

The Time of Your Life

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[0 : 0 0] Please be seated. We're going to be looking at James 5, 7 through 11, and so I invite you to turn there so you can follow along, and I do wish you a blessed Advent as well.

David Short is not here with us today. He's in God's country right now, which means he's in Saskatchewan. And he's there leading a conference for a large group of Essentials leaders and so forth in all three dioceses in that province.

And in God's country, I think the high was 10 below yesterday, so we can hope that David's Australian blood doesn't freeze. And David prepared for us in his absence today the beginning of a sermon series, which we're going to be doing throughout Advent.

And he's called it From Time to Time, Learning How to Live Between the Comings of Christ. And I think it's a great title for Advent, because we, in reality, are living in an in-between time.

Jesus has brought unimaginable hope to the world as he came to Bethlehem as a baby and also king of the universe.

[1 : 2 9] And of course, because he has come, we also know that he will come again, because he rose from the dead. And he will come in glory to bring a new heaven and a new earth.

All of this we know because he gives us the forgiveness of sins and he rose from the dead. And so, not only do we look back to this coming in Bethlehem, but we look forward to the day that Jesus comes again.

And we are in the meantime, in a time of longing, in a sense, of waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed to the whole world.

But in that time of waiting and longing, we are still living in a world that is broken. And each of us who are here this morning have been touched by that brokenness.

In other words, all of us have experienced suffering and brokenness in our life and in our relationships. And in fact, even though we look like very well put together people, as you look around you in this congregation, who are dressed well and look like they have it together, and they're much more awake than the nine o'clock service as well.

[2 : 4 5] Despite that fact, each one of us has a history of brokenness in our life because of our time in this world. And in fact, a number of you have come this morning with deep pain because of relationships that have gone wrong, that have sin in them.

And that's why James is a very helpful book for you and for me. Because in this little passage we read, James particularly talks about suffering that is caused by adverse people.

And I hope you can go through your life without meeting adverse people, but you won't. That's the nature of this world. And so what James does is he talks about relationships in which you have been treated unjustly or you have been deliberately hurt by another person.

James is about teaching us to deal with relationships both inside and outside the church that have been broken and involved in injustice.

And so he talks about everything in this book from people who don't care for each other in the church to extreme persecution from people outside the church.

[4 : 02] And this is a very good passage that we have today because it deals with a great temptation we have in living in this in-between world.

And that temptation is to respond wrongly when we are mistreated. That's the temptation for James' readers. It's our temptation as well.

The first six verses of chapter 5, if you just look briefly at them, actually outline extreme injustice. Those six verses are about God's judgment against the wealthy wicked who were oppressors in this passage, who were taking away the money of those who were poor, and in fact bringing violence against those who had nothing.

And if you look at verse 6, you see that the righteous man, these poor people who are being oppressed, do not resist them.

They do not resist them. In other words, they do not retaliate. They don't fight back out of vengeance. They are meekly content to suffer for Christ and let vengeance belong to the Lord.

[5 : 17] They take seriously the promise that God says, revenge is mine, and that he will give it on behalf of his people. But that's not an easy thing to do.

And the question that James had to answer was, how long could they keep acting this way in that church? Well, James' response is the theme of this little passage.

His response is that you need to be patient. He says it three times in those first two verses in 7 and 8. Be patient, be patient, be patient, in case you don't get the message.

And by that word patience, he means enduring somebody who is mistreating you, and not being angry and retaliating, not being full of vengeance. Now, when I read this, I thought, that runs against the grain of my human nature, and I would think most people's human nature.

We are, by nature, quick to anger when we are wronged. But that word patient literally means to be large-tempered.

[6 : 25] And by large-tempered, the Greek is talking about being long-tempered, the very opposite of being short-tempered, having a long fuse instead of a short fuse. And James writes this as though there is a decision to be made, that you decide to be slow to anger.

Well, how do we do that? How can we possibly decide and train ourselves to be that way? Well, James does it by making us shift our vision. He makes us shift it away from the situation or the person that is causing us such grief.

And he shifts it to the day of the Lord. That's why he says, be patient until the day of the Lord. And every time he mentions patience, you will see mention of the day of the Lord.

He's saying, live your lives anticipating that day when Jesus will come with perfect justice, when he comes in glory to bring a new heaven and a new earth.

And he says, wait for God to act. Wait for his timing and not yours. It means things will not always be the way that you want it to be.

[7 : 34] But it also means that it will end. The time of injustice and suffering will end. That's the truth of the day of the Lord. And you know, the early church had the coming of Jesus at the forefront of their minds.

If you read the New Testament, you see mentioned, if you were to count it, at least 300 times where the day of the Lord, Jesus coming again, is mentioned.

