

Patient Till Christ Comes

James 5:7-11

Pastor John Miller

In reading James 5: 7-11, he says, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer 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...”—or “patience”—“...of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

In verse 7, James says, “Therefore be patient, brethren.” And the words “patient,” “patience” or “patiently” appear in verses 7-11 five times in the King James translation. It tells you what the subject matter of our text is.

In the text, James is actually addressing the saints. In verses 1-6 of this chapter, he was speaking to the wicked wealthy. They were indicted not because they were wealthy, but because they obtained their wealth by wicked, evil means and used it for selfish gain. So he is speaking as a prophet to the wicked wealthy about God coming to judge and condemn them.

Now, in verse 7, he begins to speak directly to the brethren. Verses 1-6 were for the benefit of the brethren; they knew God would judge the wicked wealthy. Then verse 7 says, “Therefore be patient, brethren.” And when he uses the word “brethren” in verse 7, he’s not only talking to the men. It’s a generic term for the believers, the Christians, the brethren, which includes brothers and sisters in Christ. James also uses the word “brethren” five times in verses 7-19—in verses 7, 9, 10, 12 and 19. And in our text, James refers to “the coming of the Lord” three times.

So our theme, the big picture, the big idea is that the Lord is coming back, and He will take vengeance on the wicked and vindicate the righteous, so the brethren are to be patient. Now we’ll pick apart this idea, in this text, phrase by phrase.

First, notice that James says, “Be patient.” What does James mean by “Be patient”? Whenever I hear the word “patience,” I get impatient and a little aggravated. The last thing I want to hear is someone tell me, “Be patient.”

One of my pet peeves is when I’m the first one stopped at a red light at an intersection, the light turns green and immediately someone behind me honks their horn. “It just turned green! It takes time to take my foot off the brake and put it on the accelerator!” I can’t tell you how tempted I am to put the car in park, get out, go back to the one who honked and say, “Is there something wrong with your horn?!” That would be dangerous to do today in our world. If I did that, I’m afraid they might say, “Well, I’m from Revival, I saw it was you and I just wanted to say, ‘Hi’.” So if you see me at a red light, be patient. I am getting older, and it takes me awhile for

me to get that foot off the brake and onto the accelerator and get that car moving. “Be patient, brethren.”

And when you go to a restaurant and you wait to get a table, you wait for your menu, you wait to order, you wait for your food, and you wait for your check—and they call the person who serves you “the waiter.” I’m the waiter! “All I’ve done since I got to this joint is wait! What’s the deal?!” So the natural heart of the unregenerate individual is impatience. We don’t want to be patient.

The word “patient” comes from two, Greek words. The first is “makrós,” which means “long,” and the second one is “thumos,” which means “temper.” So the word means “long-tempered” or “long suffering.” It’s the quality of restraint in the face of provocation. It’s bearing insult or injury without retaliation.

In verses 7-10, there is one Greek word that means “patience.” It means that we don’t retaliate when we’re provoked or mistreated. We don’t strike back; we’re patient. However, in verse 11, it is a little different Greek word that means we are “patient under circumstances.” The word used in verses 7-10 means “patience in provocation from people.” And the word used in verse 11 means we’re “patient under circumstances.” So there are two kinds of patience: we don’t strike back when we’re mistreated or abused by people, and we’re also patient in the adversities of life. So we have to be patient.

Now notice in verse 7 there is a “therefore.” It says, “Therefore be patient.” That word takes you back to verses 1-6. In light of God’s judgment on the wicked rich, “Therefore be patient.” God is going to judge them; you don’t have to take vengeance into your own hands. Verse 6 says, “You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.” He was speaking to the wicked rich, how they condemned and killed the just, but they were patient and didn’t resist. And in light of that, James says that the believers need to be patient or long-tempered and not retaliating.

Someone said, “The storm of indignation is past, in verses 1-6, and from this point to the end of the letter, James writes in tones of tenderness and affection.” I like that. So from verse 7 to the end of the chapter, it has tones of affection and tenderness, as he speaks to the believers in light of the Lord’s return and lays out how we are supposed to live. We are to be long-suffering or patient.

