

Patience in a World of Urgency

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[0 : 00] It was very kind of Ian to include me amongst the young preachers. I could probably double the rage in some of them. Thank you for giving me the privilege of sharing God's Word tonight with you this evening.

Thank you also for extending to me the courtesy of allowing me to sit to speak. Unfortunately, I have back trouble and that prevents me from standing for very long. So it would be a very short sermon if I did.

That might be an option you wish you had taken later. Just a quick prayer. Father, as we turn to your Word, may your Holy Spirit take it and comfort us where we need to be comforted.

Encourage us where we need to be encouraged. And challenge us where we need to be challenged. In Jesus' name, Amen. Can I ask you to take your Bibles please and open them at James chapter 5 as we continue our series in that book.

Reading verses 7 to 12. So that's James chapter 5, verses 7 to 12. This is the Word of God. Be patient then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.

[1 : 09] See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop. How patient he is in the autumn and spring rains. Brothers, you too, be patient and stand firm.

Because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door. Brothers, 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 consider blessed those who have persevered.

You've heard of Job's perseverance. And have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else.

Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Or you will be condemned. Amen. When I was a lad, and that wasn't yesterday, the only phone we had in the house was in the hall.

[2 : 20] And it was attached by a cord to the wall, to a box in the wall. It sat on a telephone table, especially because... And it had a seat as a part of its construction.

Where you sat and made your calls. If the person you were calling was not in, or was engaged in another call, you simply called them back later.

It was a major step forward in technology when we got an answering machine. The nearest thing to a mobile phone was the call box at the end of most streets. Today, the majority of us probably carry one of these.

With it, we can call, message, and send emails all over the world, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you're anything like me, then when, for example, I send a WhatsApp message, and the message has been... There's a marker there that shows that the message has been delivered.

[3 : 22] And then it changes colour when the person, the recipient, has read it. Impatience then builds as I wait for the person to respond.

The patience levels of our society have plummeted, and we live in a world demanding instant responses. During this period of lockdown, forcing many of us to work from home, one of the partners in the firm I work for found it necessary to send out an instruction to all staff saying that we were no longer allowed to use ASAP, i.e. as soon as possible, on any of our emails or Teams messages, and we had to start showing an increased level of patience.

So as we study this passage in James chapter 5, God calls us, especially those within his church, to a life of patience in that world of urgency.

Our key verse is found at verse 7, when it says, Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. So I'd like us to consider this passage under three headings.

First, faithful patience. Secondly, obedient patience. Thirdly, fulfilled patience. That's faithful patience. Obedient patience. Fulfilled patience.

[4 : 42] So faithful patience. In verse 7, we are given the example of the farmer. He will have lovingly prepared the soil, ploughing it, removing all possible stones and weeds to ensure it gives the best environment possible for the seed to flourish.

He will then have planted the best seed available to him, but, and that's a big but, he is powerless in making that seed germinate and produce a crop.

For that, he looks upwards in faith to his heavenly Father to bring the rains, and hopefully the sunshine, to allow that seed to grow and mature.

Is that a blind faith? No. As a farmer in New Testament times, he will have known the Old Testament promises of God, including those in Isaiah 55 that talk about God bringing the rains.

Like most farmers of his day, he will be totally reliant on that crop to provide for his family for the coming year, and therefore his faith is absolute in God as he waits in expectation for what will happen later that year.

[6 : 00] We are then in verses 10 to 12, given the examples of Job and a number of the Old Testament prophets. The patience of Job is an expression that's used in our world today.

If you Google it, the dictionary definition is the ability to remain patient and do what you think you should do despite having many problems.

Unfortunately, the dictionary has totally missed the point. As we've been discovering in our Sunday morning series, Job's patience and perseverance is rooted not in a self-reliance or the stiff upper lip to keep going through adversity, but has its foundations built on that rock that is God.

It's his faith and knowledge and the promise that God would never forsake him that sees him through this period of trial and tribulation. Job may have voiced complaints about his circumstances, but he did not stop trusting and putting his faith in God.

