

Becoming Like Christ

Lesson 6: Patience With People and With God -- James 5:7-11

Ask a farmer about patience and he will not give you a sentimental speech. He will tell you about waiting. He plants the seed in soil he cannot see into, and then there is nothing to do but wait. He cannot pull the wheat up to make it grow faster. He cannot command the clouds. He depends on rains he does not control, the early rain that softens the ground and the late rain that swells the grain, and between them lies a long stretch of ordinary days where nothing seems to be happening. The farmer's patience is not passivity; it is a hard, hopeful, costly waiting on something he is sure is coming.

James reaches for exactly that picture when he writes to Christians who were tired of waiting. They were poor, and they were being pushed around. The chapter opens with a thundering warning to rich oppressors who had cheated the laborers who mowed their fields (James 5:1-6). The believers reading this letter were the cheated ones. They had every reason to grow bitter, to take matters into their own hands, to turn on one another under the strain. And into that pressure James says one short, steadying word, over and over: be patient. Be patient until the coming of the Lord. Establish your hearts. Do not grumble. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

We do not mow other people's fields for unfair wages, most of us, but we know this waiting. We pray and the answer does not come. We do the right thing and the wrong people seem to prosper. We carry a hurt that no one has made right. We watch the slow erosion of something we love and we want, more than almost anything, for the Lord to act now. James does not scold that longing. He aims it. He tells us where to fix our eyes and how to hold our hearts steady in the long stretch between the planting and the harvest.

This is a lesson about a quiet, unglamorous virtue that turns out to be one of the truest marks of Christ in us. The patience James describes is longsuffering, the willingness to bear with people and to wait on God without giving up and without lashing out. He hands us three teachers: the farmer who waits for the harvest, the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name and suffered for it, and Job, who lost nearly everything and still did not let go of God. Read these five verses slowly. They were written for people at the end of their patience, which means they were written for us.

Group Discussion: James tells suffering, mistreated believers not to grumble against one another but to be patient until the coming of the Lord. Why do you think pressure and waiting so often turn us against the people closest to us, rather than drawing us together? What does it look like for a church to wait well, side by side, instead of fraying under the strain?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life are you most out of patience right now, with a person who keeps wounding you, with a situation that will not change, or with God for not

acting sooner? As we begin, name honestly what you have been tempted to do in that waiting (grow bitter, take revenge, give up, grumble), and what it would mean to entrust it instead to the Judge who is standing at the door.

Read James 5:7–11

Study Questions

1. James grounds the whole call to patience in one event: be patient, therefore, until the coming of the Lord (James 5:7–8). Why does he anchor patience in the certain return of Christ rather than in willpower or positive thinking? What does it tell us about Christian patience that it is fundamentally a matter of waiting for a Person who is surely coming?
2. James says the farmer waits with patience for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it until it receives the early and the late rains (James 5:7). Where in your own life are you in a long stretch of waiting where nothing seems to be happening? How would it change your week to see that season the way a farmer sees the silent months between planting and harvest?
3. Twice James says the coming of the Lord is at hand, and then, behold, the Judge is standing at the door (James 5:8–9). What does it mean that the Lord's coming is near and that He stands as Judge at the door, and how does the nearness of His coming and His judgment shape the way we are to live and wait now?
4. James warns, do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged (James 5:9). When you are under pressure and tired of waiting, who tends to absorb your irritation, your spouse, your children, your fellow Christians? What would it look like this week to refuse to let your waiting curdle into grumbling against the people around you?

5. James offers the prophets as an example of suffering and patience, men who spoke in the name of the Lord (James 5:10). Why does he point to people who suffered precisely because they were faithful, not in spite of it? What does this teach us about the relationship between obedience to God and the experience of hardship in this life?
6. James says, you have heard of the steadfastness of Job (James 5:11). Job is famous for losing nearly everything and still refusing to curse God. When your faith is tested by loss or unanswered prayer, what does Job's example show you about the difference between perfect patience and honest, struggling, persevering faith? Where do you need that kind of endurance right now?
7. James says, we count those blessed who remained steadfast (James 5:11), and Jesus likewise blesses those who endure (Matthew 24:13; Revelation 2:10). Why does the New Testament so consistently tie God's blessing to endurance over time rather than to a single moment of decision? What does this teach us about the nature of saving faith and the danger of falling away?
8. James tells us we have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful (James 5:11), pointing us to how Job's story ended. When you cannot see what God is doing in your own long ordeal, how does it steady you to fix your eyes on God's character and His proven mercy? Name one specific hardship where you need to trust God's compassion before you can see His purpose.
9. This is the heart of the lesson, so weigh it carefully. James says the Judge is standing at the door and the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:8-9), and he points our hope to that final coming when the Lord sets all things right. Some teach that this points to a future earthly reign of Christ for a thousand years, a kingdom still to be set up on earth. Yet Scripture teaches that Christ's kingdom was established when the church began

(Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13), that He reigns now at God's right hand (Acts 2:33–36; 1 Corinthians 15:24–26), and that His coming brings not an earthly thousand-year reign but resurrection, final judgment, and the handing of the kingdom to the Father (John 5:28–29; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10; 2 Peter 3:10–13). How does a right understanding of Christ's present reign and His certain final coming as Judge give us a firmer foundation for patience than a hope pinned on an earthly kingdom yet to come?

10. Look back across James 5:7–11 as a whole: the patient farmer, the steady heart, the warning against grumbling, the suffering prophets, the steadfast Job, the compassionate purpose of the Lord, and the Judge at the door. Name one specific situation where Jesus is calling you to longsuffering right now, and one concrete way you will wait on Him this week, in your speech, your prayers, or your attitude toward someone who is hard to bear.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 8:18–25, the whole creation groaning as we wait with patience for the redemption to come; Galatians 5:22–23, patience as fruit the Spirit grows in those who walk in step with Him; Hebrews 10:36–39, the need of endurance so that, having done God's will, you may receive what is promised; 2 Peter 3:8–15, the Lord is not slow but patient, not willing that any should perish, so count His patience as salvation; Lamentations 3:22–26, the Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him.