

Wait on the Lord
James 5: 7 – 10
Makemie Presbyterian Church
December 16, 2007

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. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!¹⁰ Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

God's words for us.

There is a boy whose family would sit on one of the front pews at church. On one particular Sunday, this six-year-old was fidgeting and having a hard time sitting still, so his mom gave him a pencil and a big sheet of paper to keep him busy. Instead of drawing, he wrote, to his mom "How much longer?"

Mom wrote back, "A few minutes." Again he shoved a note her way, this time asking, "How long is a few minutes?"

Mom patiently wrote back, "Maybe five more minutes."

Finally the boy was quiet. Proud that he was behaving, his mom glanced down at him, only to notice he was holding a sign in front of him that the minister could see asking, "How much longer, Rev.?"

Another story:

When James A. Garfield was president of Hiram College, a man brought for admission as a student, his son, for whom he wished a shorter course than the regular term of study. "The boy can never take all that in," said the father. "He wants to get through quicker. Can you arrange it for him?"

Mr. Garfield, not yet president of the United States, still just a minister-educator said, "Oh yes. He can take a short course; it all depends on what you want to make of him. When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years, but He takes only two months to make a squash. So do you want an oak or do you want a squash? If you want an oak, you have to be patient.

James uses the word "patience" three times in our text that Lee just read. So what is this patience he is talking about? Patience so we may calmly tolerate delay. Tolerate delay rather than give up faith & hope. Tolerate delay rather than get angry. Tolerate delay rather than do something foolish.

Patience is a rare commodity in technological times. In our western world today we are increasingly accustomed to instant responses to almost every situation. We think quick is better, because many times it is.

But there are many time wasters in our society today, and we really don't like to wait. The doctor's office is one of my stress factors. I don't know why I should be upset, they have been honest with me — they labeled it "the waiting room." Why should I be surprised that I have to wait?

The restaurant is another place that we have to wait. There are at least six waits in a restaurant. First, you wait to get a seat. Second, you wait to get the menu. Third, you wait to order. Fourth, you wait to get the food. Fifth, you wait for the bill. Sixth, you wait for the bill to be picked up. And in some restaurants you have to wait in line to pay the bill. So why do they call the people that work in the restaurants waiters? They don't wait — we do!

One thing that makes patience even harder to come by is that we are all thoroughly indoctrinated with the idea that the sheer amount of work produced is a measure of a person's worth to society, company, and family. So every spare minute that can be employed in productive activity is important. Therefore if the traffic slows we become irritated and impatient. Perhaps one day there will be a flip-down keyboard on our steering wheels and a pop-up computer screen on our dash to enable us to get work done in traffic jams. Sounds like a good idea, but our problem is that we would try to work while we drive.

Most people today cannot remember when we had no television, automatic washers, dryers, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, air conditioning and even microwave ovens. With all the instant conveniences we possess, we learn little about patience. Yet patience is a virtue that all of us need, for our sakes if not for others. As we stew over the traffic light that seems stuck on red, we are the losers. While we thought it stayed red for ten minutes, when it was only one, our blood pressure shot up, our ulcer flared up, and we wound up with a bad attitude that ruined the entire evening. We need patience for ourselves and for others, and we need it now.

Patience is what James addresses in our text. Perhaps we can hear the Lord speak to us about the possibilities for patience in our own lives. That is, if we're not in too much of a hurry to get out of here

Here is a conversation I have on a regular basis with Jaxon.

"Mom?"

"What?"

"Mom."

"Yes."

"Mom."

"Yes."

"Mom."

It makes me, umm, impatient.

That Christians have trouble with patience is evident from this exhortation in verse seven: Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. We, as believers, are encouraged to cultivate patience until the Lord comes. To illustrate patience and instruct us, James gives us three

examples of patience: the farmer, the prophets, and Job. Each of these provides insight into the difficulties we all face that require patience.

We need patience when we must wait. James uses the farmer as an example. If you are going to be a farmer, you have to have patience. By the very nature of this work, you must be patient. Farmers plant, then wait. There is no control over the weather. Yet, their crops don't immediately sprout up.

James is saying, "Look at the farmer. He can be patient. You need to be patient, too." Why was he so patient? Well, for one thing, farmers have to wait, no matter what. Sometimes we have no choice but to wait. And the question that cries out from us during these times is often, "How long, O Lord?"

