

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### **SERMON SERIES: Faith to Faithful**

(Studies in the book of James)

### **Survival Truth for Tough Times**

(James 5:1-11)

Study #11

#### **Introduction: "Don't goof off during training..."**

Louis Zamperini was an American soldier who was also the subject of Laura Hillenbrand's wonderful book, Unbroken. Zamperini lived through terrible hardships during World War II when his plane went down in the Pacific and then when he was a prisoner of war.

He died in July of 2014 at the age of 97 years young, a vibrant, joy-filled follower of Jesus. Among his many activities during his later years, Louis spoke to soldiers at Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base in California before the troops would leave for combat.

Louis would recount his own war stories. And then this, *"I told them to not goof off during training. I told them that they should learn all they could about survival so that if they were ever in a dire situation, they'd know what to do."*

He said, *"When I was on that life raft in the Pacific Ocean for forty seven days, I was the only one of the three of us who was prepared."*

Training to survive a dire situation is a pretty important piece of readiness if you are about to fly off to war. But then, advance preparation for a dire situation is important for any of us.

It would be a good idea for you and me to pre-think scenarios where we might face danger.

Family fire drills will ensure everybody knows where to go and how to get out if the time comes. It's a great idea to know CPR (I don't) and to have an emergency first-aid kit in your car (I don't).

You may not know this, but one of my favorite outdoor shops, REI, holds regular *"Zombie Apocalypse Survival Training"* seminars. It's their funny way to get us to think about what to do in a dire situation in the woods or if a natural disaster should strike San Antonio.

Someday, you may find yourself needing to know how to respond in a crisis related to your physical safety. And if that day comes, you'll be glad you did some pre-thinking.

As important as it is to survive a physical test, there will almost certainly come a day when you will face a test that will threaten your spiritual well-being. Your faith will be tested.

Maybe that day has already come for you and you are in that day right now. If so, I hope you are doing well. If it hasn't yet come, it almost certainly will. How will you respond? What will you do when, not just your body, but your soul is in jeopardy?

Well, today James gives guidance to some first century Christians who were under spiritual attack. They were suffering something that tested their faith. The advice he gives them will be exactly what you and I will need when tomorrow's storms hit, and they are just what we need to face today's storm.

As the passage opens, James is addressing himself to wealthy people who were taking advantage of the poor.

#### **Words to the Unrighteous Wealthy Who Oppress (vv. 1-6)**

##### **Intro: Weep for Misery to Come (v. 1)**

*Who is James addressing? (v. 1a)*

***[1a] Come now, you rich...***

To preview, these resource-filled rich people were abusing poor people who had very few resources.

It is my strong opinion (and the opinions of many Bible scholars) that the wealthy in view in this passage were not believers in Jesus *and* that the poor were the Christian recipients of the letter.<sup>1</sup>

It is certainly NOT that Christians could never be guilty of such abusive behavior. Throughout James' letter we have listened as he has accused believers in Jesus of:

- a lack of wisdom (1:5);
- committing (either figurative or literal) adultery and murder (2:11);
- sending the hungry away with nothing but well-wishes (2:16);
- having bitter jealousy and selfish ambition and being arrogant and lying against the truth (3:13-14);
- being consumed with lust, praying with wrong motives and being openly hostile toward God (4:1-5);
- being double-minded (4:8);
- planning presumptuously (4:13-16).

If Christians might be guilty of these (and we sure might be!), wealthy Christians could certainly be guilty of mistreating the poor.<sup>2</sup>

But here, I think the wealthy abusers are outsiders who are persecuting the Christians to whom James is writing.<sup>3</sup> Why do I think this?

Well, for one thing, James doesn't call them "**brothers**" (which he does elsewhere when finding fault).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "His pronouncements are obviously no longer addressed to the Christian community alone, even though the epistle was intended to be read by that community." (Zane Hodges). Agreeing are Walter Wessel (of Bethel College and Seminary), Edward Sudden (Abingdon Commentary), James Adamson, and Peter Davids.

<sup>2</sup> The theme of materialism is a solid thread that connects 4:13-17 with 5:1-6.

