

Patient Till Christ Comes

James 5:7-11

Pastor John Miller

I want you to follow with me. We're going to read the whole text, and then we'll come back and break it down.

James says, beginning in verse 7, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." That's the theme of this passage: being patient until the Lord comes. "See how the farmer..."—or "husbandman"—"...waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful."

James is addressing Christians here. But in verses 1-6 of this chapter, he is speaking to non-Christians. They were the wicked wealthy. But it's very clear that when you come to verse 7, he says, "Therefore be patient, brethren." So he's speaking to brethren in light of what he said in verses 1-6—thus, the "therefore." Because God is going to judge the wicked, He's going to set all wrongs right, He is going to vindicate us, He's going to redeem us in the coming of the Lord—that is the reason for the exhortation: "Therefore be patient, brethren." So James is clearly talking to Christians about patience, in light of the Lord's return.

What does James mean by the word "patient"? Just hearing the word "patient," I get impatient. I don't like the word "patience." When you tell me, "Be patient," I want to punch you in the nose. It's called "the laying on of hands." It's in Christian love. "Don't tell me to be patient! I want what I want, and I want it now!"

We have a difficult time with patience. We want our computers to be lightning fast. We want our phones to be fast. We want waiters and waitresses to be fast. By the way, why do they call them "the waiter"? I'm the one who's waiting. I wait to get in, wait to get seated, wait for my water, wait for the menu, wait to give my order, wait for the food to show up and wait for them to bring me back my change. You wait and wait, yet they call them "the waiter." Who's actually "the waiter" here? I'm the one who's waiting.

Another one of my pet peeves is that I'm the first one waiting at the red light, and the moment the light turns green, someone honks behind me. I can't even get my foot off the brake onto the gas when they want me to go. I tell you it's so hard for me to maintain my pastoral sanctification. I want to put it in park, get out of my car and I want to say to the guy, "Is there something wrong with your horn?"

I heard about one guy who stalled in an intersection, and there were people honking behind

him. So he gets out of his car, goes back to the guy honking behind him and said, “You go try to start my car, and I’ll stay here and honk your horn.” That’s a good arrangement. But it’s dangerous to do that today. You could get killed doing something like that. Or an article could appear in the newspaper: “Pastor beats up man in intersection.” I don’t think that would fly.

What do we mean by “patience?” Let me break it down. The word “patient” or “patience” that appears in verses 7-10—there’s a different meaning for “patient” in verse 11—comes from two Greek words: “macros,” which means “long” or sometimes “big” or “large”; and the word “thumos”—from which we get our word “thermometer”—which means “temper.” So it means “long-tempered,” and we usually translate it “long-suffering.” It’s the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation—in the face of honking horns. It’s bearing insult and injury without retaliation. Someone said, “It’s keeping your car in neutral when you want to grind the gears.” I like that. You want to just pop the clutch and burn rubber, but instead you just kind of cool your jets.

Jerry Bridges explains how this concept works out in every-day life. He said, “The aspect of patience is the ability to suffer long, a long time under mistreatment by others without growing resentful or bitter.”

Now there may be some of you today who are being mistreated. You’ve been lied about. You’ve been dealt a wrong hand. Things weren’t done right. Maybe it’s a husband. Maybe it’s a wife. Maybe it’s a coworker. Maybe it’s a boss. Maybe it’s an employee. You feel hurt and you want to retaliate. But long-suffering is that ability to suffer long. As it says in 1 Corinthians 13:4, “Love suffers long and is kind.” Same word—“suffers long and is kind.”

After I’ve suffered long, I’m usually not very kind. I’m not very patient. But God wants to fill us with His Spirit; the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and long-suffering. It’s in Galatians 5:22. It’s one of the fruit of the Spirit.

How long must we be patient in our suffering and in our mistreatment? Notice verse 7: “Until the coming of the Lord.” There are two reoccurring words or phrases. The first is the word “patient” or “patience.” The second is “the coming of the Lord.” Let me point them out. In verse 7, we see “the coming of the Lord.” In verse 8, we see, “For the coming of the Lord is at hand.” Again, in verse 9, we see, “The judge is standing at the door.” Those all are a reference to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What coming is James talking about? You ask, “What do you mean, ‘What coming’? The Lord’s coming.” But the Bible teaches us that Jesus will come first for the church. It’s called the Rapture. I know that people object and say, “Oh, this Rapture. It’s not even in the Bible.” But it most certainly is. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says that we shall “be caught up.” The word is “harpazo.” The Latin Vulgate translation actually translates that “rapturous.” It means to be raptured or to be caught up. Harpazo means to be caught up or taken up or taken by force.

