
"Patient Like Farmers"

JAMES 5:7-12

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PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

In life there are certain things you cannot control. Justice, vindication, relief from suffering are in God's hands. You do what you can with integrity and you wait patiently like farmers for the Lord to do what He's going to do.

Farmers till the ground, plant the seed, and fertilize the ground. Then they wait and they pray for rain to nourish the crop. No matter what the farmer does, he must acknowledge there are some things that are out of his control. Likewise, Christians have to acknowledge that no matter how hard we try, there are some things that are simply out of our control. We must trust the Lord. We must wait patiently like farmers. Our waiting is not in vain, though. We have ample reason to put our hope in His ultimate justice at the coming of Jesus Christ. So wait patiently like farmers! **INTRODUCTION**

Psalm 37 is one of David's most incredible anthems in my opinion. The steely resolve to wait for the Lord to be his vindication. The quiet confidence that the Lord sees and knows the schemes of the wicked, and will ultimately bring them to ruin. It's a vivid reminder that you and I are not responsible for our own justice. We don't have to cling to it. We don't have to wrestle it out of the hands of those most powerful because, frankly, they aren't the *most* powerful.

THE MOST POWERFUL ONE

No, the most powerful One, Elohim and El Shaddai, God *Almighty* is the One who created all things and holds all things together. He demonstrates His power with every thunder storm, every sunrise, and every breathe in your lungs.

He is also Yahweh, the Lord our God. He is and He was and He always will be. He is *I AM*.

And Yahweh is our Abba, Father. He is close and personal.

Our close and personal Father is also El Elyon, the *God Most High*

Though He is God most high, He is also El Roi, He is the *God who sees* us in our lowly estate. And he doesn't just observe, He cares.

Because cares, He provides. He is Jehovah Jirah, the *God who provides*. Every good gift comes down from above.

Not only is He our provider, He is also Jehovah Nissi – the *Lord is my banner* - Our defender and protector.

And He is Jehovah Rapha, the *God who heals and restores*. It is in Him that we find healing for our sin-sick soul.

In light of all of this, He is Jehovah Shalom, the God of peace.

It is because of who God is that we can be patient like farmers even when our worlds seem to be spiraling out of control.

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. ¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. PRAY

EARLY AND LATE RAINS

Verse 7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. Notice the transition back to **brothers**. Last week was primarily a rebuke and a warning to the oppressive rich that the Great Reversal is coming. This week is a call to the faithful poor to patiently endure their suffering until it comes.

James refers to the **early rain** that fell in late fall. This rain prepared the ground and caused the seed to germinate. The **late rain** fell in the early summer months giving strength to the wheat stalk so that it could produce buds. Farmers were dependent upon both, but could control neither.

Likewise, James urges Christians to wait for their vindication like a farmer waits for the **precious fruit of the earth**. He tills, he seeds, he fertilizes and then what? Then he waits for the Lord to do what he is incapable of doing – he waits for the rain. He has no control over the rain so all of his work is at the mercy of the Lord.

If there's no rain, there's no precious fruit. Because his crop is his livelihood, in a very real sense he has to trust the Lord with all of his life. The **fruit of the earth**, his harvest, was **precious** to the farmer. How much more **precious** is the fruit of Heaven for the Christian?

For farmers now, **early and late rains** have different affects than in James' day. This year the early rain became a burden, delaying seeding. But now that the seed is in the ground and the crop is beginning to grow, farmers are praying for the late rain to water their crops. It would now be the lack of rain that burdens farmers. Whether it is waiting for the rain to dry up to seed or the lack of rain to nourish, the farmer's livelihood is dependent on something he cannot control.

In this life there are things we must live with that are outside our control. We have to trust the Lord with the early and the late rains, whatever those may be in our lives. At times finances might feel like an early rain – you've got too much too soon, you're flush with resources and you get sucked into materialism or gambling or reckless spending, or worse a sense of self-reliance. For others, or at other times in your life, it is the lack of resources that causes pressure to mount.

We could apply this to marriage. For some the wait to be married feels like it's taking forever. The loneliness and the passing of life without a significant other to share it with feels so hopeless and so exhausting. Some people feel stuck in the mud.

Then there are those who have found their spouse, gotten married, the honeymoon is over and life got real. And it's real hard. The let downs and failed expectations. The disagreements and the

discord. Is this really what I longed for for so long? Is there more to marriage than this? Some people feel parched and thirsty for life.