<sup>3</sup> If we conclude that James is addressing the situation of non-believers who are mistreating poor Christians, we wonder how these outsiders would ever have been "convicted" by writings found in a letter addressed solely to believers? I would argue that the first paragraph (vv. 1-5) was intended for the benefit of the oppressed in the church in light of what is to follow (vv. 7-11), and not (at least not primarily) to bring those outside the church to conviction.

<sup>4</sup> He does switch to "*brethren speak*" in verses 7ff.

And for another thing, he doesn't call them to repentance but only warns them of coming judgment. There is nothing redemptive written to the abusers.<sup>5</sup>

*The future of the oppressors (v. 1b)*

***[1] Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.***

It is certainly not that James was opposed to people who were rich simply because they were rich. Material possessions, in and of themselves, aren't a problem. Many people use their possessions to solve problems for the poor that money can solve.

But for the people James is talking to here, wealth has bred greed and insensitivity, and has led to oppression.

His harsh words continue.

**The Hoarding of the Rich Condemn Them (vv. 2-3)**

***[2] Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. [3] Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!***

When James writes of gold and silver rusting, he knew as well as we do that gold and silver don't rust.<sup>6</sup>

So, his words aren't terribly accurate, scientifically. They do, though, perfectly communicate what value these precious metals are bringing to the poor AND what value they will have in an eternal future: ZERO!

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<sup>5</sup> I suspect that IF James had been speaking to believers who were guilty of such evil, he would have exhorted them to change their ways, rather than to simply state a certain miserable future for them.

<sup>6</sup> Some have suggested that James has in mind the coins of the Roman world (gold and silver coins) which were mixed with alloys, and actually did rust, even though pure gold and silver don't.

In more northern regions of our country, cars and trucks rust out thanks to chemicals (salt and otherwise) used to de-ice roads. Here in San Antonio, well cared for and frequently used cars and tools don't rust much.

So, good South Texan that I am, when I hear that something rusts, my thoughts turn to something rusting from a lack of use. And that, I believe, is exactly James' point.

Instead of using their possessions and gold to aid the poor, the rich have callously hoarded their wealth for themselves.

They haven't used their things to bless people, but have used people to accumulate more things. Their rusty wealth is testimony to their heartlessness.

But the way the rich are treating the poor doesn't end with benign neglect. They have inflicted real harm on the poor.

#### **The Injustices of the Rich Condemn Them (v. 4)**

***[4] Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld<sup>7</sup> by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.***

*The withheld pay of the laborers cries out against the rich*

Day laborers were dependent on daily earnings to meet daily needs.<sup>8</sup> If they didn't work, they didn't get paid. If they didn't get paid, they didn't eat. And a very large percentage of the developing world's population still lives, not paycheck to paycheck, but day to day.

A couple of years ago, a good friend of mine was on a Missions trip, serving for a few weeks in a West African country.

He was telling one of his hosts about the American "weekend" - a time when you don't work.

The host asked, "*So, do you not eat on Saturday and Sunday?*"

He couldn't envision a day of eating without working. And that's the situation here in James. The laborers were working. But because they were members of a despised class of people - Christ followers - it was easy to get away with abusing them, to not pay them.

What was even worse was that this non-payment was occurring at the time of the harvest when the ingathering of the new crop vastly increased the wealth of the already rich.

It was a time of great personal profit, but the rich weren't willing to pay the workers whose blistered hands had brought them their wealth.

And the cry of the oppressed has reached the ears of Almighty God, referred to here as "*the Lord of Sabaoth.*"<sup>9</sup>

*The cry of the laborers reaches the ears of God*

This title refers to God in His majestic transcendence. Let's translate it "*Lord of Omnipotence*" or "*Master of All*" or "*Lord of the Hosts of Heaven.*"

And this Lord of Sabaoth powerfully cares when His people are mistreated, when they suffer injustice, and when they are oppressed.

So, first off, James indicted the oppressing rich for their hoarding. Then, he rebuked them for their injustices.

Finally, we listen as he calls them on the carpet for their over-the-top extravagant lifestyles.

<sup>7</sup> The word, "*withhold*", points to more than delay. It pictures default (Adamson).

