

Patience

We have just a few more messages in our series from the New Testament Book of James that we are calling *Working Faith*; I have just one more outlined after today.

Today we'll focus on verses 7-12 of the 5th chapter; the passage begins by setting the theme of the passage (hence my straightforward title).

⁷ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.¹

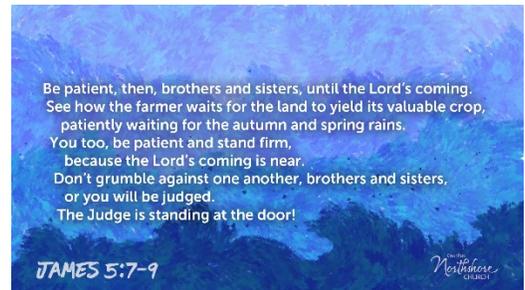
Patience, this passage is mostly about patience.

This first verse reminds us of God's *meta-calendar* for us. Sometimes certain Christians get into trouble with systems of dates and calendars, moons and holidays and such. I'm not a big fan of most of those systems (I'm not a dispensationalist, for example). But we are on *solid theological ground* when we identify that Jesus changed everything. Our calendars, the way we count years, agrees; it was about 2019 years ago when Jesus changed everything. We ought to also agree that Jesus will change everything when He returns. Jesus lives, and will return to claim His people (those who believe) and all His creation.

From the perspective of eternity, these must be the two most important dates: when Jesus came, and when He will come again. And we live **here**, *somewhere in the middle*. The implied question is something like "how are we to live, here and now, *somewhere in the middle*." James answers the implied question: **patience**.

That is not *complicated*, but it isn't all that **easy**. Is patience easy... does anyone find patience to be easy? As an adult, I've learned to *fake it* because adults are expected to be patient, and perhaps I have developed a modicum of patience... but I know the truth; I'm not really all that patient. I'm pretty sure I'm not alone.

So, if James is saying that the ultimate attitude we are to have for living here, *somewhere in the middle*, is **patience**, and I know that that is harder than it sounds, then I think I/we ought to pay attention.



¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.²

The farmer is a familiar illustration, throughout the Bible, and even throughout this Book of James. Farming is a great illustration of patience because it requires a lot of work and expertise from the farmer, and then a lot of reliance on things the farmer cannot control. For a farmer to be successful it takes a lot of hard work throughout the process, preparing the soil, planting seeds, tending to growing plants, and harvest. It takes a lot of expertise,

- knowing what makes good soil, and how to improve it
- knowing seeds and when and how to plant them
- understanding the impact of other conditions, weeds, pests, other plants and such
- knowing the business of it all (management, marketing, investment, and such)

It takes a good farmer, hard work, and expertise... and it takes a lot that is outside of the farmer's control. Perhaps chiefly it takes rain (as it specifies in the text). But it is more than just rain that is out of the control of farmers. Conditions of sunlight and soil determine success, and disasters like pests or weather could bring complete failure.

This is the sort of patience that farmers bring to their work, and the sort of patience called from every believer as we live *somewhere here in the middle*. We do everything we can, we apply all that we know and all our effort to living Christian lives that are fruitful, faithful and honor God. And that is all in the context of the patience required of us who know that God is in control. Ultimately success and provision, as well as failure and suffering, are within His control. And, we know that He holds the calendar.

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.³

How do you feel about the *nearness* of the Lord's coming? Do we believe it? Do we act like we believe it? (Perhaps eschatology without works is dead too.)

There is little doubt that those who penned and originally heard the words of our New Testament were convinced that the promised return of Jesus was imminent. It could have been anytime, likely during their lifetimes or perhaps within a generation.

² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

And yet, 2,000 years later, here we still are. Has it been some sort of a trick, or broken promise?

The Scripture is clear that we ought to continue to live with the expectation that the Lord could return at any moment:

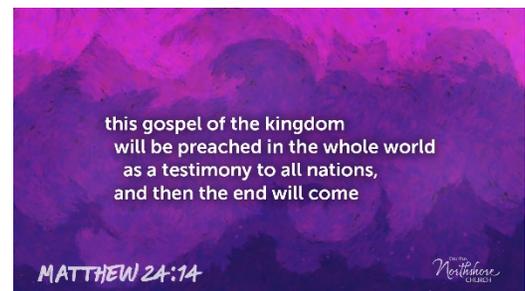
1. He could. There is no condition that would keep Him from returning now, today, or next week.
2. Any of us could meet Him through death at any moment. We may not know that the moment of His coming is short; but we certainly know that life is short.
3. This is the best attitude for us. The clear teaching of Scripture is that we are live, here somewhere in the middle, with this mindset.