So the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ—and it could be any time now—will come again. It’s

called the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Nothing has to happen before Jesus comes back and the church is caught up. Those who are born again will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. I believe He could come while I'm preaching now. That's not because I'm going to go a long time. I've always thought I'd love to get raptured in the middle of a sermon. That would be cool. But you—if you're not saved—will be left. Can you imagine? People disappear and you're left in the church by yourself. You'd have a lot of nice cars in the parking lot you could drive home. But you'd be left behind.

There's also what's called the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which is at least seven years after that, at the end of the Tribulation when Christ comes back. This time He comes to the earth in power and glory. Jesus said that "As the lightning shines from the east to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." This is the great appearing. It's interesting that the word "appearing" there, that the Lord will come again, is the word "peruzo." It means that it will be a physical, bodily appearance, and His presence will be with us. So Christ will come in power and majesty and glory. He will reign on the throne of David for a thousand years. It's called "the kingdom age." That will flow into the eternal state. That's when Jesus will come and judge the wicked, and He will right all wrongs. He will vindicate His people.

My guess is—but we can't be sure, because James doesn't say—that this "coming of the Lord is drawing near," is a reference to the Second Coming, when the Lord will come and vindicate His people and judge the wicked.

I know it's hard to be patient until Jesus comes. So to help us, James gives us three encouraging examples of patience and endurance. He gives us the example of the farmer, he gives us the example of the prophet and he gives us the example of Job, the Old Testament character who suffered so much. Let's look at each one of them individually.

First, he talks about the farmer as an example of patience. Look at it in verse 7. James says, "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain." If you are impatient and want things quickly, don't go into farming. Farmers have to be patient. Verse 7 says, "The farmer waits." And then it says, "waiting patiently."

I'll never forget years ago my attempt to be a farmer. I know my name is John, so Farmer John would be perfect. But I remember the first time I ever tried to plant a vegetable garden. I will never, ever do that again. We have stores that sell vegetables; why work so hard to get them from the ground? I didn't know you had to prepare the soil. I didn't know that when you put the seed in, it would take a long time before something started to grow. I was getting hungry. I thought, Hey, I'm going to eat veggies. I'm going to be healthy. That's cool. Farmer John. I got my little garden going and already I'm sweating. It's too much work, and I'd rather just go buy the stuff. After I plant the thing, I'm waiting weeks and then this little thing started to grow. No one ever told me about gophers and bugs. They only ones that ate from my garden that summer were the gophers. They devoured everything. I had this cantaloupe that was just perfect. I thought, If nothing else, I've got one cantaloupe. But before it ripened, this gopher

came and severed the vine. So my cantaloupe shriveled up. It was like a giant raisin I got out of my garden that year. So I do not farm, because it's hard work. It takes time and patience that must endure.

The farmer must have faith and patience. Why are they willing to wait and be patient? Number one, because the fruit is precious. Verse 7 says, "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit." On the way to Monterey this weekend, we drove through central valley California and saw all the farms and all the fields and all the fruit trees and saw all the farming going on there. That's a precious thing. I thank God that other people farm, and I can eat the produce of their labor. But I don't do farming. The farmer waits because the fruit is precious.

Notice secondly, because the harvest is a process. Notice it in verse 7: It refers to "the early and latter rain." The early rain would be around October. It would come and soften the soil. They would plant in the middle of the winter. Then the latter rain would come in April or May, and they would reap the harvest over the summer months. So you had the early and the latter rain. What James is trying to point out is that there is a process; it takes time. The fruit is precious, but the process is long. So you can't be impatient.

God also wants to work a harvest in our own lives. We must trust God to work. We must be patient with God's process. Our hearts are the soil, and the seed is God's Word. God has seasons of life. Have you ever noticed that when you grow older, you start to see the seasons of life? You get married, you have kids, then you're empty-nesters, then you're taking your son's furniture for the last time to drop it off, and you're praising God that it's no longer in your garage. You miss your kids and it's hard, but you're going through this season of life. Then there are hard and difficult times. You lose your health. You may lose some wealth. You go through these phases. God is using all this. Why? Because He purposes a crop.

