

God is Patient

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- [0:00] And for those visiting, our normal custom is really just to work our way through a book of the Bible. Although for this series, with it being topical, we've had to kind of move around with various verses, which I'll put on the screen.
- But I'll refer to your Bibles for 2 Peter chapter 3. Why don't I pray for us? Gracious Father, we do thank you for this day.
- We thank you for the sun outside. But more than that, we thank you for your son, the Lord Jesus. We thank you for your word, which points us to him. And we pray now that you help us to settle our minds and to focus on your word, that we might be encouraged to live by it.
- We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it happened to me again last week. I was rushing, taking my daughter from school to her job at Macca's down on the corner of Doncaster and Blackburn Road.
- And I think it was about the third car from the lights, the traffic lights to turn right to then go into Macca's. The light went green and nothing. And the car at the front were on their phone, it looked like, as far as I could tell through the screen of the car in front.
- [1:14] And of course, as it always is the case, just when the lights went orange and it was about to go red, the car in front realised and went through just on orange before it went red.
- But of course, it meant all the rest of us were stuck behind. And my confession this morning is, I lost my patience. No one tooted politely just to wake them up.
- We all could have thought, yeah, we'll be patient, they'll get there, they'll get there. But after they did this, I lost my patience and I went, in judgement. You should not have done that. And I remember it was a white Toyota Echo.
- How do you go with being patient? Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said, I'm extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.
- Is that the kind of patience we have? And while there are lots of virtues worth having in life, like being loving and kind and so on, it's actually not the ones that people say, love is a virtue or kindness is a virtue.
- [2:29] What's the saying? They say, patience is a virtue. Have you ever heard that? I've only ever heard patience being a virtue. And I wonder if that's because that's the one that we all struggle with the most.
- But patience is first a virtue or attribute of God before it is of us. You see, there are some attributes that belong to God alone and some that he has shared with us.
- And just to kind of teach you something a bit different, the way theologians group that is by calling them the incommunicable, those that are not communicated to us. These are the things we've looked at over the last few weeks.
- God's simplicity, his infinity, his self-sufficiency. They are incommunicable. And the communicable ones, the ones he shares with us, are those ones we're more familiar with. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so on.

These are the things that God wants us to have. Now, there's a bit of overlap between the list. For example, God does share some of his infinity with us. That is, he gives us life eternal, infinite.

[3:35] And so he does, there is a bit of overlap there. But generally, this is how the theologians group God's attributes. And over the last few weeks, I wanted us to focus on the right-hand side, the left-hand side.

Yeah, the left-hand side. God's incommunicable attributes. Those that belong to him for two reasons. One is, they're not the ones we normally think about, are they? We're so focused on our character and what it means for us that we kind of don't always take time to think about God's character, what belongs to him and him alone.

But the second reason I've done mostly those ones is because when we look at them, they end up encouraging us anyway, don't they? And like last week, we saw God's self-sufficiency, which means he never runs out of strength to give to us, to help us, and so on.

And so, in fact, Spurgeon, I quoted this a couple of weeks ago, has a similar idea. He said, Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea, be lost in his immensity, and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated.

And so that's why I wanted us to focus those three out of the four topics on God's character. But today we're focusing one of those topics in terms of a communicable attribute, one that he shares with us.

[5:01] And as I said, patience is one of those things that we all struggle with, which is why I picked it. And also because I don't hear it regularly preached on, actually. You know, God's love gets a guernsey, God's justice is talked about, but God's patience?

Not so much. And so firstly, I want us to plunge into the immensity of God's patience. And so point one will be our longest point. So that then secondly, we might be encouraged to show patience.

And then thirdly, make the most of God's patience while it lasts. So at point one in your outlines, God is patient. And when we search the scriptures, we see that God's patience is seen in terms of holding back his just judgment and bearing with humanity's sin.

The Old Testament often speaks of it in terms of being slow to anger. Now, slow to administer his just anger, his wrath, his judgment, all mean the same thing, and bear with humanity's sin.

