



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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August 8, 2010  
11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Sermon Text: [James 5:1-11](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26](#)  
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 34](#)  
Second Lesson: [James 5:1-11](#)  
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 12:13-21](#)

### **Be Patient and Stand Firm** Guard against impatient greed Guard against impatient grumbling

So did the words I just read to you strike a chord with you farmers about being patient? About a week ago I talked to a farmer about something later this month, at the end of August. He said he didn't know if he'd be able to help me out because he thought he'd still be getting in his first crop of hay. It kind of sounds like he might be a little impatient, right? This is one truth that a farmer learns though, isn't it? It doesn't matter how impatient you become with the weather, you can't change it. So you can either stress yourself out about the things you can't change or you can just sit back and wait for the Lord to take care of you. I think that's why the Holy Spirit had James point us to this so the farmer learns to be patient waiting for the rains as it talked about in what I just read to you.

Patience is a hard thing for us as we wait for the Lord to return. We can easily get distracted. Some of these distractions lead to impatience. There are two very specific ones that the Holy Spirit warns us against through James this morning. He tells us, "Be patient and stand firm because the Lord is coming." He tells us, "Be on your guard against greed." Impatience with what God has given to you and the desire to have more, like maybe someone else has, and the things that it might trip you up and lead you to do that lead you away from God; he tells us to be on guard against that, be on guard against greed, and then be on guard against impatience with one another so that you grumble against each other. Be on guard against grumbling. Then he holds in front of us the example of those who persevered by focusing on the Lord's compassion and mercy.

That first paragraph that I just read to you from James 5, do you think those words apply to you? Or do they just apply to someone else; like those guys on Wall Street, Bill Gates or Warren Buffet or George Soros or someone else, someone in management, someone else, but not us really, right? We aren't rich, right? We tend to think of ourselves as not rich. We always think of someone who is rich as that person down the aisle or down the hallway that has more than we do. We point to our roughing it by saying, "We haven't even bought a flat screen TV yet. We just have one of those big tube things that we're watching at our house. We're poor. We haven't bought cable yet or a dish. We're just watching over the air TV." Tell that to someone who is sleeping on dirt some place in a hut about how "roughing it" you have it.

The true definition of rich is having more than you need, I would think, right? I have an abundance. I am rich. I have more than I need. I think the vast majority of us in our congregation have more than we need to live, right? God has blessed us greatly and there's nothing wrong with the fact God has blessed us greatly. He has given to us and I'm not saying "Oh, that's terrible that we have it." But he does tell us to be on our guard against how we view what he has blessed us with so that we don't set our hearts on these things and we don't become impatient and want more because we see someone else with a bigger car, bigger house, or bigger whatever, and we think we have to have it. He says when that happens, sometimes we make some really poor decisions and we sin.

Those words that he wrote here in James 5, "*Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded;*" the way the financial markets and what has gone on with them in the last couple of years, did it ever feel like as you looked at some of these things that they ate your flesh like fire because you were so worried about what was no longer on that piece of paper telling you some of your statements? We can set our hearts on these things and we can be tempted by greed.

But we aren't management, so he can't be talking to us when he talks about "*Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.*" That couldn't be us, right? These are kind of interesting words when you stop and look at them. As a congregation, don't we have workmen? Don't we have laborers?

When we had the first capital appeal, if I remember correctly, before the first capital appeal was over, we had paid off our debt completely, right? There was no operating debt. Then shortly after that, as a congregation with 200 and some families in our congregation, we decided the best thing we could do to carry out the ministry God entrusted to us was to go to a part-time fifth teacher and then a full-time fifth teacher, right? Over the years as that continued, we ended up going back into debt with an operating line of credit as we didn't meet the obligations that we said as a congregation we were going to carry out. So then a proposal was brought to our congregation again, because we aren't meeting these obligations, to consider charging tuition. That would be on about the 45-50 families that are in the congregation that make use of the school where 67¢ of every dollar that is given to our congregation is spent. The congregation said, if I remember correctly, "This won't fix the deficit, so let's not do it." Even when we called Mr. Pingel, the question was raised at that meeting, "We're not supporting the teachers. Should we really call the fifth teacher or should we go without a fifth teacher because we aren't meeting our obligations?" We said, "Yes, we'll meet our obligations." When we came to the annual meeting last year, we went to the 7 families who are the workers, the laborers in our harvest field, and cut their pay by 5%. Now, before you think I'm whining because my pay got cut, if you remember correctly, I made the motion that we do this because I think we have to do something. But notice how we went from 200-some, to 45-some, to 7-some, and now we are talking about the only way to balance this budget is eliminating a position completely. Now we're down to fixing things on the back of 1.

