

Many thanks for your prayer support as we travelled to Greece. We spent three weeks in Athens with Lana’s sister before she passed away. The funeral was in a Greek Orthodox church built over 1000 years ago just below the acropolis. After the funeral we bused to the north for the graveside service.

The Exarchia “hood” is unique! Our time there included tears, reunions, new friends, time to reflect. In September I will share some “sermons from a suitcase” based on some Scriptures I read during this time.

After the graveside we had a week together to regroup with dear friends. Last Sunday I preached in their church in the village of Lagadas (north of Thessaloniki). Lana will return home on September 15.

### Proposition

Today and next week we will conclude our series on the book of James - “**Navigating Faith**”. James is a book about faith that is authentic and genuine. As Chuck Swindoll summarizes, chapter five reveals genuine patience. James 5:1-6 addressed dangers associated with riches.

Arthur Schopenhauer has commented that “*Wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become.*” (quoted in ***From Strength to Strength***, Arthur Brooks, Green Tree, 2023, 59)

In the misuse of riches can be a great example of impatience. Today our passage is **James 5:7-12** which connects with the warning in verses 1-6. In this text followers of Jesus live out their faith by “**Patient Perseverance**”. To discover what James teaches us, let’s ask three questions of this text.

### [1] What are we commanded?

In verses 7 and 8 James commands Christians to “be patient” (μακροθυμησατε). Given the term he used, this is an instruction for believers to adopt an attitude which is [1] **persistent in waiting**; [2] **resilient in suffering**; [3] **without wavering in faith**. (***Linguistic Key to the Greek NT***, Rienecker/Rogers). The echoed command reflects wisdom literature – with the distinction about the return of Jesus and the added command to “*strengthen* (στηριξατε) *your hearts*”. Waiting is part of life! God invites His children to display genuine faith in Him by patiently persevering. **James 1:2-4** and **Romans 5:1-5** reveals that when we do there is a powerful process of transformation.

In Greece I was in a line and a man asked if I the last. I answered τελειος. He smiled and corrected me. I should have said τελευταιιος. The first means “perfect” and the second means “last”. The command to patiently persevere is tied to God’s purpose of bringing us into greater completeness in Christ.

### [2] Who is commended?

To drive home his instruction, James gave three examples, which illustrate each aspect of the command.

#### [1] persistent in waiting

In the first example we have a general description of farming (v.7b). In this field of work, the farmer learns to wait for the seasonal rains with the very attitude that James calls Christians to adapt. The farmer must be patient and persistent. Earlier this week I was in an olive grove in northern Greece. I went with our friends to water olive trees in a grove that they were trying to coax back to production. This is yet another agricultural example of learning to wait patiently for what is expected by faith.

## [2] resilient in suffering

The second example is more specific and refers prophets (v.10) who had patience though they suffered. This helps us recognize that living with patient perseverance is not passive but an active battle. These faithful servants of God show what it means to be unwavering and unflinching in a spiritual battle. Such patient perseverance reveals authentic and active faith in God.

## [3] without wavering in faith

The third example is quite specific, speaking of Job (v.11). We know from the Scriptures that he suffered greatly yet he endured. But it is not just a reference to Job's faithfulness to God. This highlights the compassion and mercy of God to those who display genuine faith. God rewards those who endure.

In our text and in James 1:12 we can recognize the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. "*We count those blessed who endured*" (v.11a) reflects the beatitude: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:10).

## [3] How are we cautioned?

The third part of our passage deals with a caution for Christians. Perhaps we could put it this way: having commanded patient endurance, James cautioned Christians about being "**anti-patient**". How did he do this? Notice two ways we can act which work against genuine faith expressed in endurance.

First, we can **grumble and complain** against one another (v.9). No doubt this was in reaction among James' readers to their rich oppressors (5:1-6; see also 1:19-27 "taming the tongue"; 2:1-13 "favoritism forbidden). But such slander (even if internal) is a relationship killer and a process of self-incrimination. Do you want to be judged? Then grumble against others! James was giving a vital caution – "*the Judge is standing right at the door*"!

Second, James cautioned Christians about **oaths** that they might make in a time of difficulty. This is a tempting way to act out impatiently. It could be **harsh** – a rash, rude, and offensive misuse of God's name. Or it could be a **hasty** – an impulsive, unthinking oath in God's name.

In either case, these do not reflect genuine faith expressed in patient endurance. This same caution came from Jesus in **Matthew 5:33-37**. What is the solution? The practical activation of true faith is simply to have a clear "yes" or "no" in our difficulties. No rude or ridiculous oaths need be applied!

## Conclusion – see "Digging Deeper"

A unique sculpture recently caught my attention. It is on the north shore. It is called "Sky Harbour". The North Vancouver Arts and Culture website gives this description.

This artwork depicts a rowboat as its central motif. Raised on greatly elongated oars, it "floats" high above the heads of people in the plaza. A structure that is equal parts whimsy and reason, with a geometry that seemingly defies gravity. Boats and harbours occupy a near-universal place in our imagination. As deeply human metaphors they **evolve notions of journey, shelter, hope, and endurance**. A simple row boat can carry within it the whole weight of human endeavour; a carefully crafted object setting out into the unknowable mystery of a natural world, the burden of potential held afloat with resilient confidence and endless curiosity.

I don't know what art or object captures the notion of endurance for you. But all Christians face the challenge of developing patient perseverance. Will you rely on God to develop this quality in your life? Remember He is "**full of compassion and is merciful**" (v.11b)!