It was something that permeated the early church and ought to permeate our life together as well. The understanding together that Jesus will come with his justice.

And then what James does is he gives an illustration, having talked about the day of the Lord. And he says, here's what it's like to be patient. He said, behold the farmer, at the end of verse 7.

He waits for precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early rain and the late rain. And what he's referring to are farmers in Palestine who planted in the fall, usually around September.

[8 : 38] And they really depended upon the early rains that often came in November or December to germinate the seeds. And then there was another set of rains in this very dry climate that would come again in the spring, in usually March and April.

And that would strengthen the stock so that it would bear a lot of fruit. And so what was happening there is a picture of a farmer patiently waiting and trusting, knowing that he is dependent completely on those rains to come at the right times.

He knows he can't hurry the rains. He can't hurry the process or take things into his own hands. He depends on this annual miracle that comes each year of rain and growth and believes that it will bring, as he puts it, a precious harvest.

And that's why he goes through each year the hard work of plowing, planting, and cultivating. He knows it's going to happen. The rains will come and there will be fruit.

Well, James says in verse 8 that you need to be patient in the same way. He's saying go through the hard work of being slow to anger, of being patient, because there will always be a precious fruit to waiting on the Lord in this way, to trust him for his goodness.

[10 : 06] You can't hurry God or make him do things on your own terms. You can simply wait patiently and trust that he will do it. And he will make a harvest. Not only does he promise that there will be right, that there will be right that will replace wrong, that you will be avenged.

But James says that there will also be a sense in which your faith will grow and mature, just like these crops.

You know, throughout James, he talks about wisdom in terms of being patient. He says there is a wisdom, a godliness, a godly deep faith that comes through being patient.

Your faith grows, and it's the outcome of that faith as well. Now, you know that this does not make for a good Hollywood script.

You know, the idea of somebody being wronged at the beginning, and then the main character waiting upon the Lord, being slow to anger, and knowing that something good is going to happen in God's own timing.

[11 : 10] It might not take place during the movie. You can imagine how well a movie script or a TV script would do with that kind of plot line. Because, if you notice, almost, well, many of the plot lines that you see in the media involve revenge and retribution.

It's a great high moment when the comeuppance comes and revenge is meted out. But James has this radical script that says God will take care of it and will take care of you in his perfect time and in his perfect way.

And he will bring his goodness through it. That's radical. It's something that we can only learn from God's word. And, you know, that's why, because it's so radical, we need a practical way of going into that patience and going against the grain.

And if you look a little bit further down in verse 8, it tells you how practically. He says, establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

And that word establish is the practical word. It's a very strong word. It's used in Luke 9 when Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem.

[12 : 27] And he resolutely decides that is where he's going, knowing that he will die on a cross there. It's an attitude of firm courage and determination and commitment to this cause.

And James says, have the same kind of commitment to patience and to be steadfast in that goal of depending upon the Lord. He's talking about having confidence in God's ability to bring his justice and to bring his day.

And he says, establish your hearts, knowing that his coming is at hand. Your confidence is deepened by the nearness of Jesus Christ. And it's very important that we realize what James means by Jesus' coming is at hand.

It means that Jesus literally is near to us. That he breaks into our world at any point. It could be during the service, and my sermon will be cut short.

And it could be before you have your lunch today. Or it could be later. But it's a moment that will be unexpected. It is a moment that in a blink of the eye, the world will suddenly see in all his full glory, Jesus Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings.

[13 : 50] Matthew 24 says that Jesus, and Jesus says this about himself. He says that he will come in glory that will be as vivid and visible and unmistakable as lightning that lights up the sky from east to west.

In other words, everyone in the world will see Jesus coming. It will be unmistakable. And at that time, he will gather his people to himself.

And all wrongs will be made right. Now this is something that the Bible says the world will scoff at and dismiss this idea.

But for Christians, it is the hope and the encouragement that you are meant to have daily. It is the encouragement that Jesus will come for you and he will come for me.

That he is near. We need to constantly let the word of God remind us of that. We should remind each other as well. A couple months ago, I don't know how he got this very true thing in his mind, but my two-year-old son Alexander learned that Jesus was coming.

[14 : 59] And I think he got it at the Birth to Three ministry, which is a very good ministry. They're teaching young people the word of God. But every day, he would say, Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming.

And I think he was expecting Jesus to be coming like his uncle comes to the door, you know, and we're going to welcome him into our house at any moment. In fact, at Thanksgiving, we had all kinds of family over, and grandma and grandpa and uncles and aunts and cousins were there, and we were naming all of them.

