

Be Patient!

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[0 : 00] Of all the Christian virtues, patience is probably the hardest of them all to practice. We all want to be up and doing, whereas God wants us as his children to be patient.

If I can remind you that the main theme of the book of James is faith at work, faith at work. How to express our faith in Jesus Christ, in good works for Jesus Christ.

The patient Christian is putting her faith to work, especially when the circumstances in which she is called to be patient are painful.

Many of the Christians to whom James was writing were poor and the victims of the greed of the rich. Perhaps they wanted to take matters into their own hands to redress the balance, but to them James says, be patient, brothers.

Perhaps the circumstances into which we are being called this evening to be patient have nothing to do with economics. Perhaps they've got to do with broken relationships, physical or mental illnesses, COVID anxiety, or something else.

[1 : 28] Well, to us, as to his first readers, James says, be patient, brothers. Well, thanks, James. You brought us up short again, especially those who, like myself, are seriously impatient.

You've reminded me that my impatience is not a personality trait, but a sin I've got to repent of and run away from. If we want to put our faith in Christ to work, then we need to heed James' command. Be patient, brothers. Now, we can access James' teaching in these verses on the theme of patience under four headings.

Patience commanded, patience commended, patience characterized, and patience completed. Remember, of all the Christian virtues, patience may well be the hardest to practice.

But at the end of the day, the gospel of Jesus Christ is so able to transform us in holiness and grace, so that when others see us enduring patiently painful situations, they might well say of us and to us, hey, you have the patience of Job.

[2 : 58] Where does it come from? First of all, then, patience commanded, patience commanded. Our passage begins in verse 7 with the command to be patient.

And if we don't get the message, James reinforces the command in verse 8, therefore be patient. Both verbs are in the imperative tense. Be patient. Be patient.

I don't like it, but I get the message. God's not calling us to be patient. God isn't telling us that he would prefer it if we were patient. God is commanding us to be patient.

His command to be patient carries with it the same authority and the same urgency as all his other commands in Scripture, yes, even to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But, again, we're not calling us to be patient. Now, perhaps you and I might have hoped that God had set this as an optional extra in the Christian life.

Most university courses now offer electives in specialist subjects as well as compulsory core subjects. Perhaps we wish that God had made patience an optional elective in Christian growth rather than a core subject.

[4 : 12] But, again, we could excuse ourselves, could we not, on the basis that by nature we're impatient. We can leave patience to Christians who are by nature more patient than ourselves.

Because, after all, there are some of us, like myself, who temperamentally are more impatient than others. So are people like us excused from obedience to God's command to patience because, by nature, we are temperamentally impatient?

Not at all. Not at all. And this is what makes this command so challenging. It commands that we fight against what we are and who we are by nature.

That we stop making excuses for our impatience on the basis of our natural temperament. An independence upon God's grace toward us in Christ Jesus.

Repent of our impatience and run to Christ for the power to change who we are by nature. By nature, we might be angry people.

[5 : 16] But, by grace, we must subdue our anger. By nature, we might be impatient people. But, by grace, we must subdue our impatience. God commands our patience.

And that is super hard. As I said earlier, patience may well be the hardest of the Christian virtues to practice. Especially when the circumstances in which we are being called to be patient are tough. God is commanding that which is impossible for us. And we will come back to that later. There may be some of us who are going through very painful situations in our lives.

And perhaps we make allowances for our impatience. And yet the command of God is clear. Be patient, brothers. Neither natural temperament nor current circumstances excuse or justify our impatience and disobedience to the direct command of God.

And so patience is commanded. Earlier on, I said that we all want to be up and doing. But as God wants his children to be patient.

[6 : 31] Now, I don't want any of us to get the wrong impression here. Because it's easy for us to assume that patience is passive. Not at all. For on both occasions where James uses the imperative, be patient, he uses it in its active, active voice.

In other words, patience is up and doing. Patience requires sweat and tears. Patience is very far from the passive letting go and letting God.

Patience is an active virtue requiring superhuman effort. The Christian who is exercising patience is expending entirely as much energy as the Christian who is filling the space with busyness to keep his mind off his problems.

So here you have it. Patience is commanded. It's not an elective course in the school of sanctification. It's a core subject. All of us, whoever we are, by nature temperamentally impatient or going through tough circumstances, are commanded to be patient.

Young or old, poor or rich, be patient, brothers. Patience commanded. Patience commanded.

Second, patience commanded.

[7 : 56] Patience commanded. If you were to read through the book of James from a purely literary perspective, you'd pick up the various influences which affected his writing style.

So sometimes James sounds like King Solomon in the book of Proverbs. And sometimes, for example, in James 5 verses 1 through 6, like one of the Jewish minor prophets like Hosea or Amos or Malachi.

