

*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. <sup>8</sup> You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup> Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

*<sup>10</sup> Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 5:7-11)*

### **Be Patient!**

“Just be patient!” Have you ever said that to your kids? To a friend? To your spouse? How’d they take it? How do you react when someone tells you to be patient? To a certain degree, I think that depends on whether patience – and impatience – is a feeling or an attitude. If they’re feelings, it doesn’t really do much good to tell someone to be patient. You can’t command feelings. It’s like telling your kid to like someone that they really don’t. You can tell them to be nice to that person, to treat him or her the way Christians are supposed to treat each other. But you can’t make them feel affection for someone they dislike. So if patience is a feeling, it doesn’t do much good to tell people to feel it. But are patience and impatience completely feelings? I don’t doubt that to a certain degree they are. But in many respects, they’re also attitudes. Attitudes we can control. How I think about something, how I approach something, how I react to and deal with my feelings is my responsibility. So maybe I can’t feel more patient. But I can adopt an attitude of patience that controls my words and my actions and doesn’t let my feelings make the situation worse. I can adopt practices that help me to wait when that’s what I need to do. This morning, God tells us to be patient. He’s not commanding feelings that we cannot conjure up. Rather, he’s talking about our attitude and our lifestyle between here and eternity. That attitude and all those Christian practices come from faith. My friends, **be patient.**

#### **I.**

It’s clear what James is talking about here: Jesus’ return. **Be patient. The Lord is coming.** James says, **“Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”** Over and over again, the Bible says that Jesus is coming soon. The mere fact that it keeps saying it must mean that we need to hear it. Why? Because it doesn’t really feel that way to us. When I was a child, we lived just outside of Indianapolis. A couple of times a year, we’d load into the car and drive the three hours north to visit grandparents. I would ask, “Where are we?” “How much longer?” “Are we there yet?” because that trip seemed so long. That seems funny to me now that I’ve traveled to other continents. But when you’re six or seven, three hours in a car seems like a very long time. To God, Jesus’ return is right around the corner. But to you and me, the two thousand years that he’s been gone is a very long time. Most of us have been waiting for Christ to come back all our lives. To us who look over the length of our years and are just ready to see Jesus, our Lord says, **“Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”**

He’s telling us to adopt a different attitude. When we’ve lived for thousands of years with Christ, this won’t seem like it was such a long wait after all. Right now, that’s hard for us to see, but part of changing our attitude is thinking about what’s real, no matter what feels real to us. That’s why James points to farmers. A farmer plants his crop and then waits for that precious harvest to come in. Here in Michigan, that means sometime in late April or May, you go out and rototill your garden or a farmer plows his field. Then you plant the seeds. Once they’re in the ground, you wait. With some plants, by late June or July, you start to harvest. But with others, it’s going to be September or even October before those plants finally yield a crop. A farmer has to learn patience. James points out that he even has to be patient while he waits for the rains to come. In James’ day, irrigation was a lot harder. The farmer waited for rain and prayed that it would come and then he waited some more so that he could harvest his crop and feed his family for another year.

Patience is a virtue. Whatever we feel about the Lord’s return, however much we might wish that he would just come, God calls us to an attitude of patience. That means an attitude that trusts that Jesus is coming at just the right time. Nothing we do or feel can hurry him up. We need to trust that he has a plan to bring in all the elect and he won’t come until that moment arrives. He has a plan to do what is best for all of his people,

and we need to trust that the God who sent his Son to die and rise for us knows what he's doing. Trust – faith – is the source of our patience. While we wait, we need to cultivate an attitude of trust that leads to an attitude of patience.

What happens if we don't cultivate that attitude of faith and patience? James says, **“Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”** Sad to say, we're kind of like my siblings and I were when my parents piled the three of us into the backseat of their sedan and we had to drive three hours to grandma's. We got cranky. Whoever was sitting in the middle got tired of the others crowding them and not being able to see out the window. Sooner or later, somebody was going to complain, “Mom, he hit me!” or “She's in my space!” or “He won't leave me alone!” Sound familiar? It shouldn't just sound familiar to us parents. What happens to us in our congregations while we wait? The devil pushes our buttons. Our own sinful flesh gets cranky and we take other members' words and actions in the worst possible way and we get mad. Or, other Christians get tired and thoughtless and self-absorbed and they hurt our feelings. We get tired and thoughtless and self-absorbed and we stop thinking about how to make the wait easier for the Christians around us and we start moaning about how hard it is for us. We do what we want and give others reasons to complain.

When sin and impatience rule our hearts, our fellowship suffers. The judge is at the door! It's sin to be selfish and self-absorbed. It's sin to be cranky and hard to live with. It's sin to be impatient with God's plan. Aren't we all guilty of that sin sometimes? That sin is why Jesus came the first time. He came to die and rise and pay for it all. He died for our selfishness and our crankiness and our lack of love. He paid every drop of blood we owed. Then he rose and God erased our sin. Jesus rose and God declared that we are now perfect in his sight. Then he sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts and made us believers.

One of the gifts of that faith is our fellowship. We are brothers and sisters in Christ even though we're sinners and we get on each other's nerves sometimes. We are forgiven and loved by Christ and that teaches us to love one another. And it teaches us to adopt a different attitude toward our time here. We only have to struggle here for so long and then we'll be in heaven. The people God has given us in this congregation are the people he's put here to struggle alongside of us, to be our brothers and sisters in the fight. Love these people, because they stand together with you. Love them, because we're going to spend eternity together around the throne of Christ.

## II.

What makes it so hard to be patient? Isn't it how hard life is here? God does bless all of us more than we appreciate even here. But there are lots of times when life hurts. Every time we got to a funeral, life hurts. Every hospital visit I make, happens because something painful has happened to someone here in our church. God gave us a congregation to shore up our faith because while we live here, the devil does everything in his power to make our lives hard, the unbelieving world around us tramples us, the curse of sin has broken this world and, again and again, we rub up against the sharp edges of this broken life. And our own sinful hearts lead us to make decisions that we regret and to make honest mistakes that cost us. An elderly person makes one misstep and they spend months waiting for broken bones to heal while they learn to walk again. You misjudge one red light and you've got endless hours of dealing with insurance companies and traffic court and maybe hospital care. All that stuff hurts and we wish the pain were over. Well, my friends, **be patient. The Lord will have mercy.**

James urges us, **“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.”** Life here will always be hard. Persecution will always dog the steps of faithful Christians. That's what the prophets show us. They spoke the word of God and people made them pay. The faithful are not spared the hurts and sorrows here because we're faithful. Rather, we persevere. We hang on to God's promises because we know we are protected from anything that would destroy our faith. We know God uses all those challenges to bring us home to him.

James says, **“You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”** Job was a faithful believer and God blessed him. But the devil wanted to destroy his faith and God in his infinite wisdom allowed Satan to afflict him. In one day, Job lost his wealth and his children died. But in his grief Job trusted in God. The story goes on. The devil afflicted Job's health. He covered his body with painful sores. Job's own wife counseled him to curse God and die. But

Job trusted. Finally, a group of Job's friends came to visit him. They accused him of some secret sin that God was punishing. Then Job did sin. He got angry and accused God of being unjust. Finally, God himself came to Job and called him to repent, which Job did. Then God had mercy. God restored his wealth and his physical health. God even gave him new children to comfort him in his old age. God built up his faith to accept his losses here and to look forward to eternal life. God loved Job even when he allowed the devil to hurt him. God loved Job even when Job didn't understand God's ways and his faith weakened. God loved Job when he repented and God had mercy on him even in this life. And God took him home to heaven where all the emotional scars and hurts of life are erased and we are made new again.

God loves us, too, and he calls us to persevere. When we stand up under suffering and persecution, we are blessed – with eternal life, certainly, but even here, God is full of mercy and compassion. He knows the hurt in our hearts and in our bodies and he invites us to bring them all to him when we pray for his rescue. And he promises that either in this life or in the life to come, we will feel his mercy. How do we know that's true? Not by measuring what's happening right now in our life. On the day Job's children died, it didn't feel like God was taking care of him. When his body was covered with sores, it didn't feel like God was watching out for him. When the prophets were persecuted and even murdered for telling people what God actually said, it didn't feel like a reward.

But God is full of compassion for us when we suffer. He sees our pain and he is moved to mercy. We know that because of what he did through Christ. God sent his Son to suffer all that sin does to us in order to set us free. Because Jesus came, because Jesus lived in our place and suffered our hell and our death and our hurt, the day will come when we will be free. When he returns, he will erase all hurt and suffering from this world and remake it as the paradise it was supposed to be. He will raise us and we will live without any kind of pain or sorrow with him forever. And between now and then, he comforts us with the message of his love. He works in our hearts and gives us strength and even joy in this sinful world. He hears and answers every one of our cries for help. He blesses us every day in more ways than we can ever imagine. He walks next to us all through this life and when we close our eyes, he takes us home to heaven.

Jesus is the source of patience because he is the source of God's love. Nothing we face escapes his notice. He will always have mercy on us. The more we understand that, the more patient we can be here. The more we see how close he is, the more we are able to wait. The more we focus him, the more we have the attitude of trust that makes patience possible. Focus on Jesus and wait for him patiently. Amen.