

Patience in Suffering

⁷ Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.¹

We are in the season of advent where we look with anticipation for Jesus' return. James wrote about how we are to behave while we wait. The book of James was written to "the 12 tribes scattered among the nations," but it speaks to us gathered in this place at this time. The book has the substance and authority of the Prophets and the style and beauty of the Psalms. I don't know how many of you were raised on a farm or are gardeners, but James tells us that we must be like farmers who have patience and faith in God for the harvest. No crop grows overnight unless it a crop of weeds, and no farmer has control over the weather. Too much rain can cause the plants in the garden to rot, and too much sun can burn the plants up. An early frost can kill the plants. So the farmer or the gardener must be long-suffering with the weather!

The gardener must also have patience with the seed and the plants, because it takes time for plants to grow. Jewish farmers would plow and sow in what to us are the autumn months. The "early rain" would soften the soil. The "latter rain" would come in the early spring (our February-March) and help to mature the harvest. The farmer had to wait many weeks for his seed to produce fruit.

Why did farmer willingly wait so long...because the fruit is "precious." The harvest is worth waiting for. In Galatians 6:9 we read "In due season we shall reap, if we don't faint." When the crop matures, the harvest will come." (Mark 4:28-29)

James pictured Christians as "spiritual farmer" looking for a spiritual harvest. Our hearts are the soil, and the "seed is the Word of God" (Luke 8:11). There are seasons to the spiritual life just as there are seasons to the soil. Sometimes, our hearts become cold

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Jas 5:7-12

and “wintry,” and the Lord has to “plow them up” before He can plant the seed (Jer. 4:3). God sends the sunshine and the rains of God’s goodness to water and nurture the seeds planted; but we must be patient to wait for the harvest.

The secret of endurance is that we be receptive to God producing a harvest in our lives. God wants the “fruit of the Spirit” (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control) to grow (Gal. 5:22–23), and the way God does this is through trials and troubles. Instead of growing impatient with God and with ourselves, we must yield to the God and let the fruit to grow. Remember we are “spiritual farmers” looking for a harvest.

You can enjoy this kind of a harvest only if your heart is strengthened (James 5:8). One of the purposes of the spiritual ministry of the local church is to strengthen the heart (Rom. 1:11). The ministry of the Word of God and prayer are important if our hearts are going to be strengthened. A heart that is not strengthened cannot bear fruit.

James reminds us that the farmer does not stand around doing nothing: he is constantly at work as he looks toward the harvest. James did not tell these suffering believers to put on white robes, climb a hill, and wait for Jesus to return. “Keep working and waiting” was his instruction. “Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He comes” is found working and watching (Luke 12:43). Also the farmer does not get into fights with his neighbors. One of the usual marks of farmers is their willingness to help one another. Nobody on the farm has time or energy for fights with the neighbors. So James added, “Don’t grumble against each other, or you will be judged” (James 5:9). Impatience with God often leads to impatience with God’s people, and this is a sin we must avoid. If we start using our harvesting tools on each other, we will miss the harvest!

Then James points us to the Old Testament prophets for encouragement. For one thing, they were in the will of God, but they still suffered. They were preaching “in the name of the Lord,” but they were persecuted. You have experienced it... other Christian

and Satan tells the faithful Christian that your suffering is the result of sin or unfaithfulness. But you must remember that if you are faithful your suffering might be because of your faithfulness! 2 Timothy 3:12 says “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” We must never think that obedience automatically produces ease and pleasure. Jesus was obedient, and it led to a cross!

The prophets encourage us by reminding us that God cares for us when we go through sufferings for His sake. Elijah announced to wicked King Ahab that there would be a drought in the land for three and one half years; and Elijah himself had to suffer in that drought. But God cared for him, and God gave him victory over the evil priests of Baal. It has been said, “The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.”

Many of the prophets had to endure great trials and sufferings, not only at the hands of unbelievers, but at the hands of professed believers. Jeremiah was arrested as a traitor and even thrown into an abandoned well to die. God fed Jeremiah and protected him throughout that terrible siege of Jerusalem, even though at times it looked as though the prophet was going to be killed. Both Ezekiel and Daniel had their share of hardships, but the Lord delivered them. And even those who were not delivered, who died for the faith, received that special reward for those who are true to God. Our patience in times of suffering is a testimony to others around us. Our lives might back up our messages. We have power to lead others, but they want to know whether we follow our own teaching by our faithful and godly lives. Some will say, but have not many faithful Christians suffered and died without any notice or recognition? Yes, but when Jesus returns, these “un-sung heroes” will receive their rewards. The prophets were killed and buried, but today their names are honored. When our Lord comes again, He will bring His reward with Him (Rev. 22:12). The Second Coming of Jesus is the arrival of the King; it is God appearing to his people and mounting his eternal throne; it is God directing on the world the full blaze of his heavenly glory.

The example that James used from the Old Testament prophets ought to encourage us to spend more time in the Bible, getting acquainted with these heroes of faith. According to Romans 15:4, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” The better we know the Bible, the more God can encourage us in the difficult experiences of life. The important thing is that, like the farmer, we keep working, and, like the prophets, we keep witnessing, no matter how trying the circumstances may be.²

If we want to meet God in peace, if we want to have joy the experience of Jesus comes again, I recommend Jesus. Give your life to Him. You may be one that says but I have done so much wrong in my life that God can't love and use me. I know one who was born in Bethlehem, whose birth we celebrate this time of year. He grow and learned and taught and prayed and loved each of us so much that He went to the cross and died for our sins. Now He stands at the door of your heart knocking, waiting to be invited in. He can and will change your life from the inside out! I recommend Jesus. Jesus can and will be the center of your life.

Thanks be unto God for salvation and the Holy Spirit to help us walk patiently in righteousness and peace, and the promise of Jesus' soon return! ^{3 4 5}

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jas 5:7

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:833

⁴Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 875

⁵Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters of James and Peter*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 121