

Remember to Ask for Patience

⁷ **Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.** ⁸ **You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.** ⁹ **Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!**

¹⁰ **Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.**

¹¹ **As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**

Are you patient? I think I am patient. We all think we are all patient. But I have learned that we are not as patient as we like to think. I visited plenty of folks who had knee replacement surgery. It takes a good sixty days or more to recover. That is a long time. In the days following surgery, they thought they would be further along than they were. They don't see much progress; only a lot of pain. Be patient, the doctor tells them. It takes time. We are not as patient as we think.

It is Christmas time. My family is asking for a gift list, so I made one. Do you have one? While we are asking for gifts this year, let's include another one: patience. Let's do what our text tells us to do and to pray to God for patience. First, be patient with the Lord.

I. Be patient with the Lord.

⁷ **Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.** I remember the story my mother told me when she visited my dad's aunt in the hospital. In her upper nineties and quite feeble, she had fallen and broke her hip. When my mother visited her, she found her sitting up in bed with rosy cheeks and a smile on her face. When she asked her why she was so happy, she said that she was going to be with Jesus soon. She died that evening.

We all have stories like that. The thought of Jesus coming soon is the best remedy for any pain and suffering of any kind. If Christ came back this afternoon, we would all be better off. But what if Jesus does not come back this afternoon? God tells us to be patient. The word for "patient" here was often translated as "long-suffering" in the King James. It is the idea of putting up with a lot of pain. Now, we are not being encouraged to face the world with a sense of stoic hardness like some soldier badly wounded saying it is only a flesh wound. We don't pretend to be impervious to the pain and suffering around us. We can't. We still cry. It still hurts a lot. What gives us patience is the promise that Jesus is coming, soon. So we endure it knowing it will someday end soon, not merely in death, but in glory and joy in heaven.

But patience does not come naturally to us. We live in a day of instant gratification. If you can't afford it now, just put it on a credit card. If you don't want to sit through the commercial, change the channel. If traffic slows down, get irritated. If there is a line, we get antsy. I had ordered something over the internet. I got impatient when the package took ten days to arrive. I remember peeking out my office window four or five times a day looking for a package on our front steps. Really?

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ **You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.** In ancient Palestine, a land typically arid and dry, the farmer relied on two rainy seasons, one in October to soften up the ground for planting, and then one in March or April to give the plants that last spurt of growth for the harvest. If either rain failed, the crop failed and the farmer failed. So the farmer had no choice; he had to be patient. They learn that all they could do was put it into the Lord's hands. They learn that worrying couldn't squeeze out even one more drop of rain from the sky. So they wait. The rains may come late, they get nervous, but all they could do is wait.

Once in a while the rains don't come. There have been crop failures, farm foreclosures, and ruined lives. But not with Jesus. He may be later than we would like, but he will come. So James tells us to be patient and to "stand firm." This is the same word used to describe determined Jesus was to go to Jerusalem to die for our sins. That determination you see on Jesus' face you see on the face of every believer here on earth. Like the farmer looking out his window for any sign of clouds, we look to see if today is the day. If not, we are patient because we know he will come, and soon.

So be patient with the Lord. And be patient with one another.

II. Be patient with one another.

⁹ **Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!** Let's say you are taking the family to Mankato for some shopping. You have all day so it doesn't matter if you leave now or an hour later. But if there is a deadline, kids can't move fast enough. It is five minutes before church and they are not sitting on the sofa, coats on, ready to go. You roll your eyes. You nag them. You lose patience. They can't move fast enough. And they are impatient with you, angry with you for being angry with them. No one is happy. Impatience, grumbling and complaining are contagious sins. Once they start, we all join in.

The next time you want to roll your eyes and tap your foot repeatedly in the long line, the next time you grumble, the next time you complain about politics, the neighbors, your kids, your wife, husband or cousin, remember something. The judge is standing at the door! Jesus is returning as a Judge of the living and the dead. He will call our grumbling and complaining for what it is, selfish, sinful, arrogant, unholy, unfit for heaven. We need a healthy reminder that God is not pleased with our sins.

The Judge is at the door, but that Judge is Jesus who is also our Savior. Listen to God describe himself in Psalm 103: ⁸ **The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.** ⁹ **He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;** ¹⁰ **he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.** ¹¹ **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;** ¹² **as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.** God is angry with our sin, but he is also consumed by his love for us. He wants to turn his anger away from us. He doesn't want to treat us as our sins deserve. What does he do? Jesus came into this world and said, "Punish me instead. Direct your anger at me." And he did. How far away are you from your sins? As far away as the east is from the west, all because of Jesus.

Jesus is the Judge. He is also our Savior. He is coming back to take us to a heaven he is getting ready for us. Let the Judge remind you that we still have sinful natures, are still inclined to sin and our sins are still damning, but let this Jesus assure you of his love. God is patient with us, even giving us more time to repent and turn back to him. Love is patient. So be patient with one another instead of grumbling. The line is long. So what. Your day is thrown off schedule, so what. The priest and Levite were too busy to stop and help the wounded man, but the good Samaritan stopped even if it meant it threw his schedule off by days and weeks. He wasn't impatient. He was loving.

To help us, we are encouraged to be patient like others.

III. Be patient like others.

¹⁰ **Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.** ¹¹ **As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**

Now you know why we teach Bible stories in Sunday School and why we encourage you to read your Bibles at home. Look at all the examples of fellow believers and the patience they endure while suffering. They can inspire us to be patient, too. Hebrews 11 lists some of them. Some faced humiliation, others prison; some were put to the sword, or stoned or sawed in half. Hebrews concluded that the, **world was not worthy of them.** Do you think their patience ran thin? Of course. Why did they endure? Hebrews tells us: ... **since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.** We talked about that already, how the coming of Christ and one day going home to heaven made it possible for them to endure even to the point of death.

Or look at John the Baptist in our gospel reading. Here was John, the one who prepared the way for Jesus, sitting in prison filled with doubt. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the one. Before we get too critical of John, perhaps we should sit in jail for a while and see what a challenge that does to our faith. Jesus restored his confidence, citing his miracles to prove he is who he claims he is and how the good news is being preached.

And here is one more, Job. If someone said you had the patience of Job, that is a real compliment. And Job was patient. When he lost it all including his ten kids, he was able to exhibit great patience with the Lord as he confessed how the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away and the only thing he could was praise the name of the Lord. But Job, like all of us, is still human. His patience had reached its limits. He wanted to sue God. He wanted to drag God into court and make him answer one question, "Why?" Why did the Lord let that happen to him? What crime did Job commit to deserve this? Ever felt that way?

But maybe we can understand why God does let bad things happen to good people. We don't have the patience we think we have. Job's patience wavered, but God used this to strengthen his faith and build up his patience. Job confessed, **Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.** He repented of his grumbling against the Lord. He got closer to his Lord. And during all of this, he was still able to cry out, **I know that my Redeemer lives.** Sounds like my dad's aunt, doesn't it. This explains how Christians are determined to suffer all while we wait.

So, what do you want for Christmas? Don't forget to ask for patience. You can't get it from Amazon or Target. You can only get it from Jesus who is coming soon. Amen.