And so we heard in our first reading, that's what God proclaims about himself. One of his characteristics is to be slow to anger, patient. And we see that not just in the first five books of the Bible, like Exodus, we also see it in the Psalms, where it's often like before, combined with compassion and graciousness and love and so on.

[6:31] And we also see it in the prophets, like Nehemiah and Nahum. But notice at the very bottom sentence there, at the bottom of the screen, God's patience does not then mean he will never punish people, that he'll never be unjust.

I mean, that's what justice is, you know, giving people what they deserve, for good or bad. He will punish the guilty. It's just that his patience means he holds off on that for a time.

Why? Well, so that people might instead repent and be forgiven rather than punished. That's why God's patience, his slowness to anger, is often accompanied by his grace, mercy and love.

For God's love drives him to exercise patience, to hold back his just judgment at our wrong sin, so that he might be able to show mercy, grace, forgiveness and pardon.

That's what we also see in our second reading too. So if you've got your Bibles there now, 2 Peter chapter 3, hopefully you've had a chance to turn there. Peter's addressing some scoffers and mockers about the return of Christ.

[7:47] And he says in verse 3, we'll pick it up there, he said, after all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, where is this second coming?

He promised. Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. And we can feel the weight of this too, can't we?

I mean, the world does seem to just go on and on the same way as it has since creation, or perhaps even worse. I mean, every time you turn on the news, there seems to be more bad than good.

And either way, the suffering never stops going, or a right coming. So where is this second coming of Christ, which will end suffering, and put all things right, make sure that there is complete justice, that people like a certain president invading a certain country at the moment will be held accountable.

Well, Peter says we're not to forget three things. First, God's word has powerfully already created and judged the world. And so it can certainly do it again.

[9:00] See verse five? He says, but they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and destroyed with Noah and the flood. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly.

See, God's word has created the world already. Remember Genesis? God said, let there be light and there was light. And God's word has also already judged the world with Noah in the time of Noah with the flood.

And it's that same word, verse seven, that promises Christ's return with a future judgment day where there'll be complete justice. And if you look over at verse 13 on the right hand side of your Bibles there, part of this promise also includes a new heavens.

There should be an S on the end. It's like skies. New skies and a new earth where righteousness dwells. A new creation with no more suffering.

[10:15] But Peter's point here is don't forget the power of God's word. It has already created and judged the world once so it can certainly judge and recreate the world again. A new heavens and new earth.

And second, don't forget God views time differently, verse eight. He says, but do not forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.

Now Peter's not saying that one God day equals a thousand human years, kind of like one human year equals, is it seven dog years? Seven dog years? Something like that.

He's not saying it doesn't equal that where you can kind of do the maths and work out how old God is. He's saying that God views time differently. In fact, God is outside of time. We may think in terms of lifespans.

God thinks in terms of eternity, infinity. So it may seem like a long time to us but it's not to him. Don't forget the power of God's word nor the view of God's time nor thirdly that the delay is God's patience.

[11:25] Verse 9. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.

You see, the reason Jesus has not yet returned is because God is patient which means holding back his full judgment on judgment day and instead bearing with humanity's sin.

Why? So there might be more opportunity for people to, well, in the terms of the kids talk, catch God's bus to the new creation. To not perish but repent.

To be saved not punished. Peter says something similar in verse 15 which was the end of our reading. So on the right hand side in verse 15 he says, bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.

You see, God's patience has to do with holding back or deferring his full judgment so that more people can be saved. The English Puritan Stephen Charnock puts it like this.

[12:36] He says, God's patience signifies a willingness to defer, to hold back that full judgment and an unwillingness to pour forth his wrath upon sinful creatures.

He moderates his provoked justice and it is provoked. Every time he sees suffering or sin it's provoked. But he forbears to judge the injuries he daily meets within the world.

This is God's patience. And it helps us to understand those who deny God's existence because of the suffering in the world. Have you heard people say, look, I can't believe in God because there's so much suffering in the world?