I love the statement by the saintly Samuel Rutherford, who said, "Why should I tremble at the plow of my Lord that makes deep furrows in my soul? He's no idle husbandman; He purposes a crop." How true that is. When God allows sorrow and suffering, when He allows the rain to fall and He brings the sunshine and takes you through the seasons of life, He's trying to produce fruit in your life. One aspect of that fruit is certainly long-suffering or patience. It's so very important.

In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches." The "Father is the vinedresser," verse 1. He prunes back the vine, and it's painful. Could you imagine if a grape vine could talk when it's being pruned what it would say? "What are you doing? Why are you cutting me?" Yet the vinedresser knows that that is what brings more fruit. So the process is painful, but it brings a beautiful harvest. God is working in your life right now to bring a harvest of spiritual fruit. You need to be patient.

God wants you to "establish your hearts," verse 8 of our text. The word "establish" there suggests the mustering up of courage, the strengthening of your inner being. The New English Bible renders that "be stout hearted." It's a firmness of faith. Also in verse 8, James says, "For

the coming of the Lord is at hand.” He also says that the Lord “is standing at the door,” verse 9.

As we’re growing and God is producing fruit, and like the farmer we’re being patient, He’s developing character. Notice that He says in verse 9 that as you’re waiting for your crop, you’re complaining. “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned,” or “judged.” “Behold, the judge is standing at the door!”

The word “grumble” in verse 9 means literally to “sigh,” to “groan” or to “murmur.” Quit griping and complaining or sighing or groaning. Don’t blame your problems on other brothers. Again, the New English Bible renders verse 9, “My brother, don’t blame your troubles on one another.” As we’re waiting for Jesus Christ to come back, let’s not bite and devour one another. Let’s not complain, gripe and let’s not moan. Let’s be patient. Let’s wait. Let God produce the fruit, because the Lord is coming back. Someone said, “The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.” I believe that God allows our hardships to produce a thing of beauty in our lives. So the message of the farmer is that we should be working while we wait.

There is a second picture, in verse 10, of the prophet. It says, “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.” So the farmer is patient, and the prophets, who were suffering affliction, were patient. The farmer is working, and the prophets are witnessing. What do we do until the Lord comes back? We work and we witness. We believe Jesus is coming again, so we’re busy working and witnessing.

James doesn’t tell us which of the prophets he’s referring to here. Was it Isaiah? Was it Daniel? Tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two. The Bible says that Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den. But all of them spoke in the name of the Lord. Notice verse 10: All “spoke in the name of the Lord.”

I believe that anyone who speaks for God, in the name of God, will be persecuted. If you stand up and witness boldly and courageously and do not compromise the truth, people will oppose you and you’ll be persecuted. The Bible says that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

One of my favorite prophets is Jeremiah. He is called “the weeping prophet.” He wrote the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, which is about his lamenting and weeping. Why do they call Jeremiah “the weeping prophet”? Because he preached to Judah during its darkest days. Prior to the Babylonian captivity, Judah had turned away from God. They had apostatized. They weren’t worshipping Jehovah; they were worshipping pagan gods. They were sinning. Every man was “doing what was right in his own eyes.”

And here’s the amazing thing: For 40 years, Jeremiah preached repentance. And after 40 years of preaching, he had not one convert. You think, Wow! He should turn into a farmer or something else. He should get another profession. Jeremiah was preaching God’s Word. He was representing God. He was God’s man speaking God’s message. But he had no converts. He was rejected, put in stocks, put in prison, lowered into a muddy cistern and left to die. But

through it all, he was patient.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake...for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." So if you are being put down for your faith and rejected for your witness, you are in good company.

What encouragement can we receive from these prophets and their example? Number one, they were doing God's will, yet they suffered. You can be smack dab in the center of God's will, you can be God's messenger doing God's work, you can be living a godly life and suffering will still come to you. God's never promised that life would be smooth. They would go through a difficult time. Notice that verse 10 says that they are "an example of suffering and patience," even though they "spoke in the name of the Lord."

