
The Book of James

Chapter 5:7-11

Ministry Reading

Opening Reading -- James 5:7-16

James 5:7-16

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Patience: Five Times, and Love's First Quality

The word patience -- or the patient one -- appears five times in verses 7 through 11: twice in verse 7, once in verse 8, once in verse 10, and once in the middle of verse 11. That repetition is the Spirit of God pressing the point. And it is not without significance that patience is the first quality named in the great description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Darby renders it: 'Love has long patience.' Love and patience go together -- they are compatible, they belong to each other. What passes for love in the world tends to be impatient, because at its root it is self: I want this person or this thing, and I want it now. But the love that gives, the love that flows from the heart of God -- that love is patient. It waits for the harvest at God's time.

The Context: Surrounded by Sin

Our passage is framed on both sides by a somber context. What precedes it is a sharp address to those who have lived in luxury and pleasure, who have condemned and killed the just. What follows returns to the question of sin in a different form: if any is turned from the truth, the one who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death. In the middle of these dark descriptions stands this passage -- the husbandman waiting patiently for precious fruit. The patience of the husbandman is not indifference to sin and evil around him. It is the patience that endures, that waits for God to work, that does not take matters into its own hands.

The Husbandman and Precious Fruit

The husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth. That word precious is worth pausing over. Scripture speaks of the precious Savior, the precious blood, precious faith, precious promises. And here, precious fruit. The fruit of the gospel, the fruit of faithful labor, the souls won and built up in the things of God

-- these are precious things. The husbandman does not plant seed and then become indifferent. There is hoeing and watering and pruning and careful work before the harvest. He is active, concerned, and patient all at once. And the early and latter rains are God's part -- signs of His approval upon the work, a picture of how one plants and another waters, but God gives the increase.

The Sower and His Waiting: Matthew 13 and Mark 4

The Lord Jesus is preeminently the sower. In Matthew 13 He says of the parable of the tares: 'He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world.' And Mark 4 gives a picture of the sower's patient waiting:

Mark 4:26-29

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

He rises night and day -- he is not indifferent, not passive. He is watching and waiting and concerned. But he does not know how the seed grows. The growth is God's own mysterious work. The patience is that of one who has done his part faithfully and trusts the harvest to God's time.

Honduras: A Hundred Years of Harvest

A striking example of this patient sowing came from Central America. In 1908 two brothers went to Honduras to cover the whole country with gospel literature. Every morning one of them rose at four o'clock and traveled from town to town. Over four years every single town in Honduras received the gospel. Then the

Lord withdrew each of the laborers -- one by disease, one by one they were taken from the field. Malaria brought one of them home. And to all outward appearances, nothing had developed. The seed had been sown and seemed to lie dormant.

Years passed -- many years, nearly a hundred. Then the harvest came. First there were some twenty-five assemblies in Honduras, and in time that number grew to around two hundred and fifty. The workers who had sown never saw it. They were taken home before the fruit fully appeared. But the Lord blessed the faithfulness of those who sowed, and the harvest was His in His own time. That is what we are called to: faithfulness, and the leaving of results in God's hands.

The Andes: One Sower, One Convert the Day After

An almost identical story came from South America. A brother developed a strong exercise to take the gospel to a particular town high in the Andes Mountains. A doctor warned him that the altitude would give him at most two years to live if he went. But he could not shake the conviction that the Lord wanted him there, so he went. He spent two years distributing gospel literature and preaching, and then he died -- without a single conversion.

Shortly after his death, a man came to the door of whoever was still there and said: I must talk with him -- the one who brought the gospel here. I have read his tract, and I have been saved. The brother who had given his life for the gospel in that town had been taken home just before his first convert came. And that first convert had the gift of an evangelist: he became responsible for the conversion of multitudes in that country. If the seed had not been sown, none of that fruit would have come. God is sovereign and can do anything without us. But He is pleased to use the foolishness of preaching, and He alone knows how the seed grows.