Or how can God be real if he doesn't do anything about this suffering I see? It's a powerful argument, isn't it? And after all, none of us want to see suffering, do we?

But the answer is twofold. One is God has done something about it, actually. He's given his only son so that everyone who repents and believes can have a place in the bus, so to speak.

[13:43] A guarantee to place in God's family with a certain hope of a new creation where there'll be no more suffering. And secondly, the only reason God waits to bring about that new creation is because he's being patient with you, giving you more time more time to repent rather than perish, more time to be saved rather than punished for our sins.

And so we too need to be patient with the suffering we see so that others more might be saved. You see, people cannot have both the opportunity of salvation without the suffering in our world.

Because if Jesus returned and put an end to the suffering in the world, well, there'd be no more opportunity to be saved, would there? That's it. It's done and dusted. So which would you prefer?

I know we preferred neither, but would you prefer suffering with salvation or no suffering and no salvation? Because they go together.

Oh, which is worse, seeing people suffer from flood and war and don't mishear me, that is terrible and we don't want to see that. But is it worse than seeing them suffer an eternity in hell?

[15:09] As I said, we don't want either and yes, we are to pray for those who suffer and pray for Jesus to return, you know, for the driver to come back and take us to that new creation.

But we who already have salvation cannot be so selfish as to wish people would miss out on salvation simply so we can end our suffering.

We can't do that. That's not fair. Rather, we too are to patiently bear with it so that others might be saved.

I know this is not easy, especially when it's us who suffer or our loved ones or when we see the madness in our world, you know, from people not going when the light is green.

I'm obviously still not over that. to much more seriously war crimes in the Ukraine. There's an article that came out at the end of last month where the UN has set investigators and concluded that there has been war crimes in Ukraine against civilians, executions, torture, rape.

[16 : 23] It's horrific. such injustice ought to grieve us and, I think, anger us.

And if it does, imagine how much more it does so to God. In 1887, that's 135 years ago, Charles Spurgeon also wrote something that is still so true today.

It's a long quote, but it's worth reading in full. He says, what an amount of profanity is poured out before God in this city? He was talking about London 135 years ago.

Has anything changed in Melbourne? We have today some among us that might match the devil in blasphemy, so foully do they talk. And oh, how is it that God bears it?

Oh Father, how dost thou bear it? How dost thou endure those profane persons who insult thee to thy face? Just think of that acronym, OMG.

[17 : 28] And then when I turn my thoughts another way to the oppression of the poor, to the grinding down of those who, with the hardest labour, can scarcely earn bread enough to keep their body and soul together, how does the just God permit it?

When I mark the oppression of man by man, for among wild beasts there is none that equals the cruelty of man to man, war crimes, how doth the all-merciful bear it?

Methinks the sword of the Lord must often rattle in its scabbard and he must force it down and say, sword of the Lord, rest and be quiet. Oh, the wondrous long-suffering of a gracious God.

You see, Spurgeon understood that God is more grieved and more angry at the suffering in our world than we are and yet he holds down the sword of his judgment.

He is patient that more people might be saved. In fact, he's patient even with us. I mean, how slow are we to be like Christ?

[18 : 41] How slow are we to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives? How slow are we to stop doing that sin time and time again?

And yet God bears with us for giving us time and time again because of Christ and working in us time and time again by his Spirit. If you find it hard to be patient in this fallen world when you turn on the news and see such suffering and sin, then plunge yourself into the immensity of God's patience and long suffering.

Think of God's patience that you might be moved to be patient too. Be patient with what we see in our world so that others might be saved. And secondly, patient with one another, point two.

And so more briefly now, in Ephesians chapter four, Paul writes, as a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. And part of that worthy life is to be completely humble and gentle.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love. And just in case we don't get it, he says almost the same thing in the next letter, Colossians, therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, which involves bearing with one another and forgiving one another.

[20 : 06] If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you. Here is the communicable attribute. Here is patience that we are to share and reflect, particularly towards one another.