Having kids is a huge source of trial and suffering for people. The wait to get pregnant, the infertility and the miscarriages have would-be parents in tears before the Lord. My fruitful years are passing me by! Then the precious bundle of joy comes! But the sweetness is replaced with the sassy. Then the sassy with the sullen or the smart-mouths, leaving exhausted parents in tears before the Lord.

I could go on and on. We wait for the early rains which never seem to go away, always preventing us from moving into the season we really want to be in. Then when the rain finally clears and we finally enter those seasons, we find ourselves wondering what the hype was all about and begging the Lord to send the refreshing late rains to revive our soul.

James began his letter to the church with an exhortation to rejoice in our sufferings, saying, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” James 1:2* There are all kinds of trials coming your way and mine. Lord willing, we’ll never face the violent persecution that so many Christians have and continue to face. If we do, this passage will take on a whole new meaning for us. Even if we don’t, though, there’s only one thing we can count on: life is hard.

REAL RELIEF IS COMING

The only real relief is the return of Jesus. Until then, it’s about faithfully navigating the trials and rejoicing in them because of what they produce in us. It’s about being patient like a farmer. The precious fruit of *heaven* is coming! James said in **verse 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**

When James says, **be patient**, he’s not telling us to passively watch life go by, like we’re sitting at the airport waiting for the flight to board. That phrase is pregnant with meaning. It means not only waiting but also expecting.

The farmer sows the seed and waits, but he doesn’t wait aimlessly. He maintains his equipment, he tends the field, he prepares his barns. He waits, expecting that at the proper time the precious fruit of the earth will be ready for harvest.

This is what James means when he says, **establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.** We should prepare ourselves for His imminent return. Wait with eager expectation the way the farmer fully anticipates the harvest of his crop.

James points our attention to **the coming of the Lord** The word James used is *parousia* and it refers to the physical presence of the Lord. What inspires Christians to endure faithfully is the physical return of Christ and His everlasting presence with us as our King. When we think about Christ’s return, it should inspire holiness and hopefulness, not debates.

James says the Lord’s coming **is at hand**. It is 2000 years nearer today. By the end of the first century Jesus spoke to John in the concluding words of Revelation, *“And behold, I am coming soon...Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done...He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’” Revelation 22:7, 12, 20*

Jesus could return this moment or He could belabor another 2000 years. Peter tells us a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day in the Lord’s timing. The point James is making is that His return is near and we should not only believe it, but allow it to inspire confidence that we can endure life’s trials. For as Paul said, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:18*

DON'T COME OUT SIDeways

James offers a bit of very practical advice next for us while we wait. In **verse 9** he says, **Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.**

Sometimes we need to be reminded who the real enemy is. This is especially so when we feel the pressures of life and when the body is experiencing spiritual attack. It can make people jumpy, irritable, & quick to take offense. We can grow frustrated with our circumstances and end up coming out sideways on people.

Yet, Christians ought to be the last people to devour one another. As James has already made clear, who are you to judge your neighbor? Who are you to **grumble against one another?** Who are you to complain and criticize and gossip about your brother or sister?

That **the judge is standing at the door** is a warning for Christians, too! Focus on doing the Lord's work, having your lanterns lit like the faithful servants and wait and hope in the Lord's return. As we say on the weapons qualification range: Watch *your* lane!

So often, we grumble against other Christians because we're discontent with what the Lord has given us or what He's asking us to do. We compare our lives to others' and become cynical of them. We complain and we criticize our fellow servants, we judge them harshly and James warns that our judge is at the door. Imagine Jesus coming through the door while you trash one of your brothers or sisters in Christ, one of His precious servants for whom He died!

THE BLESSING FOLLOWS THE ENDURANCE OF SUFFERING

Returning to the topic of suffering, James says in **verse 10** **As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.**

It's easy to look at someone who endures suffering and be inspired by their faithfulness and almost envy them a little. Not that we envy what they had to endure, but that they reaped the fruit of the endurance. I think about someone who runs a marathon and there's part of me that envies their accomplishment. We love the finish line moments!

But what I don't envy is the 26.2 miles between the finish line and the starting line. It's tempting to look at someone on the tail end of their trials and see how the Lord **blessed** them through it; how they grew in their faith and how they have this peace which surpasses all understanding and a strength and resolve, and to see how the Lord provided in miraculous ways, and how they've impacted the world around them.