And God is revealed in the Scriptures as long-suffering or patient. And when we are patient, we are God-like. So when I’m patient, I am displaying the attribute of God. And patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:22. And in Ephesians 5:18, it says that when I am “filled with the Spirit,” I have patience. In 1 Corinthians 13:4, it says “Love...”—which is agape love—“...suffers long and is kind.” It’s talking about patience and perseverance. And after suffering long, if we’re “filled with the Spirit,” we’ll show kindness. And how long must we be patient in our suffering and mistreatment? The answer is in verse 7. “...until the coming of the Lord.”

You say, “Do I have to wait that long?” Yes. Be patient; the Lord’s coming. And verse 8 says,

"For the coming of the Lord is at hand." Then verse 9 says, "The Judge is standing at the door!" He's going to enter at any moment, so be patient. Three times in three verses, 7-9, James makes reference to the Lord's coming.

The coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ has practical implications in our daily lives. Not theological or eschatological concepts but practical, rubber-meets-the-road implications in our lives.

If you really believe that Jesus Christ is going to come back and set all things right when He comes, wait for Him to do that. Be patient for Him to do that. Don't take matters into your own hands. "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord," Romans 12:19. And the book of James opened in chapter 1, verse 4, by saying, "Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." So we are to be patient, waiting for the coming of the Lord.

Now the question is, "What 'coming' does James have in mind?" In the Bible, there is the doctrine of the coming of the Lord for His church, which is the rapture, and then there's the coming of the Lord with His church, which is the Second Coming or Second Advent. But strictly speaking, there is only one second coming, and that is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the seven years of tribulation. I believe the Lord will come back before the millennium at the end of the tribulation. The Second Coming is when we come back with the Lord, Revelation 19, and He will judge the wicked and set up His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years, commonly called the millennial reign of Christ.

But there is that earlier coming, seven years at least, before the tribulation, in the clouds to catch up the church, the believers, the body of Christ, saved individuals to "meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord," 1 Thessalonians 4:17. So the rapture is when the Lord comes in the air, and we get caught up to meet Him in the clouds.

So what "coming" is James referring to in verses 7-9? I believe it is a reference to the Second Coming. And when we talk about the rapture in the New Testament, it's always presented as being imminent. That means that nothing has to happen before the rapture occurs. We could get raptured at any moment.

It would be so cool to get raptured on Sunday morning while I'm preaching. If you agree, I hope it's because you're saved and you know you're going to be caught up in the rapture. If you don't agree, everybody will be gone in the church, and it'll just be you sitting there by yourself. You'll be going into the tribulation period with the revelation of the Antichrist and all that will happen.

The Second Coming will be preceded by signs, Matthew 24 and 25. But the rapture is the imminent hope that Christ will come at any moment to catch up the church to "meet the Lord in the air." So I believe James is referring here to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and not to the rapture.

The word "coming," in verses 7-8, is the Greek word "parousia," which means "presence." So it

means not so much that we'll get to "meet the Lord in the air," but the Lord Himself, His physical presence, will be manifested to those on the earth.

And Jesus, speaking of the Second Coming in His famous Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, said in verse 27, "As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming..."—the "parousia"—"...of the Son of Man be." Revelation 1 says, "Every eye will see Him....His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace....Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." And He comes in righteousness and vengeance to judge the wicked. So that is what we need to wait for: the manifestation of the church, when it comes back with Christ, and He reigns in righteousness upon the earth.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8, Paul says, "...since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you...." He's writing to the believers in Thessalonica saying that it's a righteous thing that God is coming back, and He's going to bring judgment on the wicked who trouble you. Verse 7, "...and to give you who are troubled rest with us." James says, "Be patient," and Paul says, "Rest with us." He says, "...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels..."—that's the Second Coming—"...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." And if you continue reading in chapter 1, it talks all about the Second Coming and the vengeance and the judgment God will bring through Christ upon the unbelieving world at that time.

So if you are suffering because of the wicked world around you, be patient, because Jesus is coming, and He will vindicate you and judge the wicked. But it's hard to be patient when we are being mistreated and abused.

Now James gives us three, encouraging examples in our text of patient endurance. He gives us the example of the farmer, of the prophet and the man Job. First, we see the example of the farmer, in verses 7-9. "Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer..."—or "husbandman" in the King James translation—"...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..."—referring to "Christ" at the Second Coming—"...is standing at the door!"

