

James Chapter 7 the Practical Hope of the Lord's Coming

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon emphasizes the importance of patience and hope in the face of suffering, rooted in the anticipation of the Lord's return.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:1-2, Ecclesiastes 8:11, Habakkuk 2:3, Luke 12:15, Luke 18:7-8, James 4:13-15, James 5:1-5, James 5:7-8

Topics: "Patience", "Hope in Christ's Return"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the importance of patience in the face of suffering and injustice, urging believers to hold onto the hope of the Lord's coming as a source of strength and comfort. He draws parallels between the social injustices of James' time and those of today, highlighting the dangers of greed, hoarding, and luxurious living. Simpson encourages Christians to remain steadfast in their faith, reminding them that their labor is not in vain and that the coming of the Lord will bring justice and reward. He calls for a focus on the eternal perspective, urging believers to live with the anticipation of Christ's return as their guiding principle.

Transcript

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:7, 8).

With pungent, prophetic words, reminding one of the ancient prophets of Israel, James has just been pointing out the signs and sins of the last days, and summoning earth's children of pride to the tribunal of the coming King.

Now he turns to the suffering disciples of Christ, and tells them of the remedy for their wrongs, and the recompense for their sorrows which that blessed hope holds out to the children of promise. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." That blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus, has many precious applications in the Scriptures, but none is more precious than its

application to the practical duties and trials of our common life. It is not only a theme for the theologian to discuss, the poet to sing, and the saint to dream of, but it is a weapon for life's warfare, a staff for life's journey, a comfort for life's every trial, something for the housewife amid the poverty of her home, something for the laborer under the scorching sun of the harvest field, something for the workman robbed of his wages and tempted to fight for his rights, something better than our modern socialism, than our heated politics, than our Utopian dreams -- a living hope for living and dying men, and a practical remedy for all earth's wrongs and sorrows. First, however, let us look with James to the terrible social conditions which he describes, and which well might be copied from some photographic picture of our own times. As we read his graphic sketch of the struggle of human selfishness for gold and pleasure, we can almost imagine the author looking upon one of the scenes in our Stock Exchange, or sitting in the gallery of a modern theater, or watching the carnival of pleasure in some social function or society banquet.

I. THE SPIRIT OF GODLESS SECULARISM AND GREED OF GAIN.

"Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:13-15).

This is a picture of modern business in its worst form. The one idea of these people is to get gain and to do business. There is no doubt about the value of money, but we may surely say that the pursuit of money for its own sake is no proper object to any Christian man. As a means to a higher end it is perfectly legitimate to pursue business and acquire wealth; but to make it the end of life is selfish and degrading. But these men are not only intent on getting gain, but utterly regardless of God in their means of seeking it. They form their plans without any recognition of His authority and will. They determine what they will do on the morrow, as if their lives were their own. Instead of saying, "If the Lord will, we shall live and do" these things, they ride roughshod over divine providence and remind one of the old farmer in the Savior's parable, who had made all his plans and settled all questions in that famous interview with himself, without ever thinking of consulting God, until another form was thrown across this vision and another voice insisted upon taking part in the conference. "But God said." Ah, he had not thought of this. God was not in it, "God was not in all his thoughts," until that dreadful message came, "Fool, this night they require thy soul of thee."

There are two capital letters which I like to interpose in all my appointments, D.V., or, translated into reverent English, "If the Lord will," and I should be afraid to make any program without that little parenthesis. God save us from the worldliness and godlessness of what men call up-to-date business methods. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Prov. 3: 6).

II. THE SPIRIT OF AVARICIOUS HOARDING.

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days" (James 5:1-3).

Here we have another picture of our times; namely, the sudden accumulation of enormous fortunes. Here we have not only the millionaires, but the multi-millionaires, that have grown up like mushrooms in a night, and who rise like colossal figures by the score and hundred all along the vista of our modern commercial

life. They are features and signs of the times. They are full of ominous significance. They have "heaped treasure together for the last days." They are God's signs of the near approach of the Lord's coming. Half a century ago great fortunes were not unknown, but they had chiefly descended as hereditary legacies from ancient houses. But the colossal fortunes of today have grown up in a single generation. The other day the income of a single merchant was estimated at forty millions of dollars. This enormous sum would support a hundred thousand missionaries for one year, and would multiply tenfold the missionary agencies of today, and put the Gospel within the reach of every human being immediately. What an awful responsibility to have such wealth!

Would to God that the men might be prepared to whom the Master could safely entrust vast resources and possibilities. But alas, the holders of the enormous fortunes are here addressed as men to whom they are of little use. "Your gold and silver is cankered," he says, "and the rust of them shall be a witness against you." Money unused is really wasted, and the possessor owns it only in name. The rust of their unused treasure is a witness against them, and tells how little their trust has been spent for God.

