out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed by the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

There were times when Job grew frustrated with his lot and protested to his friends and to God. At one point he "cursed his day" (Job 3:1) wishing he had never been born, but he refused to sin by buckling under the pressure. He remained faithful in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances. He demonstrated great perseverance and endurance. Job was determined to endure his sufferings without losing faith in God. He chose to believe even when he did not understand. He would announce in Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him". How could he endure this great trial? We glean insight into the source of his endurance when he says, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25).

Job is a memorable model of endurance under tremendous testing, and through it all remained unswervingly loyal to God. What an encouragement to know that God does not expect stoic perseverance in the midst of trials. He knows we are clay. He understands tears. He accepts our questions. But he does demand that we recognize our finiteness and acknowledge there are processes at work beyond our comprehension. A plan far bigger than us is moving toward completion. And God demands that we, like Job, hold on to our faith and hope in God.

### **b. Instruction: Wait Patiently**

In the midst of trials and suffering, God wants us to learn to wait patiently. We don't like to wait, especially when there is pain involved, but this is God's instruction to us through the example of Job. Remember this word *patience* means to "remain under the load". The trial God has placed in our lives and on our shoulders is ultimately for our good and His glory. We recall James's command in chapter one to "count it all joy" when facing trials. It is possible to do so only through the grace of God and with the knowledge that He is at work in our lives.

Instead of asking for the weight and burden to be removed, may we ask for wisdom to discover and apply the truths God has for us (James 1:5). And may we ask for grace to patiently wait as God makes us into the image of His Son.

God's blessing does not come only to people who do great things, but to people who endure great things. Those who will receive the greatest blessing in the life to come are those who have endured the greatest suffering in the present world. The hope of blessing now and in the future glory should motivate suffering Christians to patient endurance.

### **c. Incentive: Christ's Character**

Some try to "grin and bear" their trials. James has given us a better incentive to "count it all joy" (1:2) as he points us to the character of Christ (5:11). For "we have seen the end of the Lord" (5:11). The *end of the Lord* is His "outcome, goal, or purpose". We know God's goal for us is Christlikeness. James has identified this in the first verses of chapter one. God allows us to go through trials to bring about patience (spiritual endurance) and perfection (spiritual maturity) with the ultimate goal of "being conformed to his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

Not only does he point to Christ's goal, but also His goodness by saying, "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (5:11). It seems James coins a new Greek word when he says the Lord is "very pitiful". Other ways of saying this are, "very, very compassionate," or "full of tender compassion." To this compassion James couples "mercy." God is full of compassion as he cares for us in our misery, and he is full of mercy as he forgives our sins. All of which says to those who are undergoing hardships: God is good.

We must recognize that God's goodness is unwavering! With this free quotation from Psalm 103:8, James declares that God is not vicious, He does not love watching people suffer. On the contrary, with a heart of full of compassion, He allows them to face pain because of the greater good that will be produced. Weirsbe says, "When you find yourself in the fire, remember that God keeps His gracious hand on the thermostat!" Job himself attested to this when he said, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

Application: The example of Job encourages those suffering trials to patiently endure, realizing the Lord's purpose is to strengthen them, perfect them, and, in the end, to richly bless them. In the words of the apostle Paul, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

### **CONCLUSION**

"Swim 2.4 miles! Bike 112 miles! Run 26.2 miles! Brag the rest of your life!" This may be the goal of the IRONMAN triathlon athlete, but we have a higher calling. We are to work expectantly in light of Christ's coming. With diligence, devotion, deference, and dignity we patiently endure. We are to witness faithfully because of Christ's calling on our lives. We have been called to be salt and light. And we are to wait patiently remembering Christ's character. His goal for us through adversity is conformity to Christ. His goodness through our suffering is constant as we persevere by His grace. Real faith endures!