Job 1.21, for example, says, Naked I have come from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

[7 : 19] May the name of the Lord be praised. The farmer Job and the other prophets referred to took God at his word and found him to be faithful.

We have God's word in the form of our Bibles and that is full of his promises and that we can cling to and put our faith in as we live our lives.

In some senses, we have it relatively easy in this country compared to the difficulties many of our brothers and sisters around the world face. Increasingly, however, there are battles to face and thankfully the Lord has blessed the Christian community in this country recently with some significant victories.

There's a case of the advertising for the Festival of Hope Christian event in Lancashire where Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, was to be the headline speaker. As a result of his views on biblical marriage, the local council banned the adverts for the event from their buses.

Recently, a court found that the Christian organizers of the event had been unfairly discriminated against and ordered the council to pay over £100,000 in damages.

[8 : 37] Similarly, the case of the elder in Stirling Free Church who is the chief executive officer of the Robertson Trust was sacked after nine years at the helm. An industrial tribunal found that he had been unlawfully discriminated against and again because of his Christian views on marriage.

Job and the prophets such as Elijah and Daniel stood firm in the face of testing. And in verse 8, we are called to do likewise when it says, you too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near.

Are there situations we are going through at work or in our personal lives that we are tempted to throw in the towel? We're encouraged here to look to our Heavenly Father in faith, in the knowledge that he's always there and he will carry us through the trial we're going through just as he did with Job and the other prophets.

So secondly, we have obedient patience. Verse 7 says, be patient. This is not a request or an optional extra.

This is a command, firstly for us as a body of believers, but subsequently for us to be a shining example to our communities outside these four walls.

[10 : 00] The world we live in has increasingly become a place that seeks instant gratification. This can be quite innocently things like instant coffee or that instant meal we zap in the microwave.

However, I doubt that many would say that an instant coffee trumps the freshly brewed version or a ready meal tastes as good as one lovingly prepared from scratch by a talented cook or chef.

As the world turns its back on its creator, it tries to short circuit God's plans and aims to scratch where it itches. There's a desire for sex without patiently waiting for the God-given relationship of marriage, the rise in casual relationships and the increased availability and use of pornography bringing with it a big impact on our society.

There's the desire to have the latest and the best right now even if we can't afford it. This has given rise to a huge debt problem and people attempt to keep up with the Joneses.

But many have turned to serious gambling in this respect to satisfy their discontentment with their present position. Our TV screens are full of adverts attempting to reel vulnerable people in.

[11 : 21] God would say to us to be content with what we have and patiently work with what we'd like to achieve. However, in our passages, we as God's people are given two very specific areas to live out obedient patience.

In verse 9 it says, don't grumble against each other brothers or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door.

Why would there be grumbling amongst us? I would suggest it arises when we lose patience with one another. It leads us to putting ourselves on that pedestal rising us up there as we look down on our brothers or sister.

It can be very easy to point the finger at somebody at someone's perceived shortcomings but we do not always know the full story of what they're going through.

I read an interesting article recently that highlighted the fact that if you physically point the finger at somebody then three fingers of your same hand are pointing right back at you.

[12 : 31] Think about it. Try it. The second half of verse 9 warns us that if we go about judging one another then we face a judgment from God.

Our command is not to grumble but I believe that that should be evident in the way that we do the opposite and treat each other with compassion and mercy just so as God treats each one of us.

Secondly in verse 12 there's a command about our speech. Above all my brothers do not swear by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your yes be yes and your no no or you will be condemned.

What we say and how we say it has been a common thread through the book of James so far. This parallels with Jesus' words in Matthew 5 34 to 37 and I encourage you to check these verses out at your leisure.

Oaths in this context were often used to sound impressive to puff somebody up and give the impression of truth.

[13 : 42] However the honesty of these oaths was often questionable. James is therefore telling us that we should have no part in that practice. We are to be people of integrity and what we say should be honest and trustworthy.