If you are impatient, you better not be a farmer. Many years ago I cleared a patch out of my back yard, and I decided to farm my own vegetables. That was my one-and-only time to do that. We have grocery stores that sell vegetables. You can buy them ready-to-go and eat. Why grow your own? No one told me you have to till the soil and get the weeds out. No one told me about gophers and pests. The only ones who enjoyed my garden that year were the gophers.

I remember putting the seed in the soil, watering it and saying, "Okay, I'm hungry and can't wait to eat!" And I waited, and I waited, and I waited some more. Then a little sprout came out of

the ground. I'm getting hungry, so I gave up on farming.

If you're a farmer, you have to be patient, and you have to till the soil, pull the weeds, put in the seed, water it and you have to wait. It doesn't come immediately. I'd rather order online, go through the drive-in, have them pass it out—praise Jehovah—and eat my food.

So the farmer waits. Notice verse 7: "the farmer waits...waiting patiently." Farmers must have faith and patience. And why are farmers willing to wait? Because the fruit is "precious."

If we will wait on God, the future is precious and awesome. If we will trust God, put the future in His hands, it is like the precious fruit that we will reap at harvest. Verse 7 says the farmer, "waits for the precious fruit."

The next reason why farmers are willing to wait is because it is a process, verse 7. The fruit comes after a process that takes time. They wait for "the early and the latter rain." The "early rain" would come in October and November, in the fall. The "latter rain" would come in April and May before the final harvest.

So the fruit is precious and comes after process. Also, we must trust in God's providence. If you're a farmer and waiting for the crop, you trust God for the weather and for the harvest. And we, as Christians, must wait for the precious fruit in the future, as the promises of God are fulfilled in our lives. We must be patient during the process: our hearts are the soil; the seed is God's Word; during the seasons of life, we grow and respond to God's Word; the rain is the sorrows; the sun is the circumstances of the soil of our life. Then God produces the crop.

In John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." But the branches that bear fruit, He prunes. If the branch could talk, it would say, "Ouch! Why are you cutting back?!" It's because he wants it to bear more fruit. And we are branches in the process of being pruned in order to produce more fruit in our lives.

So don't get impatient and freak out and doubt God. He knows what He's doing. He's the perfect husbandman.

Now notice what we are to do in verse 8: "Establish your hearts." The word "establish" suggests "a mustering up of courage to strengthen your inner being." The New English Bible renders this, "Be stout-hearted," which speaks of a firmness of faith." So be stout-hearted. Trust in the Lord, "for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

Then notice, in verse 9, that as you are waiting, stop your complaining. "Do not grumble against one another." I have a problem with patience; I want it now. And I don't want to suffer in the process. I just want to go to a weekend conference on how to have patience in five, easy steps and come home patient. But it's not gonna happen. The Bible says, "Tribulation produces perseverance" or "patience," Romans 5:3. There is no shortcut. There's no other way to get there.

But I also have a problem with grudging or grumbling. “Grudge” means “to sigh, to groan...”—that’s my gift—“...to murmur or complain.” James is talking about these grand themes of the coming of the Lord and we are to be patient. But also don’t gripe and complain about one another.

This is another way of saying, “Don’t be judgmental, fault-finding and critical of one another.” The natural, non-spiritual tendency is of unjustly blaming others when we suffer instead of trusting God. We want to blame, grumble against and murmur about other people. The New English Bible says, “My brothers, don’t blame your troubles on one another.” And that’s an imperative or a command in the Greek. By the way, this is a great application in a marriage relationship. It’s not your wife’s problem. It’s not your husband’s problem. God is in control. Trust Him and look to His ways.

So like the farmer is patient, we must be patient. It implies that we must keep working, because God is working. Be like a farmer and patiently keep working until the Lord returns.

The saintly Samuel Rutherford said, “Why should I tremble at the plow of my Lord, who makes these deep furrows in my soul? He is no idle husbandman; He purposes a crop.” I like that. So why should I freak out? Why should I get impatient? Why should I grumble? Why should I complain? God is purposing a crop in our lives. Someone said, “The soul would have no rainbow if the eye had no tears.” I like that.

The second thing we are to do is from the prophets, verse 10. “My brethren, take the prophets...”—he uses the plural, so it’s the prophets of the Old Testament—“...who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.” I like that the prophets were God’s spokesmen. They would preach and say, “Thus sayeth the Lord...” I don’t believe we have prophets in that sense today. The only way you can say, “Thus sayeth the Lord,” is if you’re reading the Bible. I don’t get direct revelations from God. But the Bible is the Word of God, so when I read the Bible, it is “Thus sayeth the Lord.” And that’s what a prophet proclaims: the Word of the Lord.