<sup>8</sup> The daily neediness of laborers is highlighted in Exodus 22:25-26 where the Jews were commanded to not take their neighbor's cloak overnight as a pledge, *[27] for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in?* More important for James' readers (then and now), it violated the law of love.

<sup>9</sup> The title has nothing to do with the "Sabbath" as is sometimes erroneously assumed. This name occurs 23 times in the short prophetic book of Malachi, and there stresses that the poor and the helpless have the Lord on their side, who can destroy the oppressors and punish their injustices.

## The Luxuriant Lifestyles of the Rich Condemn Them (vv. 5-6)

**[5] You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure;<sup>10</sup> you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. [6] You have condemned and put to death the righteous man<sup>11</sup>; he does not resist you.**

They have enjoyed everything they could afford. They have placed no limits on their hedonism. Self-indulgence has marked their existence. James says, *“What goes around, comes around.”*

He pictures the rich fattening their own hearts in a day of slaughter. That image brings to mind a calf or a goose being prepared for a feast.

The rich are over-feeding themselves, fattening themselves up at the expense of the poor - little realizing that the day of their own slaughter is coming.

Destruction and judgment are just around the corner because the rich have wronged (James says *“put to death”*<sup>12</sup>) the righteous poor, and the poor have become defenseless prey.<sup>13</sup>

Now we are reading about some pretty stern stuff here. The abuses are terrible, and God’s response to the abusers is severe.

Those on the suffering end were Christians and God - the Lord of Sabaoth - will vindicate His people.

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<sup>10</sup> This phrase (*“led a life of wanton pleasure”*) adds the thought of wastefulness and immorality to the picture of self-indulgence. See the parable of the prodigal son who spent his father’s inheritance in wild living. (Luke 15)

<sup>11</sup> Some have assumed that James is referencing Jesus (or even himself) with *“the righteous man.”* I think it is much better to take this as a reference to the class of people who are leading righteous lives.

<sup>12</sup> *“Murder”* by depriving a man of his living is a possible meaning here. Hiebert thinks that the context requires us to think in terms of literal murder.

<sup>13</sup> Whether the righteous man does not resist mistreatment because he is unable to or because he is taking Jesus’ words about non-retaliation seriously, (*[Matthew 5:39] “Resist not him that is evil”*), the oppressed are not actively trying to stop the abuse by the wealthy oppressors.

Right now, in locations in the Middle East, our Christian brothers and sisters are often suffering just because they are Christians. Syria, in particular, is a place of brutal abuse of Christians.

In Africa, groups like Boko Haram and Al Shabab kill and enslave Christians.

Our Christian family is suffering abuse in other places, too - the state of Chiapas, Mexico and Indonesia and Malaysia and different places in the Far East.

If you had an hour to spend with someone who was being mistreated for the sake of Jesus, what would you say to them?

What would you say to people in Kenya or Uganda who have suffered unspeakably at the hands of oppressors? What would you say to your sisters and brothers who have been grossly abused at the hands of persecutors in Iran and Syria?

Closer to home, what have you said to people you know who are suffering here in San Antonio? Maybe their suffering is not overt persecution, but the assault on their soul - because of oppression and abuse and inexplicable hardship - is severe.

You want to help. So, you speak. What do you say?

Or think about the times when you have gone through a faith-testing season of suffering. Did the words and did the presence of your friends speak to your need? Did they help?

Suffering is the human condition. When we are suffering, it is almost always a crisis of faith. Trials are tests of our trust in God because we know that if He wanted to, He could end our suffering.

With these thoughts and questions in mind, we turn back to James, who switches from speaking to the oppressors to speaking to the oppressed.

It is extremely instructive for us, who want to know what to say, to hear what he says.

## Words to the Suffering Christian (vv. 7-11)

### Intro: Called to a Jesus-is-Coming Centered Patience (v. 7a)

**[7a] Therefore be patient, brethren<sup>14</sup>, until the coming of the Lord.**

Up to this very moment, James has not mentioned the return of Jesus one time. This is the first time and he chooses to bring it up as he seeks to encourage suffering Christians.<sup>15</sup>

The return of Jesus has been the “blessed hope” of all Christians throughout time. It was a constant focus of the early church as they faced oppression and injustice.