I think of a time when Jesus told His disciples to get into a little boat on the Sea of Galilee. It was late afternoon, beginning to get dark and He told them to cross the lake to the other side. Fair enough. They got in the boat and took off on the evening boat ride. Jesus had gone up a mountain to pray. While the disciples were toiling out on the Sea of Galilee, a storm came up.

Ever been on a camping trip where everything's going wrong? When it starts to rain, you think, Whose idea was this trip?! Who can we blame? Who can we yell at? Whose idea was it to go tent camping in January in South Dakota? Why are we here?!

So the storm's coming and the waves are crashing over the boat and they say, "Whose idea was this midnight boat ride?!" Someone said, "It was Jesus' idea." Jesus was up on the mountain having a prayer meeting. He was up hangin' on the mountain praying. I believe that Jesus was praying for His disciples. He knew they would encounter the storm.

Do you know that when God sends you on a mission, He knows what's going to happen? He knows what you're going to encounter. God is in control of your circumstances.

At that time, as the disciples were rowing against the wind, Jesus came walking on the water to them. I believe, as John Bunyan said, that in times of affliction, we most commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God. That's when the disciples encountered the Lord. Jesus delivered them and brought them safely to shore. They were doing the will of God, because Jesus told them to get in the boat. Yet, they still encountered a storm.

I say that because a lot of times people will say, "I must have done something wrong. I must be out of the will of God. I must have married the wrong person. This marriage isn't God's will. It's just too difficult. I must have done something wrong, and God is punishing me." No; you can be in God's will and still suffer and go through hardships.

Secondly, God cared for them in their suffering. The prophets suffered in the will of God, but God helped them and cared for them. I think of Elijah when he was discouraged about his ministry, and he was ready to give up. He got so discouraged at one point that he actually

prayed, "God, kill me!" How's that for a prayer? "In Jesus' name. Just take me out right now!" Have you ever gotten so bummed out that you wanted to die? Now that was a prayer that Elijah could be thankful that God didn't answer. I've prayed a lot of things that I'm glad God didn't answer. I'm glad God didn't answer that prayer.

God told Elijah that what he needed was just to take a nap. That's cool. I took a nap for the first time in weeks the other day. Oh, praise be to the Lord! Praise Jehovah! It was amazing. I thought, Why don't I do this more often? It was amazing. I woke up refreshed and strengthened and clear headed. Sometimes you just need to take a nap.

Then after the nap, God sent an angel to bake him a cake. You say, "I like this sermon; take a nap and have some cake." So the angel showed up and baked him a little cake. I'm sure it was angel-food cake. He ate the cake, and then in the strength of that, he ran for the Lord. Then God spoke to Elijah. It wasn't in the wind or in the earthquake, but God spoke to him in a still, small voice. God comes to us to say, "Take a nap. Get something to eat." God sent the ravens to feed him. He drank from the brook. God meets us in our time of need. God cares for His prophets. Someone said, "The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you." That's true.

Thirdly, they patiently kept witnessing, even though they were suffering. We should do the same. Even though we get laughed at or mocked or rejected or we see no evidence of people coming to Christ—maybe it's a husband, a wife, a coworker, friend, a child or a rebellious teenager—we need to pray and keep witnessing until the Lord brings them to Him.

Now James talks about the last example of patience. He goes from the example of the farmer, verses 7-9; to the prophets, verse 10; and now to the man Job, verse 11. He says, "Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." The patience of Job is proverbial. Everyone knows about the suffering of Job and how he patiently endured and he blessed the Lord and he honored God through that situation.

But I want to point out something: In verse 11, we have a different word translated "patience" from the word "patience" in verses 7-10. In verses 7-10, the word "patient" or "patience" means "long-suffering" with people. But in verse 11, there is a different Greek word used, which means "endurance" or "perseverance" in circumstances. So we are to have both patience with people and patience with circumstances. Those are the two things that really get to you; right? Have you ever thought, I love humanity, but it's people I can't stand. They just bum me out. Lord, if I could just be alone somewhere where I didn't have to deal with anything, I'd be happy.

Have you ever had a day in which anything that could go wrong went wrong? It's like Murphy's Law. It's like, if you drop your peanut-butter sandwich, it always lands peanut-butter side down. Everything happens. "What else is going to happen today?" You get irritated, impatient and upset.

