

## **New Year's Eve 2018 – James 5:7-11 – “Tough Times Won't Last, Patient Christians Will!”**

A well-respected preacher was asked to share the toughest speaking engagement he ever had. The preacher thought, then remembered when he was asked to address a group of farmers going through tough times. Some of them had already lost their farms. Others were on the verge of bankruptcy.

He really struggled with what to say to encourage them. So, he began by reminding them of other times in our country's history when farmers also went through tough times.

He even shared the true-life story of his own parent's struggle on their farm. They didn't give up. They made it. Then he closed with what has become the motto of today's farmer: *"Tough times don't last - Tough people do."*

Farmers aren't the only tough crowd to address these days. There's another group that's had their share of tough sledding, as well. I'm talking about disciples of Jesus ... God's people ... you and me!

As we count down the final hours of 2018, we naturally look back at all our joys and blessings, but we can't help but think about all the things that challenged our faith. We realize how tough it is for Christians, people like us, to hang on to our faith.

Satan is hell-bent on destroying our faith. Anti-Christian and immoral viewpoints are today's standards for living. It's not the Bible anymore. Some, who once worshipped with us, have wandered from

the faith. Others are on the verge. Satan won't rest until he owns us.

Tonight, James gives us encouragement and a motto to live by as we step into 2019: **“Tough Times Won't Last – Patient Christians Will!”**

James says: **Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.** His first bit of encouragement ... *Don't stop believing that the Lord is near.*

Where is our mighty Lord with rescue for his followers, and ruin for his enemies? Where is the Christ who promises to answer quickly, to work out things for our eternal good, and to be where 2 or 3 gather in his name?

Whether you were the Christians who were the target audience when James first wrote his letter, or Christians like us today, it's hard to be one of Jesus' followers when Satan constantly tries to plant the idea that you've been forgotten by the Lord.

Christ hasn't forgotten about his promise to be your daily companion. He's a faithful and a gracious God. He's faithful like the early and late rains which water the farmer's crops. He's gracious like the farmer's crops which feeds the people.

Think back over the past 364 days. We've tasted this grace. We've tasted it in his daily forgiveness of sins. Hour after hour,

day after day, month after month, we committed sin after sin. We haven't revered God or served others like we should. We haven't loved others as much as we've loved ourselves. While breaking his laws, we've also doubted his promises.

Doubting God's promises isn't anything new for God's people. We just celebrated the birth of Jesus, 5,000 years in the making. 5,000 years of waiting and wondering since the first promise in the Garden of Eden. God's promises are true. He sent prophets as his messengers of encouragement to keep his people awake and watching patiently for the baby boy to be born in Bethlehem. Our weeks of birthday celebration each year attest to his faithfulness.

It's been 2,000 years since Jesus returned to heaven, but he promised to be with us to the very end of the age. God's promises are true. This time he sent apostles as his messengers of encouragement each time we open his Word to read, listen or study it. He's keeping us awake and patient. Our yearly celebration of Jesus' life and death, his resurrection and ascension attest to his faithfulness.

- Don't let the tough times you're facing trouble you.
- Don't agonize over the anti-Christian views of those who demand toleration for all beliefs – except Christianity.
- Don't worry about how society is trying to rip God out of our lives and Christ out of our Christmas?

These tough times won't last – Christians patiently believing the Lord is near will!

James goes on: **“Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters!** His second bit of encouragement ... *Don't stop living like the Lord is near.*

It's hard to keep living the Christian life, when our sinful flesh is constantly tells us not to. James picks out the contagious sin of grumbling, complaining. We grumble when we're impatient with how things are going for us. We grumble when we think the world should revolve around us a little more.

Grumbling shows itself in the cruel words we speak, but it can also hide itself in the unkind thoughts we think. It's so easy to grumble.

- Tell us to work a little bit harder than we want – we grumble.
- Tell us to clean our room when we want to do something else – we grumble.
- Tell us we're too bossy or too nit-picky – we grumble.
- When others take for granted all that we do for them – we grumble.
- When our church family does something or decides on something we don't agree with – we grumble.

Of all the things we, as God's people, do that upsets him, grumbling has to be in the top five. It points a dissatisfied finger back at him.

Over the past 52 weeks would you say that grumbling and complaining found a way into your life often? Now, remember how often we wondered how those OT Israelites

could grumble against the Lord after all he did for them?

Thankfully we have a patient and forgiving God. And, in spite of all the times we've complained or taken him and his love for granted, he's never loved us less, or held it against us, or withheld his forgiveness from us.

How are we to live in these spiritually tough times? Let James tell us: **Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**

If anyone had a reason to grumble it was the prophets. They brought God's Word, but their hearers mistreated many and even killed some. They could have grumbled. But they didn't. They knew those tough times wouldn't last.

Job is the best-known prophet for showing perseverance. He remained patient through the tough times even when his wife encouraged him to commit suicide when tragic news kept pouring in.

Is it getting more difficult to put up with the rudeness of others? Is it getting more difficult to forgive and to let God deal with those who treat us poorly? Is it getting more difficult to accept what God allows you to face? Don't give up. Be encouraged by the fact that tough times won't last – patient believers in Christ, like you, will!