We look forward to His return because when He returns, He will set up a righteous kingdom over which He will rule. This return is an especially precious hope to the Christian who is suffering, and most especially when he or she is suffering for their faith.

Back at the beginning of his letter, he told all who suffer in Jesus that we should **[1:2] consider it all joy...when [we] encounter various trials** because those trials, married to faith, will produce endurance.

Here, James invites us to *patience* when trials hit, because, after all, Jesus is coming back. Our suffering has an end. He will right all wrongs.

James knows that it’s hard to be patient. It is really hard to be patient when we are wronged, or when we are suffering, or when we are being opposed, or when life is really challenging.

But patience is called for when the tough times hit. Not a passive resignation to fate, but a humble self-restraint that doesn’t retaliate when provoked.

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<sup>14</sup> Notice the reference to “*brethren*.” It seems clear to me that James is switching to addressing Christians now.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that James had so little to say about Jesus’ coming indicates that his readers were well versed in the teaching that Jesus was going to return to earth a second time.

Now, I promise you that I did NOT choose for us to study the book of James because of his many agricultural references. But his use here of the farmer is much appreciated because farmers, out of professional necessity, are prime examples of patience.

### **Be Patient, Strong - Jesus is at Hand! (vv. 7b-8)**

**[7] The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. [8] You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.**

*Farmers are as examples of patience*

Every farmer and every gardener knows that a crop is not only the result of his own sweat and labor. Producing wheat or corn or tomatoes or broccoli depends on forces outside of his control.

The farmer has to rest in the knowledge that he will do what he can do - sow, fertilize, weed - and patiently depend on God to do what only He can do - rain, sunshine, and correct temperatures - to produce a crop.<sup>16</sup>

*Farmers focus on fruit*

And make no mistake about it. All the farmer cares about is the crop, the harvest.

At the end of the day, he doesn’t care all that much about how attractive the machinery is or how big are the leaves on the tomato plants. It is fruit that is his central and consuming interest.

The value of the harvest justifies the farmer’s patient waiting.

So, since there is nothing he can do about it, the farmer is patient about getting the rains his crops need. He doesn’t panic over things out of his control and he focuses on what he can control.

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<sup>16</sup> The farmer in Palestine depends on the early and late rains. If he doesn’t get the soaking rains of October/November, the seed won’t germinate and the seedlings won’t take root. If he doesn’t get the latter rains of April/May, the crops won’t produce a vigorous harvest.

*Christians focus on fruit*

In the same way, a Christian who is going through hard times knows she can't control persecutors and he can't control oppressors.

So, they entrust themselves to God to take care of them. and, like the farmer, they are all about a harvest.

We Christians are depending on God to produce in our lives the fruit of character, a bumper crop of righteousness, eternal reward for faithfulness - as we patiently wait for Jesus' return.

*Patience is possible because the Lord is at hand*

When we are suffering, James says that we are to **"strengthen our hearts."**<sup>17</sup> And if you're going through a time of great testing you may wonder, "OK. What do I do to strengthen my heart?"

Keep reading. Realize that **[8b] ...the coming of the Lord is near.**

The church has always known that Jesus' return is an undated event. Once, when someone asked Jesus when He would be coming back, He replied, **[Acts 1:7] "That is not for you to know."**

But, from the first century to the present, every generation has lived in a state of expectation. His return is imminent. It could be today.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus is especially **"right at the door"** in times of persecution and oppression and injustice and tough times. And because of His nearness and the possible nearness of His return...we love.

**Be Loving - the Judge is at the Door! (v. 9)**

**[9] Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.**

To understand why James says what he does here (**"don't complain against each other"**), we have to come to grips with a very human tendency. And that tendency is that in the middle of a trial, it is a great temptation to become "porcupiny" in our dealings with others.

It is the rare Christian who responds to trials with the thought, *"I am in deep pain. I know. I'll be more loving!"*

Yes, that is what Jesus did. And that is what is required of us. But when I am in pain I am very much tempted to grumble and complain and lash out. You may be tempted toward the same.