I don't know when He will return, and I don't why He hasn't returned yet. But I know that His timing is best; I know that He can be trusted.

When I do think about why He has not yet returned, I remember the Words of Jesus:

this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. ⁴

The longer He tarries (waits) the more opportunity we have to populate eternity with believers. There is still a lot of work to do!



When Jesus said "all nations" we should understand that as *people groups*; that could be a nation, but more often a smaller group with its own culture and language. Today there are over 7.5 billion people in the World, with over 17,000 unique people groups. Today over 7,000 of those people groups remain unreached. They don't have churches; they don't know Jesus.

If the kindness of God is waiting just a bit longer so that we can welcome more people in as believers, I'm in favor. Furthermore, it underscores that we have rolls to play; we have work to do. Eschatology without works is dead.

A mindset of the Lord's nearness must be more than mere excited feelings of anticipation, but an urgency to preach the Gospel.

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Mt 24:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! ⁵

In this in-between time when we live, we are to be **patient**, we are to live **expecting the Lord to return soon**, and we are to live in peace with one another... not **grumbling**.

This simply reminds us that patience isn't easy... and when it is most difficult, we tend to *take it out* on those close to us. It could just be a matter of heightened crankiness... but often it turns to blaming and judging.

We are reminded that there is only one eternal and righteous judge... and He is coming soon.

Verse 10 offers more examples

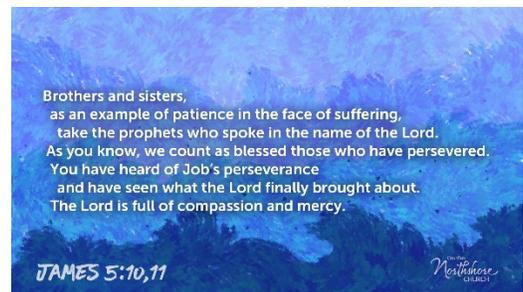
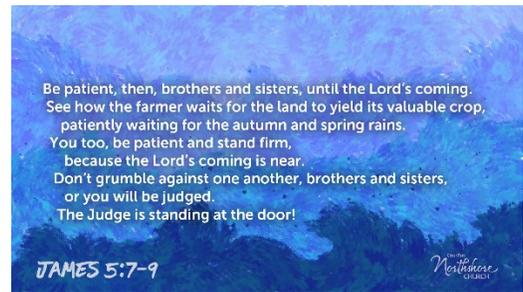
of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. ⁶

Apart from Job, who we'll get to in a moment, it is curious that James is so ambiguous, not specifically naming prophets that He had in mind. In our Bibles, it seems that most of those identified as prophets exhibited patience, while some were particularly powerful examples of patience.

As an interesting side note, some scholars believe that James wasn't necessarily referencing our Old-Testament prophets, but rather the Maccabees (those Jewish warrior/liberators from which Hanukkah is celebrated). These heroes would have been famous to the original hearers of James, heroes from just a few generations before.

Regardless of precisely who James may have had in mind, the point is that connection with our history of faith always connects us to examples of patience in the face of suffering... whether that history is all the way back to one like Abraham in the Book of Genesis, or the brothers and sisters among us today who encourage us with their walks of faith.

Here is how Jesus described this *somewhere in the middle* life that His followers endure:



⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:10–11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ⁷

I think it is easy for us to misunderstand opposition, persecution, and general difficulty as signs that we are doing it wrong; but Jesus says that these are precisely the signs of blessing.

Curiously, James **does** call out Job as an example. I say *curiously* because most would agree that Job wasn't exactly a perfect example of patience.

Note that it says:

You have heard of Job's *perseverance* and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. ⁸

The text seems to muddle the words patience and endurance, or patience and perseverance. Some scholars treat the words as interchangeable; I'm not so sure.