Then also notice in verse 10, that they suffer affliction, and they do it with patience. When you think about the prophets, Isaiah was believed to have been put to death by being sawn in two. We also know that Daniel was thrown into a lion’s den. We know that Elijah suffered from King Ahab and Jezebel. And all of them “spoke in the name of the Lord.”

Anyone who speaks for God will be persecuted. You can take that to the bank. If you proclaim God’s Word to this wicked, hostile generation you’re living in, you will be persecuted. So Jeremiah is one of my favorites. Consider him. He’s known as “the weeping prophet.” He wrote the book of Lamentations. It means “weeping” or “lamenting.” The great prophet Jeremiah preached in the darkest days of Judea for 40 years and saw no converts. I would have given up long before Jeremiah. He never gave up. He was rejected, put in stocks, put in prison, thrown into a muddy cistern, 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 preaching God's Word and are persecuted for that, you are in good company. Like they treated the prophets, they are persecuting you.

What encouragement can we receive from the example of the prophets? Number one, they were doing God's will, yet they suffered. Verse 10, they are "an example of suffering and patience." They are a pattern, an example to us of how we are to suffer affliction. The phrase "suffering affliction," in the King James Bible, only appears in this verse in the entire New Testament and has the connotation of suffering hardships and only used of the prophets. The prophets "spoke in the name of the Lord," they were doing the will of God, they were preaching the Word of God and they suffered for it.

You say, "That's supposed to encourage me?!" Yes. The encouragement is that you can be right smack in the center of God's will, doing God's work, in God's way and still suffer. Where did we ever get the idea that if we're in the will of God, we're doing the work of God and we're preaching the Word of God that everything would be hunky-dory? It's not in the Bible. Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah and all the prophets were persecuted. They suffered hardship or affliction. So you can be right in the center of God's will and still suffer affliction.

You say, "That isn't much encouragement to me." It is when the devil comes along and he tells you when you're suffering that you're out of the will of God or there is some sin in your life or you're doing something wrong or it's because of your past sins that God is punishing you. Instead you should be realizing that you've been forgiven in Christ, you're a child of God and justified, you're doing the will of God and are in the center of His will.

Remember when Jesus told His disciples to get in the boat and cross the lake of Galilee to the other side? Then Jesus went up the mountain and had a prayer meeting with His Father. In the middle of the night, as they were rowing across the lake, they encountered a storm. The waves were crashing over the side of the boat, they thought they were going to drown and I'm sure they looked around and said, "Whose idea was this midnight boat ride?!"

Have you ever been on a camping trip? And you're going to camp in a tent in North Dakota in December. You say, "Whose idea was this trip?!"

The disciples said, "It was Jesus' idea. Where is He? He's up there on the mountain having a prayer meeting while we're suffering here on the lake!" So the storm was raging, and here comes Jesus walking on the water. That's cool. The waves they thought would undo them were the very waves that brought Jesus to them. And they were in the will of God. They were obeying Christ, they were doing what He called them to do, He sent them out on the lake, yet they encountered a storm.

So you can be in perfect obedience to God, doing the perfect will of God and still encounter storms.

Secondly, God cared for them in their suffering. I think of Elijah, who was fed by the ravens. That's pretty cool. And he was getting water from the brook. He was discouraged and wanted to give up, and God spoke to him in "a still, small voice." He told Elijah he just needed to take a nap.

I can claim that promise. I can take that home. Praise God! Take a nap. It's in the Bible. God told this discouraged prophet, "Take a nap." Sometimes you just need to go to bed. Get some sleep, crabby head! It's Biblical.

And when Elijah woke up, there was a cake. And God told him to eat it. An angel brought it, so it was angel food cake. It must have been awesome. So just take a nap and get something to eat. That's my word from the Lord today! I'm going to go home, take a nap and get some food.

So God cared for His prophet. He was in His providence and in His care. And when we suffer, He takes care of us.

Someone said, "The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us." When you are persecuted like the prophets, we should be patient like the prophets.

The third thing we learn from the prophets is that they patiently kept witnessing for God. They didn't stop, quit or throw in the towel. "Well, thanks a lot, God! If you're going to have this happen to me, I give up!" No. They persevered and continued.