Tough times can bring out the worst in us and can tend to make us irritable. Troubles provide an excellent breeding ground for the disruption of unity, peace, and love. Suffering tempts us to complain against one another.

James says, *"Don't go there."* If we do then we move from being innocent victims of suffering to active agents of wrongdoing. We even open ourselves up to judgment.

It can be tempting to think that it is God's indifference that has led to your suffering. If that is what you are thinking, you are mistaken.

God is actively involved in your life, sometimes allowing and sometimes overtly orchestrating what comes your way. He is not at all indifferent. He is in all of it, using all of it to produce His fruit in you.

Have others caused your pain? Sometimes that happens. But, holding on to anger over a wrong suffered serves no one. Not the person you're angry with. Not you and not Jesus' purposes for your life.

The best course is to follow Jesus' lead and allow your pain to be a prompt to love and to give and to serve.

<sup>17</sup> One commentator has rendered it, *"Put iron into your hearts, be stout-hearted."*

<sup>18</sup> James (as did Paul - Philippians 4:5; Peter - 1 Peter 4:7; John - 1 John 2:18) looked for the personal return of Jesus in his lifetime.

The Judge is coming back. But He's not coming back to judge us. He's coming back to take care of us. He will vindicate us and will judge those who have oppressed.

Therefore, love. Don't complain. Do the things that make for peace and that contribute to unity.

There is great therapy for the heart in knowing that Christ, our Lord, our Savior, our Victor, is coming back. We are called to watch, wait, and *trust*; watch, wait, and *love*; watch, wait, and *obey*.

Thus far, James has urged us to patience and to love in light of Jesus' imminent return and our vindication. As he wraps up, James points us to perseverance in light of God's compassion.

### **Be Persevering - the Lord is Compassionate (vv. 10-11)**

*The prophets were blessed as they endured patiently (v. 10)*

***[10] As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.***

James wants us to think about Old Testament prophets as he writes these words.

We admire the prophets and respect their endurance. Some of them endured Louis Zamperini-like sufferings for the Lord.

Some of these are mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews, in the great Hall of Fame of Faith. There, the author sings the prophets' praises.

***[Hebrews 11:37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two,<sup>19</sup> they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill treated [38] (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.<sup>20</sup>***

<sup>19</sup> A long-standing tradition holds that this was the manner of Isaiah's death.

<sup>20</sup> Note New Testament reference to the persecution of OT prophets - Mt. 5:12; 21:35-36; 22:6; 23:29-37; Luke 13:33; Acts 7:51-52; Rom. 11:3; 1 Thess. 2:15; Heb. 11:32-38; Rev. 16:6; 18:24.

See? Even the Lord's most faithful servants suffered ill-treatment and oppression. And actually, in most cases it was their faithfulness that provoked their enemies' opposition.

Daniel's time in the lion's den came *because* he prayed. Jeremiah's time in a muddy cistern was *on account of* his courageous, faithful ministry over decades.

They demonstrated patient suffering. They remained faithful, no matter what.

They showed the self-restraint of non-retaliation. They entrusted themselves to the care of a God they knew would take care of them in the end.

Brothers and sisters, God will take care of you in the end, too. And we have better assurances of that care than Daniel and Jeremiah had because we have the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We have this,

***[Romans 8:32] He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?***

And James gives us one more great example to spur us toward godliness: the patriarch Job.

*Job proved the Lord's compassion and mercy (v. 11)*

***[11] We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job<sup>21</sup> and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.***

Hmmm.

This is the one and only reference to Job in the whole New Testament. He's not mentioned anywhere else and James highlights his "blessedness" and the Lord's compassion and mercy.

<sup>21</sup> This is the only time in the New Testament where Job is mentioned.

He also mentions Job's endurance. And, yes, if you don't know the story of Job, suffice it to say that it is a powerful story and, as James says, there is much about endurance in it.

When God allowed Job to be a test case for faithfulness, subjecting him to Satan's tests, Job endured the loss of his enormous wealth, his beloved daughters and sons, his health, and his well-earned reputation.

At the depths of his sufferings, he had to endure his wife's urging him to give up the fight, **[Job 2:9] "Curse God and die"**, and he also endured humiliation at the hands of three friends who urged him to repent of sin he hadn't committed.