Indeed, poor Lazarus at the rich man's gate is truly richer than Dives in all his luxury. Once, it is said, there came in a dream an awful message to a man of selfish wealth, that at a certain hour the richest man in the town was to die. As the day drew near he was prostrated with nervous spasms and overwhelming terror; he felt sure that it was the knell of his doom. Vainly did the physicians administer their opiates. Sleep fled from his eyelid and peace from his mind, and a great horror hung over him night and day. At last the fatal day and hour drew near. With almost insane solicitude he watched the face of the clock as the fateful moment came, and indeed it seemed as it approached that he must surely die. But at length it passed, and he had not succumbed. Gradually the reaction came and the terror passed, and he said, "Perhaps it was but a dream." But a few days later he learned that at that very hour and moment an old man had passed away, a village beggar, but known to all as a veritable saint. And the old miser began to wonder what it meant. Was it indeed true that he was not the richest man in the village, and that this poor old tramp who did not even own a grave, had passed on to the possession of treasures which he could never own? It all seemed to him a bitter irony. Surely it was.

Thank God for a few of the world's rich ones who have learned that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Lu. 12:15.) The other day one of our greatest capitalists declared that no man ought to die immensely rich, and he is setting the example by the liberal distribution of wealth in his last days.

III. THE SPIRIT OF LUXURIOUS EXTRAVAGANCE AND SELF-INDULGENCE.

"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter" (James 5: 5).

Here we have a picture which recalls the banquets of Lucullus and Tiberius, in which every costly luxury was brought from every realm for the gluttonous gratification of a Roman reception. But such scenes are not confined to Roman pride or Roman luxury. Our daily journals tell us of social functions and costly banquets held every night in the season where thousands and even tens of thousands of dollars are offered in vainglorious display and sensual pleasure, and the shameful accessories that often accompany these coarse feasts and "bachelor dinners" are suggested but too plainly by the significant language, "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton."

These exhibitions of godless luxury were associated with the fall of ancient Babylon and Rome, and they are, alas, the signs of the closing days of modern civilization. Surely, as we behold them, their dark shadows are fringed with the light of the better dawning.

IV. THE PICTURE OF INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION.

For the darker shadow of wrong and crime heightens the picture of selfishness and luxury with which the apostle's fearful impeachment of a godless people reaches its climax.

"Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth" (James 5: 4). It is not necessary for us to take the side of either capital or labor in the social or political strikes of today, in order to show that this picture of oppression of the poor is not an obsolete one. Go to the sweat shops of our manufacturing cities, see the poor, attenuated women and children that are toiling for a pittance in suffocating workrooms with long hours of half-remunerated toil, and read the sickening story, that has sometimes come to us, of struggling girls, that have been told to their face that they cannot expect to earn a living merely by honest toil, but must also expect to sell themselves, as well as the labor of their hands, to eke out a sufficient livelihood or help those who are so often dependent upon them. Occasionally the bitter cry of the poor reaches the ears of humanity as well as of the Lord God of Sabaoth, and we get a lurid gleam upon the wrong and sorrow that is done "under the sun," and we say like Solomon, "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive." (Eccles. 4: 1-2.)

V. THE DIVINE FORBEARANCE.

"Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you." This is undoubtedly a reference to the murder of our Lord Jesus Himself by proud and wicked enemies, of whom these worldly men are but the successors and representatives. The apostle means to suggest to the suffering disciples whose wrongs he has already referred to, that they are but following in the steps of their Master, and the patience which they are expected to manifest was first shown by Him who stood amid the shame and suffering of the judgment hall and the cruel cross of Calvary. He exposed His unresisting body to all their murderous cruelty, and bore in silence all the wrong and shame of wicked men. He let Pilate, Herod, and the Scribes and Pharisees have their own way. Yes, they might spit in that gentle face and crown with the mocking thorns at will; it was their day, and well they took advantage of that awful liberty, until they had wrought their wicked will to the full. And so still, in the suffering members of that blessed Master the same wicked world has its way. It is a fearful thing to have our liberty and use it without consulting God. You can hoard your money if you please; you can enjoy the banquet and the song if you will; you can grind the face of the poor and compel them to toil on your hard terms; you can do all this for a little while, and God will not resist you; you have your way and your little day, but remember that God is bringing you to judgment. The great Assize is coming on, and all the witnesses will meet you face to face some day, and then how you will wish that you could live your life once more.