So we're first to be patient with people, and then we're to be patient with circumstances. It means that you can stay put, stand fast, when you would like to run away. Maybe you want to run right now. Maybe God brought you to hear this message today, because you want to run from your marriage. You're actually thinking about running from your marriage. You'd like to just disappear. Maybe you want to run from your job. Maybe you want to give up responsibility. Maybe the pressures of the home and family are too great. You just want to drop it all and run. Maybe you want to be like a bird with wings that just flies away. But the word "patience" means that God gives you perseverance. God gives you endurance. God gives you strength.

When it comes to Job, he was a rich and righteous man. The story goes that God was bragging about Job, and Satan was listening in. Satan said, "It's no wonder that Job serves You, God, because You've blessed him so much. Look at all that he has. Skin for skin, if you let me persecute him—let me take away the things that You've given him—he will curse You to Your face."

Now I want you to understand that the theme of the book of Job is not suffering. The theme of the book of Job is this: Is God worthy to be worshipped apart from the gifts that He gives? Do you know who was on trial in the book of Job? Not Job. God was on trial, because Satan was accusing God by saying, "You're not worthy to be worshipped unless You bless people. You give them health and wealth. You give Job all these things. No wonder he goes to church. No wonder he prays. No wonder he reads his Bible. No wonder he is following You. Look how good You've been to him! Let me take all this away, and he will curse You to Your face. Let's put You to the test, God, and see if Job will still love You and serve You." Amazingly, God said, "Okay; go for it." But God put a hedge around Job. He said, "You can take everything Job has, but you can't touch his body."

I believe that God puts a hedge around us. I believe with all my heart that Biblically and experientially, nothing can happen to me except what is filtered through the love of God. God's in control. Every circumstance of my life God knows about and is in control.

So in one day, Job lost everything. You think you've had a bad day? He lost all of his livestock. His children were all gathered in one place having a party, and a big wind came, hit the building, it collapsed and killed his entire family. The only thing Job had left was his loving, encouraging, supportive wife. Just as the patience of Job is proverbial, so the impatience of Mrs. Job is proverbial. She said, "Why don't you just curse God and die right now? Why don't you just give up?"

"Thank you, sweetheart. I needed that encouragement. Bless you, dear." At a time like that, everyone needs a wife who supports you and encourages you.

Job finally said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. I came into this world naked, and I will go out of this world naked. Blessed be the name of the Lord." All through that, Job did not curse God, and Job did not argue with God. Then God restored his health and wealth. Job was prosperous in the latter end of his life.

Job was not perfect, but he was patient, he kept his faith and he trusted in God. The Bible says in Job 42:12-17, “Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters....In all of the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. After this Job lived 140 years and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days.”

In verse 11 of our text, Job experienced God's compassion and mercy. God is very compassionate, and God is full of tender mercies. Job said, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You,” Job 42:5.

If I can encourage you—and it's as much of a challenge for me as it is for you—I don't know what you're going through. I don't know your circumstances. But God is in control. He's no idle husbandman. He purposes a crop. Don't freak out if He's plowing up the soil of your hard heart. He's trying to soften it. If God has put you in an adverse situation with difficulties, He is trying to produce fruit in your life. He's trying to give you endurance. He's trying to make your heart strong. The fruit is precious. It's a process.

Like Job, he didn't understand why he was suffering. His three friends show up—if you want to call them “friends.” They said, “Okay. Fess up, Job. You must have done something wrong.” Not only do you need a loving, supportive wife, you need friends who will really encourage you. “Come on, Job. You know you've done something wrong. God's punishing you.”

“No, I haven't done anything. I don't know why I'm suffering.”

Someone said, “Never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light.” God has promised, “I'll never leave you nor forsake you.” God's promised, “As your day is, so shall your strength be.” He says, “The plans that I have for you are good, to bless you and to prosper you and to give you an expected end.” But we need to wait and to be patient.

If you take all three of these examples, we see the example of the farmer—we need to keep working and wait for the precious harvest; like the prophets, we need to keep witnessing and sharing the good news that Christ is coming; and like Job, we need to keep waiting and trusting God that He is compassionate and full of mercy.

Jesus will come and set all things right. Listen to me, my beloved. Jesus is coming again. And when He comes, He will set all things right. We need to be patient and wait for that day.