

## James 8

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James 5:7-12

AT Halloween, there pop up different evangelistic outreach events that are designed to scare the HELL out of people and presumably get them to heaven.

There are two things that bother be about things like this. First, we usually depict hell as a hole in the ground with contorted bodies and demons running around poking people with pitchforks. I think C.S. Lewis was on to something in his book *THE GREAT DIVORCE* with his conception of hell. Instead of thinking of a hole in the ground, a manhole to hell, with fingers clamoring to get out in vain, it might be better to think that everyone in hell is happy to be there and does not want to leave. Lewis writes, "I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end: that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. Its constituents don't want to leave because they would have to give up themselves to do so, a thought that is intolerable.

The other problem I have with these presentations is that everything that happens is in a melodramatic moment. It is as though everyone has a choice that comes down to a split second decision of choosing Door Number 1 or Door Number 2. The process of life is much different for most of us than walking through a house and at the end of the tour choosing a door. In theological terms, this is called "decisional regeneration." What happens to those who don't take the tour?

It seems to be that if it was as simple as presenting a power point presentation on heaven and one on hell, then asked those people that viewed the presentation to choose between the two like they would choose a vacation destination, most people would certainly choose heaven. Yet, that is not always the case. In our text we see something about the decisions of life.

### 1. DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

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Not all that long ago, a book by that title appeared. In it, the author offers hundreds of exercises that are designed to keep our emotions in proper balance. While I would be the first to agree that being overly neurotic won't get you anywhere and that it is better to let your life's purpose guide you rather than trying to string along all the various activities, James is trying to teach us something very important here. **Patience, grumbling, and steadfastness** with your words are the things that can show you who you are. Why?

## 1. Patience is a Must

**PATIENCE** – James uses the term three times in 5:7-8. The noun form is used in 5:10. Patience is a passive virtue; it waits. We wait, i.e. we wait for a wound to heal. In this sense, it is longsuffering or forbearance.

**STAND FIRM (STRENGTHEN YOUR HEART) 5:8** – This term is a bit more active. It has the sense of steely resolve. Luke 9:51 uses it to describe Jesus who “set his face like a flint.” Soldiers stand firm when they stay ready for battle. We stand firm when someone gets angry with us and we do not respond in kind.

**PERSEVERE 5:11** – This word describes the more active side of patience. It is resolve or determination to continue on the right course, despite difficulty. Runners must persevere to finish a marathon. Charles Lindbergh persevered when he flew 3,600 miles across the Atlantic Ocean at 109 MPH for 33 ½ hours in a plane that had no amenities.

How are you with patience?

## 2. Grumbling Creates a Gap vs. 9

C.S. Lewis speaks of a grumbling woman in a conversation between two ghosts. One says to the other, “What troubles ye son?” “I am troubled, son, because the unhappy creature doesn’t seem to be the sort of soul that ought to even be in danger of damnation. She is not wicked: She is only a silly, garrulous old woman who has got into a habit of grumbling.” Said the other, “The question is whether she is now a grumbler. It is important to know whether she is a grumbler or only a grumble.” “But how can she be a grumbler without being a grumble?” “Hell begins with a grumbling mood. However, you can come out of it through repentance.” “Without repentance, the grumble goes on forever like a machine.”

The small stuff reveals the big stuff in our lives. James says that “Jesus is at the door.” (See 2 Peter 3:8 for God’s timetable). We must live in such a way as every day was our last. **Scripture never promotes the question “When will Christ return? It always asks the question, “Will you be ready when Christ returns?”**

## 3. STEADFASTNESS (11)

Think about the prophets for a moment:

-Isaiah was told to preach before anyone would believe him

-Jeremiah preached while Israel was being attacked. Everything he was told by God was considered traitorous

-Hosea was told to pursue a prostitute

These are big things. It is easy to sweep over this verse about Job. What gives any book or movie a powerful ending? The details that lead up to the ending. Big moments are built on the little moments that precede it.

James does not leave us with the weight of small decisions or big decisions on our shoulders. JESUS HAS BEEN PATIENT WITH US. JESUS HAS STOOD BY US. JESUS DOESN'T GRUMBLE AGAINST US. HE EVEN PRAYS FOR US.

*Cornelius Plantiga writes: "As Christians, we see her, a spiritually whole person. She longs for God and the beauty of God and Christ and Christ likeness, for the dynamite of the Holy Spirit and spiritual maturity. She is a person of character consistency, a person who rings true whenever you tap her. She keeps promises. Her motives include faith. She knows God is good and practices gratitude for the goodness shown her by God. She ponders the life of spiritual mentors and compares them to her own. She knows the Word of God and speaks of it tenderly. She is characterized by humility, hope, endurance, forthrightness, and hospitality.*

*Why is it so? The point is to be lined up right, to seek first the kingdom of God. Her object is to increase the net amount of shalom in the world. To glorify God is to do these things and, by doing them, to make God's intentions in the world more luminous and God's reputation more lustrous.*

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