We want to be blessed like those who endure faithfully; at times we're jealous of their walk with Christ. We see the glory of their suffering – how it brings glory to God and steadies their resolve, but we rarely think so fondly when the storm clouds build over our heads. The difficulty is recognizing our own opportunities to exercise our faith by walking through the trials trusting in the Lord.

People want to grow spiritually, they want to have a Kingdom impact, they want great faith, but few want to endure the trials that produce such great faith. They want the result without the hardship. They want great things to be handed to them. That's now how it works. God's blessing come to those who endure trials faithfully rather than avoiding hardship.

Interestingly, James appeals to men who suffered not at the hands of God's enemies, of people who claimed to love God. The **prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord** "*were stoned, they were sawn*

in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.” Hebrews 11:37 Who did that to them? God’s people did that to them.

Like the prophets were **blessed who remained steadfast**, so too are God’s children today blessed when they patiently endure their trials, even when their trials come at the hands of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

James gives us a specific example of faithful endurance followed by blessing, Job. **You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.**

Job was a wealthy man who had a lot of kids and a lot of possessions. He also was a man who loved the Lord. Satan accused Job of only loving God because he had been blessed and requested God’s permission to strip him of all these things, God obliged. One after another, Job had everything in his life except his wife taken from him. Several would-be helpers advised him that it was his sin causing the loss – only bad things happen to ungodly people.

There’s an element of atheism that comes out in each of us when we suffer. Whether that is the loss of a job, a loved one, an opportunity, conflict with people, or outright persecution, there’s an unsettled doubt that surfaces – is God really...real? Is He really...good? Is He really...able? If so, why does He allow this to happen?

But Job checked his heart, knew it wasn’t sin and refused to get angry with God. He didn’t handle it perfectly because, well, he wasn’t perfect. Which is really great news for us. Job was a real man like you and me. Therefore, his faith is replicable.

Job’s story is a reminder of God’s character. He is **compassionate and merciful**. This is why Peter urges Christians to constantly be *“casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7*

When we make this a practice of our lives – this depending and hoping in God for all of our needs and concerns and when we put ultimate hope in Jesus’ return rather than in getting ahead in this life – then we can truly live as people of integrity.

James desired that Christians stop envying other people’s lives and get busy living their own lives as faithfully as they can. In chapter 4, he rebuked them because their envy caused them to do all sorts of terrible things because they wanted what they did not have. They were discontent with their lives and the sting of poverty and persecution caused them to abandon Christian conduct and character. No doubt their lying tongues, the same tongues that spoke blessing and curses, flew fast and loose.

RADICAL INTEGRITY

To this end, he admonished the reader to be a person of integrity. He said in **verse 12** **But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.**

When pressures of life come, we’re tempted to justify white lies, subtle suggestion, manipulation, and other deceptive tactics to either lessen the suffering or evade it altogether. In the heat of the conflict, we might resort to stretching the truth, making promises we don’t intend to keep, or coloring the situation in a manner not true.

Deception is part of our sin nature. But how Christians speak has clearly been a serious issue for James. How we use our tongue is a mark of who we are. “Can a fig tree bear olives?” James asked.

James was correcting a popular Jewish practice that had the appearance of honesty but in reality devolved into a hedge for dishonesty. Some rabbi’s taught that certain oaths were binding and some

were not. If the person swearing the oath invoked the name of God or implied it, it was binding. Otherwise, it could be broken.

Thus, if you swore as God is your witness, it was binding. But if you swore by Jerusalem, it was not binding. Unless, that is, you swore *facing* Jerusalem. Then it was binding. Silly, right?! We get the sense of what we're dealing with from Hosea 10:4 "*They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants...*" God has never been pleased with empty promises.

These oaths James was addressing were more about finding loopholes to lie than attempts to affirm commitment to the truth. It's like crossing your fingers when you make a promise.

The point is that Christians should be so committed to integrity that oaths seem irrelevant and unnecessary. You ought to have such a high character that even business partners take your word for it. James' desire is that Christians would be people known for their integrity.

Even when life gets tough and the bills pile up and the pressures mount all around them, Christians keep their promises knowing that God always keeps His.

They don't cut corners to make something happen, they don't violate integrity in hopes of getting out of hot water. Instead, they keep entrusting themselves to Him who judges justly, just as Jesus did. They wait for the precious fruit of their heavenly harvest. They endure life's trials and they wait patiently for the Lord's vindication when He returns. They're patient like farmers.

By His grace and for His glory!

Pastor Brian

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