But by far, as you read through the book of James, you pick up his brother Jesus' influence upon him.

In particular, as you note the illustrations James uses, you can almost hear the voice of Jesus.

These illustrations commending patience are equally at home in the gospels as they are in the book of James.

And James commends the virtue of patience, driving it home to the hearts of his readers using two illustrations. One from nature.

[9 : 02] One from scripture. One from the book of God's works. And one from the book of God's words. He uses one from nature, first of all.

In verse 7, James speaks of the patience of the farmer. So the farmer sows his seed in dry soil. The precious fruit of which he speaks there in verse 7 is the harvest which shall come forth from that seed.

But the harvest does not follow on immediately from the sowing of the seed. For the seed to push through the soil and bear fruit, it requires rain.

And so, having sown his seed, every day the farmer looks up into the sky praying for the clouds to drop the rain. No grain, no growth. No growth, no food. The farmer has to be patient.

He counts time not in seconds or minutes like we do, but in months. He can't afford to be impatient or he'll go clean mad.

[10 : 06] He just has to wait for the rain to fall to reap the reward of a bountiful harvest. And there's a lesson for us all here.

Even though we live in a city, we all know the patience of our farming, forestry and fishing communities. They're not forever sitting agitated because they know that the seasons will come round.

And they have to be patient to wait for the right time to plant and the right time to harvest. When it comes to mission, having sown the seed, we need to be patient to reap the harvest.

That's one reason we continue steadfast in prayer on a Wednesday evening. Because it expresses our patience in waiting for God's time to send the rains of his blessing.

That's an example from nature. Well, secondly, from scripture. Example from scripture. For the sake of time, I'm going to overlook the patience of the prophets in verse 10. Prophets like Elijah, Jeremiah, who spoke for a lifetime, but whose words seem to have had so little effect.

[11 : 20] But there are few more attractive figures in the Bible than the patriarch Job. Well, attractive I say, but I'd rather not have to go through what he did.

We talk about having the patience of Job. But in order to develop the patience of Job, we need to endure the sufferings of Job. The death of his family.

The loss of his possessions. Poor health. A nagging wife. Foolish friends. This man was a walking disaster zone.

If you were going to buy a ticket for the national lottery, Don't go asking Job to buy it for you because you were wasting your money, Although we shouldn't be doing the lottery anyway. Every piece of gold Job touches turns to lead.

He's the kind of man you need to stay away from. You'll either catch his bad skin condition or his bad mood. But everything about Job is just going to be bad.

[12 : 22] But what's remarkable about him is his steadfast patience and the dogged endurance of all he went through.

You know, it's remarkable, one of the greatest tributes to anyone in human history, That through so much suffering, Job stayed faithful to God. No wonder James says of him in verse 11, We consider those blessed who remain steadfast.

Perhaps you have known others who have had the misfortunes of Job in life. And you deeply admire their steadfastness.

How they can endure all the sufferings they have, But remain joyful and faithful to Christ, Is a tribute to a heart blessed by the grace of God.

Do you want to be like Job? You know, that's an easy question to ask when everything's going well in your life. When the winds are behind you and your ship is flying along. It's far harder to ask when everything's going wrong in your life.

[13 : 38] When the winds are against you in the sky and the ship is going backwards. When mental illness strikes. When a key relationship in your life breaks down. When you're lonely.

When you're afraid. But it's then. It is then in the cold and in the dark. You'll be most like Job in your patience. James commends patience.

Using illustrations taken from the natural world. And from the biblical world. From the farmer. And from Job. This is what it means to put our faith to work.

To give practical expression to our faith in Jesus. To be patient. Well, third. We have in this passage.

Patience characterized. Patience characterized. As I said. It's all too common. To characterize patience as passivity.

[14 : 42] That patience. Is the preserve of those. Who sit back and do nothing. And twiddle their thumbs. But do you suppose. For one moment. That patience for the farmer.

Means passivity. That between sowing and harvesting. All the farmer does. Is sit back. In the farmhouse. And drink his whiskey. And smoke his cigars.

Not at all. You don't know farmers very well. If you think that. Patience is very far from passivity. It takes spiritual energy. And sweat. To patiently endure.

During dark times. Patience is. Up and doing. Patience. But if biblical patience. Does not conform. To the characteristic image.

Of passivity. We often think it does. Then. Then what is it? James says. It is composed of two things. Contentment. And perseverance.

[15 : 40] He says first of all. It's composed of contentment. In verse nine. Seemingly out of nowhere. James commands his readers.

Saying. Do not grumble against one another brothers. So that you may not be judged. It's a mystery. That it's here. Until you realize. That the person who grumbles.

