

Be Patient for the Lord – James 5:7-11

It's only 2 weeks away. 2 more weeks to sing beloved songs to your heart's content. 2 more weeks until the presents under the tree will be nothing more than a mess of wrapping paper as shouts of joy fill the air. 2 more weeks and it will be Christmas. Are you starting to get excited? Maybe a little bit impatient? I remember growing up we had one of those Advent/Christmas calendars with the candy pieces inside. There's a nice Christmas picture on the front of the box with 25 little cut out areas just waiting to be broken through. Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you have them in your house so you can count down to Jesus' birth on Christmas? As a little kid, those Advent/Christmas candy calendars would both frustrate me and build up my anticipation. I wanted to get the candy inside and would love nothing more than to punch out each box on the first day of December! But my parents wisely made me wait and count down the days to Christmas. And the closer we got to Christmas, the more impatient I would become. And yet I had to wait and be patient until Jesus would come to Bethlehem to get all the candy.

Although Christmas is only 2 weeks away, I imagine you are getting impatient. In our verses from the book of James, we talk about this same thing – patience. Patience for the Lord and patience for his blessings. Patience for him to fulfill his promises and patience for him to come again.

Patience is not an easy thing. It is one thing to say “I have patience,” but it's an entirely different thing to be patient. To illustrate this, the author James chooses the profession that perhaps requires the most patience of all – the farmer. If you want to be a farmer without driving others crazy, you need to be patient. James writes **“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”**

It's hard enough to be a farmer with today's technology. But to be a farmer in ancient Israel requires a different level of patience. They didn't have irrigation or crop insurance. They entirely depended on the weather cycle. In that part of the world the rains would come two times a year – in the autumn and in the spring. The autumn rains were essential to bring moisture to the sunburnt ground so the farmer could cultivate it and plant his seeds. But all that work would be for nothing if the spring rains didn't come. They were necessary to give the crops the

nourishment for the final push. If one of the rains didn't come at the right time, you lost the entire crop.

Do you think you could be a farmer in ancient Israel? Would you have the necessary patience for the rains to come without your ability to control them in any way? Thankfully we'll never have to answer that question because we live in the modern world. But we still need to have this level of patience in this life as we wait for the Lord's 2nd coming on the Last Day. I know how hard it is to have this patience when we weather the storms of life. When we want something to happen and the opposite happens instead. When life seems to be out of control and we feel like we're living in a pinball machine. We get pushed from one thing to another as we react to life's events. The job or raise you were expecting to get isn't going to happen. And you know that once the joyful distractions of the Christmas holiday are done, you'll have to face the harsh music of reality. Maybe Christmas is not a time of warm fuzzy feelings because of problems in your family or loved ones who have left you. How can we be patient for the Lord to come on the Last Day if we can't even wait for Christmas to be done in 2 weeks?

Patience is in high demand among us. But when your patience is running low, how do you act? If you're like me, you're not fun to be around. Irritable and finding fault with everyone. A short temper and unable to be pleased. Grumbling and complaining against others – including your own friends and family. And how sad it is when we do this and tear down the bonds of love and friendship with our fellow Christians! Because the grumbling and complaining comes from our mouths spring from our sinful hearts. With this in mind James writes **“Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”** God the Almighty Judge is standing at the door and knows when we grumble and complain against each other. And when he comes for the last time, he will come to judge the dead and living. No matter how long it may be until Jesus comes again, it will happen. No matter how many storms of life we have to weather, we need to be patient for the Lord as the farmer. As he is patient for his crop after the autumn and spring rains so we are patient for the Lord.

Not only are we to be patient for the Lord when the storms of life come, but also when we suffer for the sake of Jesus' name. To show us what James means by this, he points to the prophets and to Job. As you read the pages of Scripture, there are countless examples of how the prophets suffered because they spoke God's Word. Look at Moses who suffered at the hands of the Egyptians and his fellow

Israelites who grumbled against him. Look at Jeremiah and Ezekiel who suffered when they warned the Israelites about the coming destruction by the Babylonians. Look at Stephen who was stoned to death in Acts chapter 7. These prophets and everyone else who speaks God's Word will suffer. And yet, the Lord does not abandon them. He has blessed them for their perseverance with life in heaven.

With Job, our Lord has done the same. We heard in the first lesson just a fraction of the sufferings Job had to endure. In a futile attempt to prove God wrong, the Devil took away Job's wealth, possessions, family, wife, and health. The friends who sat with Job only made things worse by encouraging Job to give in to the Devil and curse God. But Job never lost his patience. He endured everything without knowing the reason why he suffered so much. And most importantly Job stuck to his faith. He was patient for the Lord even when he hit rock bottom. And the Lord blessed him. He blessed him with renewed wealth, a new family, and the comfort that heaven was waiting for him.

While I can't promise you that God will bless your sufferings with earthly riches as he did with Job, I can promise you that God will shower you with his compassion and mercy. James tells us this sure truth in our closing verse – **"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."** He showed this to Job by giving him riches on Earth and in heaven. He showed to the prophets by strengthening their faith when they suffered and bringing them home to heaven. And he shows it to us with our Savior Jesus on the first Christmas.

When the time was right, God sent his Son to be born of a virgin in Bethlehem, the town of David. Mary and Joseph were filled with joy at the birth of their firstborn. The angels sang praises to God and told the shepherds about the good news. The shepherds left their sheep behind and went to Bethlehem so that they too could be overjoyed at the birth of our Savior. And it is for good reason they all praised God and were filled with joy. Because Jesus' birth was just the beginning of how the Lord would show his compassion and mercy. Jesus came to Bethlehem and lived a life on Earth because of his compassion for us. For 33 years Jesus showed his patience so he could die on the cross when he knew it would be best. He showed his mercy on us by going to Calvary to die. At any time Jesus could have lost his patience with our sinfulness and gone back into heaven leaving us to wallow in our sins. But because of the Lord's compassion and mercy which we see so clearly on Christmas, Jesus would die on that cross for our sins so that we may have eternal life in his name.

Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year because it is when Jesus came to us in Bethlehem. And as we read James' words together here in church, I encourage you once again – be patient for the Lord. He will come again on the Last Day as surely as he did in Bethlehem 2,000 some years ago. And when he comes on that Last Day, we will fully see the Lord's compassion and mercy. For he will come as the Almighty Judge to confirm the faith we now have. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, your sins have been paid in full. There is no condemnation left against you because the perfect blood of Jesus has cleansed you. Your sins have been forgiven. Each and every single one. And because you believe this, don't be afraid when the Almighty Judge comes. For he will look at you and see Christ's righteousness covering you. And he will forever declare you not guilty.

But until that wondrous day comes, be patient for the Lord. Weather the storms that this sinful life will throw at you. Resist the temptation to grumble and complain against others and your brothers and sisters in the faith. When you suffer for speaking and holding fast to the name of the Lord, be patient for the Lord. Persevere through the suffering and keep your eyes on the Lord's coming. For he is standing at the door and will soon come to judge you innocent by the blood of Jesus. Be patient for the Lord and live for that day, for it will be a day of rejoicing. Amen.