Early and Latter Rain

The early and latter rains of verse 7 speak of God's own part in the harvest. In Israel's experience, these rains in their due seasons were a sign of God's approval and blessing on an obedient people. One plants, another waters, but God gives the increase. The latter rain carries a particular weight in the prophets. Hosea 6:3 says: 'He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.' The coming of the Lord Himself is pictured in the latter rain -- the final sovereign blessing that produces the full harvest of His purposes.

Be Patient unto the Coming of the Lord

Verse 7 gives us the object of patience: 'unto the coming of the Lord.' Not unto certain events that will precede His coming. Not until the abomination of desolation stands in the holy place. Not until the Antichrist is revealed. Just one thing: the coming of the Lord. That is the event that patience is anchored to. And the verb is in the aorist: 'have become patient' -- not a process still ongoing but a state already entered and to be maintained. The soul is to be in the position of a patient one and to remain there, not slipping out of it.

Second Thessalonians 3:5 adds a depth to this: 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of the Christ.' Not merely patience for Christ -- but His own patience. The Lord Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, is waiting for the Father to send Him forth. He too exercises patience as man -- waiting for the moment the Father appoints. That is the patience we are called into.

Verse 9: Groan Not One Against Another

Verse 9 returns patience to the most practical level: do not groan against one another, lest you be condemned -- for the judge stands before the door. There are

groans and groans: the groan that arises from our own suffering is one thing, but the groan directed against a brother is another. The failure of patience toward God -- losing sight of His purposes and His timing -- almost always expresses itself in failure of patience toward fellow Christians.

Moses said to the people of Israel after repeated complaint: 'He hath heard your murmurings which ye murmur against him.' They were complaining against Moses, but their complaint was ultimately against the Lord. They did not know that the Lord had already made provision for the need, if only they had asked. When the Lord comes and we hear the assembly shout and are caught up to be with Him in the air, it will not be an occasion for presenting a list of complaints. We will bow at His feet, worship Him, and give Him thanks and praise. The complaints that seemed so weighty down here will have no place before Him. What is really important is patience.

The Judge Standing Before the Door

The judge stands before the door -- not sitting upon the judgment seat, but standing. There may be something of grace suggested in that posture: the God who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, stands in patience Himself. He has not yet taken His seat in judgment. The door is still open. Government will assert itself -- the Lord does chasten His own (1 Corinthians 11:32) -- but the standing judge speaks of One who waits in grace before the final act of judgment falls.

The Prophets as Examples; Simeon

Verse 10 points to the prophets as examples of suffering affliction and patience. Hebrews 11 and 12 give us the great cloud of witnesses -- those who endured. Among them is Simeon, who had been told by the Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. When the parents brought the child

Jesus to the temple, Simeon took him in his arms and said: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' Not every prophet who waited for the first coming of the Lord lived to see Him. But Simeon did, and he said exactly the right thing. His patience was rewarded.

The Endurance of Job

Verse 11 brings Job before us with a particular word: not his patience, but his endurance -- the steadfastness that held on through circumstances. One has noted that in all his early trials, 'Job sinned not with his lips.' That is one aspect of it. But Job handled the dealings of God with him far better than he handled the arguments of his three friends, with whom he disputed at great length -- feeling that they had not addressed his situation honestly. They kept arguing until they stopped, because Job had justified himself and they had run out of answers. It took, as one brother calculated, something like thirteen thousand words in the book of Job before the Lord brought him to the place where he was. A long process of endurance -- but God was working through it.

At the beginning, Job was greatly blessed and greatly feared: 'What I feared has come upon me.' His blessings came with that edge of dread. At the end, he knew how to receive all from God's hand as a pure gift of grace. The Lord had shown Job himself -- not a pleasant sight -- and had shown him something of Himself. Job's three daughters at the end of the book, with their names speaking of beauty and light and fragrance, suggest the fruit that God was seeking in his trial. The endurance of Job was not mere gritting of teeth through difficulty; it was a work that the Lord was doing in him through the whole long process.

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Lord willing.