Is impatient. And discontented. As I guess is true. Of many of us. And is well known to my family. I get grumpy.

Not as much as I once did. But still. Way too much for my own liking. And certainly too much for theirs. My grumpiness. Is a sign. That not everything is well with me.

That I'm discontent about something. I want something to happen. And when it doesn't happen. When. And how I want it to.

[16:34] I get grumpy. Because I feel out of control. What caused the grumbling. Of the wandering Israelites. In the desert. Was their impatience.

And their discontentment. We want water. We want food. We want a God. We can see. And so. And so on.

Which all boils down. To this one point. This one point. We don't like trusting God. With things we can't control. We don't like trusting God.

With things we can't control. Listen. Patience and contentment. Are blessed friends. Whereas impatience. And grumbling. Are bad influences.

Patience. Patience and contentment. With things we can't control. Question mark. That is hard work. The apostle Paul said.

[17:33] I have learned the secret. Of being content. In any and every situation. Note. He learned it. By nature. Paul was not a contented man. He had to learn.

How to be content. I feel certain. That the lessons of contentment. Are to be found. In loving. In submission. To the loving. Sovereign providences.

Of our heavenly father. To wholeheartedly saying. Your will. In your way. At your time.

Oh Lord. Not my will. In my way. At my time. Oh Lord. It's about reminding ourselves. That it's only when we are not in control.

But our heavenly father is. That we don't need to push for control. Or grumble. When we don't have it. Contentment is hard work indeed.

[18:28] It's harder to be content. Than it is to complain. To restrain oneself. Rather than to hit out at others. It takes discipline.

It takes effort. That is what patience looks like. Contentment. Second. Perseverance. Perseverance.

If one of the synonym ideas. James uses for patience. In this passage. Is contentment. Then the other is perseverance. It's commanded in verse 8. You also be patient.

Which means in essence. Establish your hearts. Don't be like a cork. Bobbing on the ocean. Being carried about. By every wind of direction.

Be like a rock. Protruding from the ocean. Which the waves. Break around. But do not. Move. Be like a huge tree.

[19:27] Solid. Setting deep roots. Down into the soil. So that when the high winds come. The tree shall not. Fall. Don't be flighty. Don't be changeable.

Don't be double minded. Be completely committed. To following Christ. And setting down your roots in him. Setting down your anchor in him. Again.

If you think that's an easy thing to do. You don't really have much experience. Of the Christian life. To abide in Christ. To remain in Christ.

Is hard work indeed. It requires. Listen to this. It requires. A single minded diet. Of the mind. Where Christ is our appetite.

And his word is our food. Remaining in Christ. Requires a single minded diet. Of the mind. Where Christ is our appetite.

[20:27] And his word is our food. It takes guts. And gumption. To persevere. It takes gritting one's teeth. And keeping going. Even when the winds are against you.

It's the pain. Of the long distance runner. The grimace in his face. As he's running up. An endless hill. It's the steadfast endurance. Of Job.

Who dogged determination. To keep going. Defied his pain. And defied his suffering. Listen. Anyone can run.

When the wind is behind them. And they're in level ground. You can run. And you can enjoy it even. But when the wind's against you. And the rain is driving. Into your face.

And you're running. Up a hill. That's when it requires. Determination. And steadfast endurance. It's the guts. And the gumption. Of Job.

[21 : 22] And all the other. Old Testament prophets. Who kept proclaiming. The truth. Of God. In the face. Of the mockery. Of their hearers. It's fighting. Your opponent.

To a standstill. And though you feel. Like falling to the ground. Utterly exhausted. You're still standing. You still think.

Being patient. Is a passive virtue. Sitting back. Twiddling your thumbs. On a rocking chair. Many times. We're impatient. Because we lack. The contentment.

Or perseverance. To be patient. We are neither content. Nor are we abiding in Christ. But this is what patience. In the Christian life. Really means.

Being content. In Christ. And abiding in Christ. That's patience. Characterized. So patience. Commanded. Patience.

[22 : 16] Patience commended. Patience characterized. Then finally. From this passage. Patience completed. Patience completed. I want to go back. To an earlier issue. For a moment.

Namely. That for the vast majority. Of people. Myself included. No. Let's generalize. Actually. For all of us. Perfect patience.

Is an impossibility. It's at the top. Of the hard list. Of Christian virtues. By commanding us. To be patient. James is commanding us. To do the impossible.

To be absolutely content. And 100% persevering. St. Augustine of Hippo. Was fond of a particular saying.

Which. It really epitomizes. His focus on the gospel. He said. Lord command what you give. And give what you command. Lord command what you give.

[23 : 10] And give what you command. Let me give it to you straight. God commands you. To do the impossible. But he gives you.