Do not too hastily judge that God has forgotten to be just, because He gives you such a long reprieve. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." (Eccles. 8:11.)

VI. HUMAN PATIENCE.

The divine forbearance is to be our example, and we are to meet the wrongs of men with the same patience and gentleness. Yes, there is wrong. The hire of the laborer is kept back. The hours are hard and long, the compensation insufficient, the whole system harsh and selfish to the core, but it is not harder than Gethsemane. It is not more shameful or painful than the judgment hall and the cruel cross He bore for you. You are but following in His footsteps, you are but filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. Do not go and fight your battle; do not get up a strike or a political party; leave your vindication to Him; "be patient . . . unto the coming of the Lord."

VII. THE GREAT INCENTIVE TO OUR PATIENCE UNDER SUFFERING AND WRONG.

The coming of the Lord. What a practical aspect this blessed hope assumes in this message! How it comes down to the level of our common life, and sheds its light of hope upon our earthly toil! How it goes with us to the factory and harvest field and sets to music the task of the toiler! That day will bring us the righting of our wrongs. That day will pay us the long-deferred hire. That day will put us in our right place and displace the sons of pride, who have so long trampled on the rights of others. That day will make up for toil and bitter loss. That day will put us in the place for which our talents and merits have fitted us, and from which others have excluded us so long. That day will bring the punishment of our oppressors so terribly that our compassion could wish and plead for mercy. That day will confer upon us, if we are true, rewards so precious and so priceless that we will remember our misery only as a vanished dream. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."

But not only is this hope presented as the remedy and recompense for wrong and suffering, but as a great motive in all the trials and duties of our Christian life. Especially is it suggested as the goal of Christian work, and the harvest time of all our seed-sowing. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it."

The suggestion here is for our Christian work and our Christian faith. We must not expect the answer and the fruition too soon. The seed must have time to germinate, the rains must water it, both the early and the latter rain. Many a waiting day must pass before we shall see "the full corn in the ear," and for this we must look away even unto the coming of the Lord. Not always shall we see the results of our labors in the present life. Like Solomon's temple-builders we are but gathering materials for the great edifice, timbers from Lebanon, stones from the quarry, jewels and gold from the mine. But the workers in Lebanon did not see the timbers placed in Jerusalem immediately; other hands bore them to Joppa and Jerusalem, other workmen mounted them to their appointed place. The temple that we are building will not appear in its complete glory until He shall come. Our work is fragmentary, not final. Many a prayer that we breathe upon the air shall meet us at His coming. Many a message that seemed to fall in vain shall come back to us in some ransomed soul in that glad day. Many a plan which we left half completed on earth shall appear then like the rainbow about the throne, a finished circle. That is the crowning day; that is the time of the great reward. Then shall the sacrifices made for Him come back with their hundredfold. Then shall the victor receive the unfading crown. Then shall they that "turn many to righteousness [shine] as the stars forever and ever."

Then let us fix our goal on the heights of yonder advent hope. Let the point of view of every prayer and plan, every sacrifice and service, every enterprise and investment be "unto the coming of the Lord." Yes, and if even much still remains unanswered and unfinished here, remember that this is but half the circle, and the rest will appear on the other side. He may keep you waiting long, and He may hold back much from your view, but though He tarry, wait for Him, for He will surely come, He will not tarry too long. (Hab.

2: 3.)

On one of the battle fields of Pennsylvania a dying lad lay on the ambulance. The surgeon's instruments were ready for the sudden operation that was necessary, but he paused, as he noticed the stupor on the face of the lad, and he said, "No." It was useless and cruel to arouse him for such agony, he could not save his life, let him die in peace. But his comrade said that he must send for his mother. They remonstrated, for they said, "The excitement will but arouse him to feel his agony, but cannot save his life."

But the lad insisted that he must keep his promise both to the mother and to the boy, and they bore him to the hospital, and they soon brought that mother to his side. But they forbade her to speak to him or arouse him to consciousness, and only suffered her to stand in silence and hold his dying hand. But as she stood beside his cot, and gently held that hand, his lips began to move; the eyes were sealed already for their long sleep, but softly he murmured, "Mother, while a gentle light fell upon his face, and a sweet smile wreathed his lips, and he still murmured, "Mother, mother! I knew she would come, I knew that she would come."

And so the waiting Bride of Christ has waited long, and has often been perplexed and seemingly abandoned, and darker days are yet to come, when her enemies will glory in their triumph, but "shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." (Lu. 18:7-8.)

Beloved, shall we write as our watchword and our hope, over against life's darkest trials and hardest toils, the bright inscription and blessed hope, "Unto the Coming of the Lord"?

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