So, can we honestly ask ourselves the question, have we decided that we want to keep things for ourselves and not support the ministry God has given to us? I think the answer is going to be different for everyone in our congregation. I don't think everyone in our congregation is saying "I don't want to do this." I think people that are probably feeling this pain are probably desperate to do what they can to serve the Lord. But it remains, as we look at these words from James, is this a valid question to ask ourselves? Is it our desire to keep things for ourselves that is leading us not to support the ministry of the gospel that we have decided we want to carry out? It's a valid question. If you can say, "I don't think that's what it is in my heart," then thank the Lord that Satan hasn't tripped you up when it comes to greed. If it is, then the answer is to repent and in Christ find forgiveness for that sin.

Here's the deal when it comes to greed; at times, do I want to give to the Lord what I think I should give to the Lord? At times can I look at it and see that it could be this or that for me or for my family so I don't want to? Yes, because I'm a sinner. Are there going to be people that will be upset with me because I said this in a sermon? Yes, because they're sinners. This is the problem. We're all sinners and we need to look at ourselves honestly and openly and then answer it for ourselves. I'm not asking anyone to turn to one another and answer it for each other but to go to your God and say "Lord, thank you" or "Lord, help me because this is an area I'm struggling in." Then God, in his grace, the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy, first of all he blesses us by forgiving us for the times that we have not done the things we should, and then the more and more that you and I focus on this love and this compassion and this mercy and instead of grumbling about when someone says things like this, the more we look to God and say "Isn't it incredible that God forgives me in spite of what I've done." Then it moves us to want to do more for our Lord. That's how the Lord works. He operates on compassion and mercy.

That's what his goal for us is too...to operate on compassion and mercy. Then also to, in compassion and mercy, be patient with one another, to not give in to this incredibly intense desire our sinful nature has at times to grumble about one another. I think that is a sin in which we are all inclined, and that is a sin that, as I've looked at the history of this congregation, I have detected from time to time. We all have a tendency to grumble, don't we? But look at how he says it. He says, "Don't grumble against each other or you will be judged because the Lord is coming at the door. Don't get impatient with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Build them up. Strengthen them up. Don't just whine about them and complain about them. Build them up." You don't build someone up with a 2x4 of the Law swinging it at their forehead and saying "You should have; you could have; you should have." You do it by pointing to the compassion and the mercy of God and build each other up with that truth.

This last week we had school cleaning. I was there one day and I saw a lot of people and I heard that we had all kinds of people there and things still got done early even though we cut it one day shorter than it had been in the past. That's something to thank the Lord for, for all these people that are serving. That's a great thing. But a couple years back, I remember being at a School Board meeting in which that week I

was on vacation. I wasn't there for school cleaning. I remember talking about x% of people helped and x% of people didn't help with school cleaning of the school families. We were going on and on for about 15-20 minutes about what we can do to make sure that the 46% are there to help the 54% who were actually doing the work or whatever it was and how this is terrible and so on and so forth. There was really a lot of grumbling. Finally, I said "Didn't you guys get done a day early? Didn't all the work get done?" "Yes, but only 54%, or whatever it was, was there." Yeah, so? Why not be thankful for the 54% that were there instead of getting your undies in a bunch about the 46% that aren't? But it's our natural inclination to grumble and complain about what's not going on instead of being thankful and being amazed at what God does through his faithful people.

God does incredible things through his faithful people. God does things that we should never just stop and take for granted but that we ought to thank him for day after day that we have those who are willing to serve and that we have those that are willing to encourage us when we are feeling weak or down and that we have those who are willing to admonish us when we are caught in a sin. When the Lord gives us these things, don't become impatient with them, but instead be patient, stand firm, and consider them a blessing from the very hand of God. They are the ones that help us persevere.

In that last paragraph, it talks about perseverance... "the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" and how they persevered against difficulty. Then he specifically mentions Job. I want you to think about Job just for a minute to illustrate the compassion and mercy of God.

Seven thousand sheep...I think I got that number right. That's what Job had in [Job 1](#). I don't know how many cattle. I forget that. I don't remember the other things that are listed, but I do remember seven sons and three daughters. But remember in the beginning of Job, he lost all those. Satan took all those. Satan came and took them all. Satan took all his livestock...gone. His seven sons and three daughters...killed. Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. Naked I've come from my mother's womb. Naked I'll return." ([Job 1:20-21](#).) He confessed his trust in God. But as he continued on, when those three friends came, he challenged God a little bit. At the end of the book, God comes to him and says, "Tell me, were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth? Do you understand all these things? Can you fully understand the mind of God?" ([Job 40-41](#).) Job has to stand there in complete silence.

We're told that God blessed Job at the end of his life then and gave him 14,000 sheep...double what he had. Double what he had in cattle. Double what he had in the other things. But the Lord only gave him seven more sons and three more daughters. ([Job 42](#).) How come the Lord didn't give him double? The Lord, who is full of compassion and mercy, did give him double, didn't he? Seven sons on earth, seven sons in heaven. Three daughters on earth, three daughters in heaven. Fourteen sons and six daughters that Job would spend eternity with because the Lord is full of

compassion and mercy. Job stayed focused on that compassion and mercy once the Lord had set him in his place. He learned patience the hard way, but he learned it by focusing on the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy.

So if you want to be patient and stand firm, focus on the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy.