Patience: It is Indeed a Virtue!

J0.1ames 5:7-11

 Good morning to you all! Please open your Bibles to the Epistle of James chapter 5. Today we are continuing our discussion of chapter 5 by looking at verses 7-11. Last week we discussed how the rich in the days of James were mistreating others because of their desire to maintain their wealth. As we continue in chapter 5 today James is going to urge his readers to remain patient and wait on the Lord. This virtue of patience is the same attitude that Jesus Himself encouraged His followers to have as they were persevering under the rule of the Roman empire. Today, let us take our time together to encourage one another with these words of comfort from the Apostle James.

**“Therefore, be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brothers and sisters, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.**

As we begin to look closely at today’s passage, we see that patience is the key word that is repeated throughout. Now what exactly is James telling his readers to be patient for? What James is referring to is the second coming of Christ. Jesus promised the disciples that He would return one day to take all those who belong with Him back to heaven with Him. This message is especially appropriate because as we discussed two weeks ago, the people of God who have been experiencing persecution have been tired after having faced all of those struggles. We concluded in verses 1-6 of chapter 5 that there will be a day of judgment at the end of the age where God will right all of the wrongs and evils that have been perpetrated on the earth. Now, James is telling the people of God to be patient for that day. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will end all of the evil and the kingdom of heaven will come to earth.

 Another important point to make in this verse is the fact that James is not encouraging his listeners to seek vengeance for the harsh treatment they have experienced from the rich. He is encouraging his readers to patiently wait for the Lord’s return who would address all of those injustices the people had faced. When he uses the example of the farmer waiting patiently for the produce of the soil by waiting for the rains this is a perfect example of how a believer in Jesus Christ is to wait for His return. When I used to help my dad with planting and raising crops one of the things he used to say to me is that when you plant something you need to trust in God that He will guide the process for the growing of the plant. When someone takes extreme measures to help speed up the process of growing that can actually do more harm than good. We used to add anhydrous gas to the field after the corn had grown a bit. The purpose was to inject the soil with additional nutrients so that the corn would begin to shoot up. One year we applied the gas to the fields and the corn did not respond very well to it. Rather than seeing an increase in the yield for the corn we saw that the plants were burnt and did not grow as well as we had hoped. It is so easy to become impatient and then try to speed up the process. I would like to share this list from commentator David Guzik. This list shows us how patience is such a strong virtue in the life of a farmer. Here are some ways that the Christian life is like a patient farmer:

1. He waits with a reasonable hope and expectation of reward. The farmer knows that eventually there will be a harvest and he places the results of that harvest into the hands of almighty God. In like manner, the Christian knows that Christ is eventually returning and places the timing of that return into God’s hands knowing that humanity cannot rush God’s timing.

2. He waits a long time. It may seem like the harvest takes forever, but the farmer waits patiently until the time for harvest. The Christian also waits patiently for Christ’s return. If Christ returns during our lifetime or if we are called to His presence before that time, we trust Gods timing.

3. He waits working all the while. Even though it may seem like it takes an eternity, the patient farmer continues to work for there to be a bountiful harvest. We also are continually working knowing there are many more of God’s image bearers who need to hear the gospel message.

4. He waits depending on things out of his own power; with his eye on the heavens. We cannot control when Christ returns, but we are always watching and waiting with expectation. This is the same with the crops. The farmer cannot control the weather, but he keeps his eyes focused on the One who brings the rains.

5. He waits despite changing circumstances and many uncertainties. No matter what may take place in our lives or the challenges we may face we still wait for the coming of the Lord. Life in this fallen world is uncertain, but our God is dependable and His word always guides us.

6. He waits encouraged by the value of the harvest. The farmer will reap a return for his valuable crop. What is the value of the harvest in the life of a Christian? The value is the return of our Lord and Savior who will right all of the wrongs and end the curse of sin forever.

7. He waits encouraged by the work and harvest of others. When we see other people come to faith in Jesus Christ, it not only gives us joy, but it encourages us to keep sharing the gospel. Farmers rejoice with other farmers when they bring in a bountiful crop.

8. He waits because he really has no other option. The only thing we can do regarding the second coming of Christ is wait. We cannot predict it or try to make it come quicker. In like manner a farmer must wait for the crop to grow and be ready for harvest.

9. He waits because it does no good to give up. We cannot give up waiting for the Lord to return. He is credible and we must trust Him. If we give up then we have much to lose.

10. He waits aware of how the seasons work. This means that we must watch for the signs of Christ’s return. Just like the seasons of the year there are seasons of time. Christ told us in Scripture what to watch for. We also need to realize that things on this earth will get worse before they get better, but no matter what happens we cannot lose our hope.