The last individual we should learn from as an example is Job, verse 11. So we are to be like the farmer, who keeps working; we should be like the prophets, who keep witnessing; and we should be like Job, who kept waiting. "Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job..."—it's proverbial—"...and seen the end..."—our lot is not in this life but in the end when the Lord returns—"...intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." This compassion and mercy are closely related but are differentiated in the fact that He is full, for emphasis, of compassion and tender mercies. James is making it emphatic for emphasis; he uses the word "very."

So when you suffer, when you go through trials, remember that God is full of compassion and full of tender mercies. Always. God is good and He is good all the time.

As I pointed out, there is a change in the word "patience" beginning in verse 11. In verses 7-10, the word "patience" means "longsuffering with people." In verse 11, it now means "endurance" or "perseverance in circumstances." It means that you stay put and stand fast when you would like to run away.

If you are discouraged and want to give up and run, God is trying to speak to you. He wants to get your attention. Stay put. Trust Him. Don't give up on your marriage. Don't run away from your husband or wife. Don't run away from your problem. You can't run from your problems, because if you do, you take yourself with you wherever you go. And most of your problems are you. Everywhere I go, I take me with me. So my problems come right along with me wherever I

go.

You need to be patient. You need to be steadfast. Don't give up. Don't throw in the towel. Be like Job, who is an awesome example. Job's patience was proverbial. He was a righteous, rich man. One day the angels of God had come together. Satan was there among them. Evidently Satan had access to God's presence. And God was bragging about Job.

I often say, "Lord, don't brag about me, especially when the devil's around. When the devil's around, don't even mention my name!" I just want Beelzebub to bug off and leave me alone!

So God is bragging about Job and saying, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" Then the devil basically said to God, "He only serves You because You blessed him. You've given him wealth. You've given him health. You've given him all these possessions, a wife, children. The only reason why Job serves You is because You've given him all these things." So he's saying to God, "You're not worthy to be worshiped or to be served apart from your gifts."

The theme of the book of Job is not suffering. The theme of Job is that God is worthy to be worshiped apart from the gifts that He gives. The devil was actually putting God to the test and using Job as his instrument. And the devil said to God, "He will curse You. Let me touch his body. Let me take his possessions. Let me afflict him. He's going to curse You to Your face. You take away the blessings, he won't serve You anymore. He won't love You anymore. He won't follow You, because You're not worthy to be worshiped apart from the gifts that You give." And God said, "Okay, go ahead. You can do it."

But God put a hedge around Job as He puts a hedge around us. I believe that with all my heart. We may not know why He allows what He allows. We may not understand why He lets us suffer when we suffer. But it's all about God's perfect care. Nothing breaks through the hedge of what God allows for His purpose. And God is good.

So the devil took all Job's possessions in one day. You think you've had a bad day? He took everything Job owned, except for his loving, supportive wife. She said, "Why don't you curse God and just die?"

"Thank you, sweetheart. I needed that encouragement."

We know the story of Job. In Job 1:21, he says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be..."—or "praise"—"...the name of the Lord." He said in Job 2:10, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In Job 13:15, he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Can you say that? I don't see. I don't know. I don't understand. Whenever you're in the dark, God is never at a distance. You may be in the dark right now. You may not see. You may not know. You may not understand. But God is never, ever at a distance.

So never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light. He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," Deuteronomy 31:6. He's with you. Be like Job: patiently waiting, trusting the Lord. Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Here are the lessons from Job. Number one, Job was a righteous man, yet he suffered. Number two, Job didn't know why he was suffering, but God had a purpose. It's the same with us. Number three, Job trusted and kept loving God, even though He didn't understand. We should do the same. And number four, God blessed Job at the end of his life.

Isn't God good? Job lived to be 140 years old. He saw his son's sons and his sons to four generations. And Job was old, yet he was full of days. And then notice verse 11 in our text. He experienced God's compassion and God's tender mercy.

In time of affliction, we most commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God. In Job 42:5, he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You." At the beginning, the power of darkness may have an hour, but at the end the Lord will be seen. We need to wait and trust in the Lord. You may be in the dark, but you're never at a distance from God.

Now in conclusion, be like the farmer, be patient. Jesus is coming. Keep working like the prophet, keep witnessing. Don't give up. And like Job, keep waiting, trusting in God's compassion and in God's mercy.