As part of God's family is our word our bond. Are we totally honest in all our dealings when around us others venture into those grey areas of truth?

An added dimension is often found that when we have lost our patience with someone or in some situation we become exasperated and we lose self-control. This is evident to those around us when we come out with some form of expletive.

Consistent with the rest of scripture God is calling us to exercise self-control and bring the situation that's causing us stress to him in prayer and let him deal with it.

So we've got faithful patience and got obedient patience and thirdly fulfilled patience. For the farmer fulfilled patience is seen in a crop to be harvested and provide for his family over the coming year.

[15 : 10] For Job it was an end to that period of testing and a restoration of God's blessing. For many going through suffering the fulfillment of their patience may not be seen in these earthly lives but when they are called home by God.

For me personally I can honestly say that I had a real sense of joy at both the funerals of my dad and the more recently my mum. Yes for me there was a deep grieving and a real sense of loss but I realised for them for both of them that they had been released from the suffering that they had increasingly been experiencing as their earthly bodies deteriorated and now we're in the presence of their Lord and Saviour which was better by far.

I'm sure many here can echo that experience. Verse 7 commands us to be patient until the Lord's coming which means there is a finite point in time when God is going to make all things right it will be a total game changer but the Lord has already been and when he came the first time he was the greatest fulfillment of patience this world has ever seen.

Looking back at our studies in the book of Leviticus earlier this year we learnt that the ordained access into God's presence was once a year by one man the high priest and on the appointed day he went behind the curtain into the temple with the blood of a sacrificed animal and offered it as a sin offering on behalf of the people.

On that first Good Friday when Jesus was crucified on that cross at Calvary and exclaimed it is finished the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom giving access into God's presence to all who are willing to repent and believe.

[17 : 22] The access is not there just once a year but every hour of every day wherever we are. When Jesus returns as described in verse 7 it won't be as a baby in a manger but it will be in all his glory and majesty it will be both a fearful day and a day of great joy fearful because it will be a day of judgment and accountability joyful for those who are in Christ that they will go and spend eternity in the presence of God.

We live today in a period of God's patience between the first coming of Jesus and his return. for all of us today that has critical significance.

For the believer who has already come in repentance and put our trust in Jesus the Savior and Lord we are firstly commanded to live our lives with evident patience.

Borrowing a phrase from a preacher I heard recently we are to follow the compass and not the clock. Follow the compass and not the clock. In other words live faithfully in accordance with the direction of God's word whilst leaving the timing of our circumstances in God's hands.

Following on from that we have been given the privilege of sharing the good news of the gospel to the world outside these walls that desperately needs to hear it.

[19 : 00] Like the farmer we can prepare the soil in our friends and relatives and help them to remove some of the weeds and stones of issues that may be a hindrance.

We can plant the seed by introducing them to Jesus but just as the farmer had to look to his heavenly father to provide the weather to make the seed germinate and grow, we too are totally reliant on God through the Holy Spirit to work a miracle in the lives of those we are seeking to reach out to.

We wait patiently for the Lord. Our time on this earth is short and temporary and it's not our forever home so let's not get too comfortable.

if you may be here today or tonight and you've not yet put your trust in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord then this passage comes with a warning.

God has an appointed time when his son the Lord Jesus will return in all his glory and as I said earlier it will be a day of judgment and accountability. None of us know when that will happen.

[20 : 20] It could be tomorrow or it might be a considerable time yet. The important point is until that happens there is still an opportunity to respond and accept the gift of a restored relationship with God through what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection.

If you're in that position tonight then can I please urge you to take time out to consider the gift of eternal life that Jesus offers you. Don't put it in the back burner of your life.

If you want to talk further then please come speak to me or speak to one of the leaders of this church or the person that's brought you along tonight. Let's pray. Father I just thank you for this passage from scripture.

I thank you for what you've been saying to us and may Lord by your Holy Spirit cement in our hearts what's the application of it to our lives. We pray in Jesus name.

Amen. Thank you.