11. He waits because as time goes on, it becomes more important and not less to do so. As the harvest comes near it is crucial to stay the course and remain faithful to our calling of making disciples. Every moment that passes with someone not hearing the good news is time that we will never get back. Take each moment seriously. Until the crop is harvested, we must nourish and take care of it diligently.

As we continue, James reiterates that as we wait patiently for the return of the Lord we are not to use the time we have complaining against each other. What this means is that as we wait for the return of the Lord we should not allow the challenges we face to cause us to become angry and bitter at each other. When we are having a bad day usually it is a very easy thing to become frustrated and then take out that frustration on those we are the closest to. The reason we do that is because we have a sense of comfort with those people that we do not have with a stranger. This can also take place in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in the church. When we become angry at others and treat them harshly James tells us that there will be judgment for such behavior. The reason we should not be treating each other harshly is because the judge is near, meaning that every day that passes the return of the Lord is drawing closer. Because of this, we can rest assured that the evil and the suffering of this world will be dealt with meaning that we do not need to spend our time grumbling and complaining about all of the things taking place here. One such way we can avoid this behavior is by not becoming pulled in to the controversies or conspiracy theories of the day that are designed to take our focus away from what God desires for us to be concerned with. We are to be constantly watching for the return of Christ and not become distracted by things that are going to take us away from that. An example of this is a serious matter that many Christians as well ad non-Christians are obsessed with that is taking up their time and making them not look for the return of Christ. There has been a debate for the past few decades regarding the belief that the earth is flat rather than a sphere. I know a couple of people who have become so obsessed with trying to prove the earth is flat that they have elevated it to a primary doctrine of faith and are using it also to set a stumbling block for others who do not yet know the Lord. What I have been trying to urge these men to do is not become so fixated on that theory and remain focused on sharing the gospel so that those who do not yet know the Lord may hear the good news and be saved. Whether the earth is flat or a sphere, what all of us agree on is that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe who has sent His only Son to liberate His creation from the curse of sin and death.

 Another debate that seems to dominate the discussion between creationists and evolutionists is the disagreement over how many days it took God to create the world. The book of Genesis is very clear that God created the world in six 24-hour days and that He rested on the 7th day. Even though there is a lot of debate regarding the six literal days of creation, I want to urge followers of Christ not to allow that fact to get in the way of our discussions with others. In other words, arguing over that might take away from the primary focus which is that God is the creator, we are not the result of random processes and that this world is designed for a particular purpose which results in the fact that our lives have a purpose.

 Now we come to the part of the passage where James provides his readers with examples of people from the history of the Jewish nation who endured and showed patience in their lives. First, he mentions the prophets which are a perfect example of those who kept the faith despite being rejected and suffering for the word they were delivering. There were several prophets who endured patiently during their suffering and kept the faith despite their challenges. For the sake of time, I would quickly like to revisit the prophet Jeremiah. This man had the task of warning the kingdom of Judah that if they did not stop worshiping false gods and rejecting the God of Israel they would be taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Rather than have the nation hear and accept his message, he was mistreated and suffered at the hands of his own people. Here are just a few examples of what he faced: he was put in the stocks (Jeremiah 20:2), he was thrown into prison (32:2), and the people plotted to murder him (26:7-15). Even though all of this things were done against him he still served the Lord by delivering the message. What we learn from there example is that those who are faithful to the Lord are not saved from persecution and hardship. We see that those who follow Christ will suffer persecution and this is something that is to be expected. Jesus told the disciples that they should expect to suffer for His name because He was rejected first. Therefore, all of us should have that same expectation. We need to realize that following Christ will result in us facing tough times. Hence, this is why James began his epistle discussing trials in life and how followers of Christ should look upon those with joy.

 This point is further evidenced by James mentioning the patience of Job, who faced trials and suffered even though he was a righteous man in his generation. There is no guarantee that being a believer in God will automatically save someone from persecution, rather it is guaranteed that those who follow Christ will suffer. So, we must ask, where is the good news in all of this? The Apostle Paul explained that even though he had been beaten several times and had faced persecution from his fellow Jews, he had a much better reward to look forward to. Paul tells Timothy in the second letter he wrote to him “in the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). Therefore, there is a very strong reason for the people of God to wait patiently for the return of the Lord. When Christ returns, He will gather His elect from the four winds of the earth and all of those who have done evil will face judgment. This is definitely good news and motivation to wait patiently.

 As we conclude our study today let us review the main ideas of the passage. First, let us follow the example of the patient farmer who works constantly to grow a crop with reliance on the Lord to guide it. We are working as harvesters in this world, so may we bring in a bountiful harvest for when the Lord returns. Secondly, let us follow the example of the prophets who never neglected to preach the message despite the persecution they faced. Thirdly, may we endure patiently like Job. He lost all he had, but because he sis not lose faith our compassionate and merciful God took care of him. God will do the same for us if we patiently wait. So, as we said as we began today, patience is indeed a virtue!