But Job wasn't a sterling model of perfect endurance. Read the story of Job carefully and you'll see that, yes, his initial responses to his many trials were God-honoring.<sup>22</sup> However, at various points he railed against his friends (**[Job 16:2] sorry comforters**) and even against God.

His responses were not all commendable.<sup>23</sup> Job's story is a story of a man who endured, but not perfectly. So, yes, James is correct. He endured. But James' point is not Job's endurance. It is his blessedness and the Lord's compassion.

There are forty two chapters in the book of Job. The first two chapters detail Job's suffering. The next thirty five chapters describe his abuse at the hands of friends. The next four and a half chapters show God driving Job to repentance.

The final half page of a forty page book (eleven verses), records God vindicating Job over his friends who had oppressed him, and abundantly rewarding him for his faithfulness.

Compassion and mercy, indeed. And we only see it at the end.

At no point in the previous forty and a half chapters would you have looked at Job and remarked, *"Behold, the compassion and the mercy of God!"*

<sup>22</sup> Job 1:21; 2:10.

<sup>23</sup> So noted by commentators D. Edmond Hiebert and James Adamson.

But there is no denying it at the end. And the end, James would say, is all that counts.

As we close this morning, I want to leave you with two stories that, I hope will drive home the message of James for you, whether you are currently experiencing a really tough time, or if that tough time is yet ahead of you.

### **Conclusion:**

The first story is of a kind and noble king who watches as his citizens suffer through oppressed and deprived lives. His heart bleeds for his people, but he remains in his castle, watching.

He feels sorry for them, but - whether *won't* or *can't*, it makes no difference - *doesn't* help them. In the end, his citizens die horrible deaths, and the king weeps for them.

There is nothing very uplifting about that story. The king had kind feelings (compassionate) toward his suffering people, but the end of the story are tragic deaths.

And that may be the way James' Christian audience was tempted to view their lives with God. I think that's the way our enemy wants us to think about our lives with God.

*"Oh sure, God cares. He's deeply concerned about you, but look at your life. He's not doing anything for you, is He? He won't do anything for you. He can't do anything for you. Your end will be tragic. Go ahead. Curse God and die."*

So here's another story.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Check out a couple of videos. One, the performance by Dallas Cowboys' running back, Emmitt Smith, in the last game of the 1993 NFL season in which he ran for over 160 yards with a separated shoulder. Also, Michael Jordan's play in the 5<sup>th</sup> game of the 1998 NBA championship series against the Utah Jazz (Jordan's "flu" game). Similar stories are also found in the annals of military history and every other arena of life. The lesson remains: short-term suffering is validated by long-term gain. **The suffering you patiently and faithfully endure now will be more than amply rewarded by your Savior at the Judgment Seat of Christ.**



It's the last game of the season, the most important game of the year. The coach knows that his team is well coached, they are well-prepared, they are equipped with everything they need to win.

Play begins and his star, a guard, hurts his shoulder. He walks over to the bench, expecting to sit down - but the coach keeps him in the game.

At every timeout, the player tells the coach how much it hurts. The coach ignores him, keeps calling plays for him, tells him to play hard.

This keeps up all game. The injury worsens in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. The guard moves only with great pain and the coach keeps drawing up play after play for his key man.

At the end of the game, this guard, having made the winning basket, gave his team the victory.

He walked over to his coach, who's now smiling. The coach gives him a bear hug (which hurts) and says, *"Well done. We've won the championship and we couldn't have done it without you. You overcame - and I knew you could do it. Take your rest now, champion."*

That player would have understood, but only in retrospect, his coach's compassion and mercy. The coach wanted his player to be a champion and the only way to get there was through the crucible of pain.

The pain of persecution suffered by James' audience was crushing, as is the pain our brothers and sisters are experiencing around the world today.

God is compassionate - and those who, by faith, see that compassion, will bear up under great suffering to receive the reward God has for them.

The pain you are experiencing now or that you will someday know will threaten to undo you. It will test your faith and your soul.

On the day of that storm, remember that the only thing that counts is the end. Faithfulness now will be richly rewarded by your compassionate and merciful Savior.