And at the end, he said, well, Jesus is coming. We said, well, yeah, sort of, but we'll explain a little bit later. But the great thing of him every day saying Jesus is coming is it reminds us of what James is talking about here, that it is imminent.

It will happen. This is the fact that every Christian should be surrounded by. You should all have a two-year-old that's reminding you that Jesus is coming so that you know this truth. That's what James wants us to know.

And it's important for us because when we respond to suffering and persecution, it's very easy and I think very common for us to say, God has given up on me.

[16 : 12] God doesn't love me. God is not in control of this situation. But James is saying those are the times particularly that we need to know that Jesus will come for us and that he has those times of suffering in mind when he, in power, will come again.

In fact, we ought to know particularly Jesus in those times. Of suffering. And the day is coming when we will have no doubt that it was worth being faithful to God.

It was worth enduring for his sake. It will be worth it. Now, there's the deep encouragement of Jesus coming.

But I want to say also there is another side to it. There is a warning that comes with his coming. Because there is a check on our own ungodliness.

And that's in verse 9. I don't know why I often get these passages, but often I get passages that mention grumbling when I do the morning service preaching. But here is the check.

[17 : 18] It says in verse 9, And you see what it's saying is that that church had a tendency for grumbling against one another.

That's human nature as well. There is a tendency when you and I are suffering or experiencing injustice to really take it out on the people who are closest to us.

In this case, it was taking it out on fellow churchgoers, brothers and sisters in Christ. They were talking against one another and tearing each other down.

And that was their response to persecution. And we're not immune to that at St. John's either. This is something that can easily happen in our church as well.

That's why the Word of God takes grumbling so seriously. He knows that, James knows that tough times and persecutions are actually meant to be endured together as a community with one another's encouragement.

[18 : 28] The last thing the local body of believers needs are attacks against one another. And that's why James says Jesus is going to judge that kind of behavior in Christians on the last day.

So he's standing close, ready to come, not only as one who will take you to himself and make all wrongs right, but also as one who is a judge, ready to come through the courtroom doors.

That's why it's in plural in that passage. So even though Christians do not lose their salvation, there will be accountability for everything that we have done on the day of the Lord.

That's our great and very helpful check to our human nature. Well, the passage ends in verses 11 and 12 with a second encouragement.

And it's an encouragement to not only look at Jesus coming again, but to be steadfast because of the witness of all the prophets, of all those people who have gone before that have remained faithful.

[19 : 32] You know, the great author of faith is Jesus Christ himself. And that's why in Hebrews 12, we read that this great command to fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

You see, because of the joy set before Jesus, in other words, because of his glorious resurrection, the resurrection that we will see perfectly on the day of the Lord, Jesus endured the cross and scorned its shame.

That model has been played out in many people's lives, in the lives of prophets, in the lives of many figures in the Old Testament, figures of faith, and figures in our own lives as well.

In fact, the Bible says in this passage here, that it says in verse 10, as an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, and behold, we call those happy who were steadfast.

Who were steadfast as Jesus was, setting his heart for Jerusalem. Who were steadfast going through that suffering with patience, rather than being disobedient to the Lord.

[20 : 59] And that is true in our own lives. We look at people who endure and are godly in tough times, or are good at dealing with difficult people, and we say, there is a person of mature faith.

There is a person who is committed to God in his ways, a godly person. There is a blessing given to those who follow Jesus' example of suffering with patience.

And I want to close by saying that it's important to us, as we look at this passage, to look closely, look closely in your minds and in God's word, at the one who is coming for us soon.

You know, not only is Jesus coming, but we have the very nature of God shown to us in his word in Jesus Christ. And what we see is what Job saw.

We see somebody who is compassionate and merciful, who will be our judge, and who will come to us. And the words that James uses there in verse 11, of compassionate, is a word that he made up.

[22 : 10] It's a very powerful word that says, from the depths of God's being, from everything about who he is, he gives his love to you and to me, and he is full of mercy.

There is a deep sense of emotion being poured out on each of us individually. And that's the day of the Lord. It's the day when Jesus comes for his own. That God is the one who is judging us.

That God is the one who is coming for us. And that God is the one who is taking care of these awful experiences in our lives and will avenge us, his people.

And I want to close with something that the Apostle Paul said to his young friend, Timothy, shortly before he died. Because what Paul said, as a way of summing up his life, is that he lived a life in the light of the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord defined his life, defined the goals of his life, and the way that he handled suffering. And this passage was given to Timothy not to show how great Paul was, but so Timothy would follow his example, and so that we would as well.

[23 : 19] And here's the words that Paul wrote to Timothy. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed. The time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. May we love the appearing of Jesus Christ and live in the light of that great fact.

Amen.