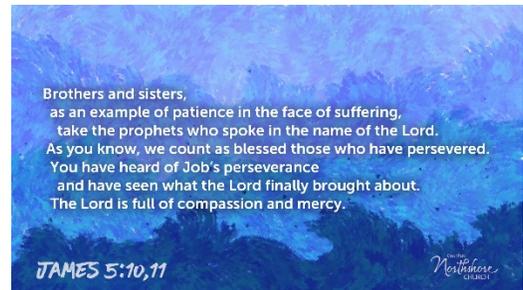
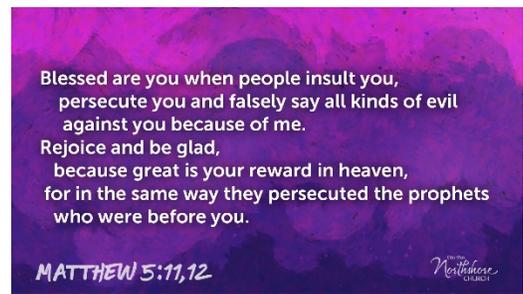
Job wasn't exactly *patient*. In describing Job's experience, William Barclay put it in these terms:

“Job's is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart.”⁹

Job was a better example of **perseverance** (endurance) than patience. Honestly, I am glad for this imperfect example, and all the imperfect examples in the Bible (only Jesus is perfect). I pursue perfection; I want to be like Jesus. But the imperfect examples encourage me to press on. The imperfect examples, like Job, remind me that the promise that

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. ¹⁰

is for me, and all of us, too.



⁷ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Mt 5:11–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ Moo, D. J. (2000). [The letter of James](#) (p. 229). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

¹⁰ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The passage wraps up with verse 12:

¹² Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned. ¹¹

As we are living *somewhere in the middle*:

- Be patient
- Expect the Lord’s Soon Return
- Live at peace and harmony, and
- Do not swear; simply tell the truth

For those who do not believe, it seems that the world is convinced that we are just making this stuff up. We believe a bunch of made up stuff in our Bibles. We make up testimonies of changed lives. We make up feelings and such as we sing our songs about made up stuff. We make up stories of miracles and the like.

Nobody likes to be called a **liar**, or **delusional**. We feel backed into a corner and what do we do, we swear, invoking God’s name or some other trustworthy source to validate our truthfulness. James says

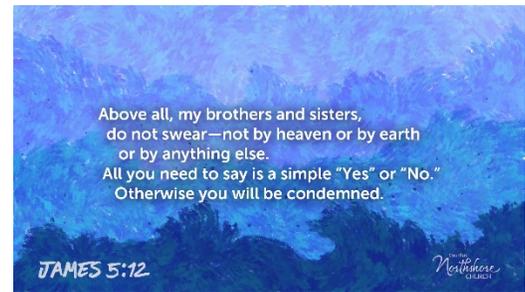
All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.”¹²

Children do this all the time. Watch kids try to solve their disagreements and they often resort to swearing, invoking some higher power... whether they swear on their own pinkies, their mother’s honor, of God. It is childish behavior that we adults resort to as well. James says

All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.”¹³

Some Christian traditions have taken this quite literally and pushed it to extremes, being unwilling to sign contracts or take oaths in court and such.

The point here is not about what others, through contracts and such, might require, but rather what we add to demonstrate our truthfulness. Our truthfulness should be pure and consistent and dependable, not needing any other assertion. A **yes** or **no** should suffice. Let government and others that we might deal with require what they might in terms of oaths and contracts... the existence of such things should have no bearing on our truthfulness. In casual or formal circumstances, our simple **yes** and **no** ought to be trustworthy.



¹¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jas 5:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

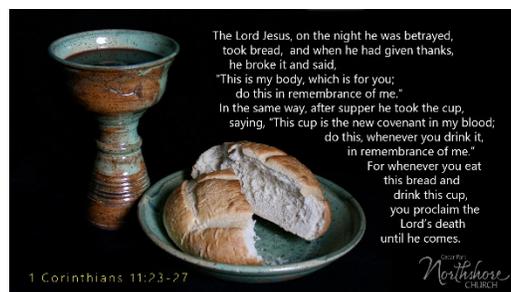
These matters of patience, and how we live our lives in this *middle*, align well with what is spread before us this morning, the Lord's Table.

Attitudes of patience, peace, endurance, and anticipation of the Lord's return, align with this observance ordained by Jesus.



Consider how the Apostle Paul describes these moments:

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,
²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."
²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."
²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
¹⁴



In Communion we proclaim the Lord's work, His death, His sacrifice... until He comes. This is an ordinance... a discipline and proclamation of the Gospel, for here and now, for this time of patience somewhere here in the middle.

As we receive:

- Patience (trust)
- Urgency (work)

¹⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (1 Co 11:23–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.