Farmers don't have much time for the peripheral issues. They are diligent people. I don't know that I've ever met a lazy farmer. When the seed is planted and everything is done in the initial stage, he doesn't go off and retire. He is working in another area of the farm. While we are waiting for the Lord's coming, we are not exhorted to put on white robes and sit on the roof of the church and wait for Him. We are to be occupied.

And we need patience when we are mistreated. And there is no better example of this than the prophets. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about the prophets who were ridiculed, spoken against and persecuted for the sake of God's Kingdom and work. Prophets are an example of suffering and patience together. The word *patience*, means *to endure under*.

We don't really need patience when everything around us is going right. We need it when life is hard. Suffering and patience seem to go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, the Bible talks about tribulation working patience in us. I've always tried to figure out if there wasn't another way to get patience than through tribulation!

We also tend to become impatient under trial. When a loved one is struggling with a disease and there is set-back after set-back, it is so easy to become impatient. When we feel overwhelmed by one trial after another – money problems and marital problems and business problems and problems with the children, problems at church – we become impatient. When we go from one controversy to another – and become the subject of accusations, doubts, questions, and gossip – we tend to become impatient.

In verse 9 James mentions Christians who "grumble against each other." They got tired of waiting for fellow believers to change their attitude or their viewpoint. They got tired of waiting for fellow believers to admit they were wrong. They got tired of waiting for fellow believers to become mature in the faith. So they grumbled and complained & murmured against each other. "Instead," James said, "they were to be patient." They were to calmly tolerate brothers & sisters who took a long time to mature or to have a

change of heart & mind.

I have a "Get Well" card that I received a while ago, on the front of the card it has a sad-looking character, sort of an elf that says, "the trials of life build character." Then inside the card, when you open it, it says, "What a stupid system." Cause that's the way it feels, doesn't it?

Yet faith can grow under trial. Faith can mature under trial. Maybe one of God's purposes in delays is growth. Maybe not.

So James holds before us this picture as his second example of patience: "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord."

Moses authority was questioned and opposed. Elijah often had to flee for his life. Jeremiah was imprisoned for declaring God's word. Hosea was ordered to marry a prostitute.

How many times in scripture did they ask God, "How long, O Lord?" "How long must I endure this?" "How long must I suffer?"

My Aunt Hazel would take her family to church and Sunday school; my Uncle Bill didn't go. He complained about Sunday dinner being late

when she came home. Sometimes the preacher would call, and my uncle would say, "I know what the church wants. Church doesn't care about me. Church wants another name, another pledge, another name, another pledge. Right? Isn't that the name of it? Another name, another pledge." That's what he always said.

Sometimes my aunt's church would have a revival. Pastor would bring the evangelist and say to the evangelist, "There's one now, sic him, get him, get him," & my uncle would say the same thing. Every time, my aunt in the kitchen, always nervous, fear of tempers flaring, of somebody being hurt. And always my uncle said, "Church doesn't care about me. The church wants another name and another pledge." I guess I heard it a thousand times.

One time he didn't say it. He was in the veteran's hospital and he was down to seventy-three pounds. They'd taken out his throat and said, "It's too late." They put in a metal tube and X-rays burned him to pieces. I flew in to see him. He couldn't speak, couldn't eat. I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the window sills, a stack of cards twenty inches deep beside his bed. And even on that tray where they put food if you can eat, on that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the

bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church. He saw me read a card. He could not speak so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare. If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story. He wrote, “in this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story.”

I said, “What is your story, Uncle Bill?”

And he wrote, “I was wrong.”

In our text that Lee read this morning, there are two times James ties patience in with the Lord’s coming: “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming ... You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.” We are being told to live our lives in the light of eternity. And, when we do that we are able to be patient with delays in this life.

I like how the Apostle Paul puts it:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. “

Be patient. But it’s over two thousand years since Jesus returned to heaven, and he’s still not back. How can the Lord tell us to be patient when the Lord so severely tests our patience? Of all the delays we have to put up with, isn't this delay the worst one?

Be patient not only with the world. Be patient not only with one another. Be patient also with the Lord – because God is patient with us.

Though sometimes it seems we might not deserve it, God is patient with us and God forgives us.

We all need patience. May God work it in you and in me. Amen.