Bearing with those who sin against us, being ready to forgive as God has forgiven us. God has been patient towards us, bearing with our sin until we were led to Christ and found forgiveness.

And if he has done that for us, then we too ought to be patient with one another, bearing with those times they annoy us or sin against us, always ready to forgive them as God has forgiven us.

Yes, we ought to be patient with all people, and though there may be times when we have to sign petitions or seek legal action, or times when we can't do anything except let it go through to the keeper, God, who will catch the injustice and call it to account on the last day.

As God says, it is mine to avenge, I will repay. But these verses are about fellow Christians, that's the one another language, it's talking about fellow Christians in the church, with whom we're to seek reconciliation, not legal action, with whom we're especially to be patient, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven us.

[21 : 31] I know it's not always easy though, is it? A bishop I know once confessed, I used to pray for patience, but stop because God was taking too long to answer.

It's not easy, is it? And so consider the immensity of God's patience towards you that waited for you to come to Christ and show that same kind of patience towards one another.

And finally, make the most of God's patience while it lasts, point three. A couple of weeks ago we saw that God is infinite, infinite in wisdom and love and patience, I take it.

And yet, he has chosen to set a time where he will press pause on his patience and exercise his full judgment through his son, Jesus.

So last week in Acts 17, Paul showed how God is independent unlike idols who depend on people to make them. And he went on to say in Acts 17, therefore since we are God's offspring we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an idol made by human design and skill.

[22 : 37] In the past God overlooked, was patient with such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

And he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man Jesus.

And he's given proof of this by raising Christ from the dead, declaring he is the Christ, the king, who will one day return and put all things right. And so if God will one day pause his patience, if it will stop at one point, and if at the moment his patience means salvation, then we're to do everything we can to see people saved.

In fact, the first thing we're to do is actually make sure we're saved ourselves. And so have you repented of your way of life and put your trust in Jesus?

Now's the time to do it during God's patience because one day it will be paused. Have you put your trust in Jesus? And for us who have, then we are to do, as I said, all we can to see others saved, whether it's by praying for people or our mission partners, inviting people to come to our women's gingerbread event or Christmas services coming up.

[24 : 06] I think the Christmas trees are already in the shops, it's not far away, or whether it's making the most of opportunities that come our way, as Paul writes in Colossians 4.

In fact, the words in yellow there, make the most of every opportunity, is literally redeeming the time, making most of God's patience. So, someone I was chatting to with last week, we were exchanging prayer points, and he mentioned how he was at a kinder day with his child and got talking with some other dads, and the topic of Andrew Thorburn and Essendon came up.

And so, he could have kind of just walked away slowly, but he didn't. He very graciously tried to point them to their common faith in Jesus, that these dads might hear of Christ, and in due course be saved.

Or an elderly person I was speaking to last Wednesday, they're in their 90s, and they told me last Wednesday that they were chatting with their cleaner, and found out that the cleaner is an atheist, priest.

And so, she asked the cleaner if she'd ever read the Bible, to which the cleaner said, no, I'm not interested in that. And so, this church member, this 90-year-old said, oh, look, here's Mark's gospel, would you read it for me?

[25 : 27] And gave it to the cleaner, and the cleaner took it. I joked with this lady how older people can say anything and get away with it. You know what she replied? I know, and I'm going to make the most of it.

Not to be rude, but to be bold. Here is someone making the most of God's patience. God is patient. He's slow to anger, giving people more time to repent rather than perish.

Indeed, if he wasn't patient, we wouldn't be here today. And so, think of his immense patience. For the suffering he sees grieves and angers him more than it ever does us.

Think of the immensity of his patience that you might be moved to be patient to, both with our world and with one another, and making the most of God's patience while it lasts.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your patience that has borne with the sin of this humanity, of people who have rejected you and done selfish acts towards one another, some very horrific.

[26 : 48] Father, thank you for your patience that means more people can be saved. In light of your patience, help us, we pray, to be patient with one another as you have been to us, leading us to Christ, and help us also to make the most of your patience while at last taking every opportunity we have.

Help us in this, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.