The wherewithal to do it. He commands. What he gives. And he gives. What he commands. And according to this text.

His giving is expressed. In two ways. Grace now. And grace then. Grace for today. And grace for tomorrow.

There is grace. Now first of all. In verse 11. We read these words. You have heard of the patience. Steadfastness of Job. And seen the purpose of the Lord.

How the Lord is compassionate. And merciful. How the Lord is compassionate. And merciful. If you go and try to read. The book of Job. From the perspective. Of a God.

[24 : 05] Who plays chess. With his people. Who heartlessly directs. The course of Job's life. Using him. As a pawn against the devil. Then you're reading it wrong.

The book of Job. Despite all its terrifying disasters. Is the story of the compassion. And mercy of God. For Job. It ends way better for Job.

Than it ever began. His friends. His heartless companions. Got it wrong in this. They forgot. That God is compassionate. And merciful.

When God calls us. To do the impossible for him. He gives us the grace. Here and now. To do it. For him. His grace. Gives us the strength. To do the impossible.

Apostle Paul. Again. He learned that lesson. In Philippians 4.13. When he says. I can do all things. Yes. Even those impossible things. Through Christ. Who strengthens me. Yes.

[25 : 08] Paul. Yes. James. We can even obey. What may well be. The hardest. Command in the whole Bible. To be contented. In trials. And to persevere.

Through our own weaknesses. And failures. Again. In 1 Corinthians 12. Paul talks about. 2 Corinthians 12 rather. Paul talks about. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Being sufficient for us. In all our weaknesses. He says. When I'm weak. Then I'm strong. How gracious. And compassionate.

Our God is. He invests his grace. In those. Who are most unworthy. And those. Who have the least promise. Are you struggling.

With the problem. Of impatience. I do every day. Am I alone in this. Of straining at the bit. To get ahead. Of trying my hardest.

[26 : 06] To be up and doing. I'm sure I'm not. Because being. Impatient. Is human. Being patient. Is superhuman. Pray about it.

Seek the contentment. Of Christ's grace. In your situation. However painful. Or complicated. It might be. Remember. Always.

The words. Of that timeless. Him. He giveth. More grace. When the burdens. Grow greater. If things.

Ended far better. For Job. Than they began. Then whatever. The trial. You're being called. To go through. At the moment. You can be confident. Of this. It'll end better. For you also. But until then. Christ's grace. Is more than sufficient. For us. As it was. For Job. Even as it's been. For all the saints. In past days. Grace.

[27 : 04] Now. And then finally. Grace then. Grace then. It would seem. Ages ago. Since we looked at.

James 5. Verses 1 through 6. But. But when we looked at that passage. We saw that there's a twofold. Motive. For Christian living in character. First. As we look behind us.

We are motivated. By the cross of Christ. Secondly. As we look. Ahead of us. We are motivated. By the coming of Christ. Looking forward.

To that blessed day. The so-called. Parousia. It gives us motive. For patience. Listen to what. James says. Be patient.

Therefore. Until the coming. Of the Lord. The earlier passage. Is. Aimed against those rich people.

[28 : 01] James 5. Verses 1 to 6. It's aimed against those rich people. Who are taking advantage. Of poor Christians. By. Underpaying them. Who are getting rich. At the expense of the poor.

But what are the poor to do. In days before trade unions. And employment law. Are they to be so impatient. That they initiate. Great slave rebellions. Like Spartacus did.

No. James says. To these poor Christians. Exploited by the rich. Be patient. Until the coming of the Lord. It is only then. When the Lord returns.

That all that is wrong now. Shall be put right. When all the tears. Shall be wiped from our eyes. And justice. Shall overcome injustice.

And equality. And inequality. Oh we do what we can. Here and now. And we give God thanks. For organizations. Which work toward. Right. Relief. And equality.

[28 : 58] But finally. Finally. It is only when Christ. Shall return. That our desperate. Impatience. Shall be over. The constant refrain. Of the psalmist.

Those psalms. We have sung. Since we were in our mother's wombs. Is. How long. Oh Lord. How long. Must evil men. Come up against me. How long. Shall my heart. Be restless. Within me.

And James says to us. Until the coming. Of the Lord. We often talk about. Heaven being a place. Without things. No tears.

No death. No pain. No hurt. Heaven will be also. Be a place. Without any impatience. At all. Will not be marvelous. No doubt.

This week. Though I've expounded. This passage. I trust. Faithfully. To the text of scripture. We're all going to be tested. On this point. Of patience. And impatience.

[29 : 57] It's grace. Remember. It's the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. Remember. Grace. To obey. The command of God. And to be patient. Grace.

Now. And grace. Tomorrow. May you pray for it. May you know it. And may you experience this grace. In abundance. This week.

Thank you.