

THE REWARDS OF PATIENCE

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Text: James 5:7-12

Do you ever feel like your going nowhere fast and things aren't getting better?

■ The antiquated train on a branch line was creeping slowly through the countryside when suddenly it came to a dead stop. The only passenger in the car, a salesman riding the line for the first time, asked the conductor why they had stopped. The conductor said, "Nothing to worry about, sir. There's a cow on the tracks." In ten minutes the train got under way again, but after chugging along for a mile or two, it again ground to a halt. "Just a temporary delay," the conductor said. "We'll be on our way shortly." The exasperated salesman asked, "What is it now? Did we catch up to the cow again?" (Hewett, 396)

You've probably all heard and maybe even prayed the prayer, "Lord give me patience, right now!" In our society we're in a hurry most of the time and we want instant gratification, we want results and we want them now! Waiting is out of the question. *And when things are going wrong for us it's even worse.*

It is important to remember that the group to whom James is writing is mainly comprised of poor, but good, Christian people. These are also people who have been mistreated. Yet James calls on them to endure, to be patient, and not to grumble. Something they would need God to help them do. It would be difficult because of the situation discussed in the first 6 verses of this chapter. The oppression and mistreatment of the wicked rich had put them in a place where they had to live in an unlivable situation. How could James, therefore, tell them in verse 7, "*Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.*" The question is "how" and even "why?" James knows that patience has its *rewards*, but only for those who endure.

James uses 3 illustrations to make his point.

I. THE REWARDS OF A PATIENT FARMER (v.7-9).

A. The farmer waits for the harvest knowing he has done all he can do.

B. He waits for the rain to come—something he cannot control.

In Palestine the early rains were in October and November after the farmer planted. The latter rains were in April and May as the crop was maturing. Both were necessary for a good crop. Hence, it was necessary for the farmer to wait for both rains. *You can do all you can, but you cannot hurry God's plan.*

C. We too must wait on God at times.

James tells us what to do in these times.

- Be patient.
- Establish your heart—literally “strengthen your heart.”
- The coming of the Lord is at hand—justice will be done.

D. Do not let bitterness or resentment fill your heart.

There was, evidently, the temptation to turn on one another, to become bitter, to hold a grudge. This often happens with those we are closest to because of the frustration that we feel at times.

E. The judgment of God is against us if we turn on one another.

- The Judge is at the door.
- His hand is on the latch.
- He is ready at any time to come in.

The second illustration James uses is:

II. THE REWARDS OF THE PROPHETS (vv. 10-11a).

A. These were those who spoke “in the name of the Lord.”

Jeremiah is certainly a good example. Look at a few things he went through and yet he was faithful.

- He was put in stocks (20:2)
- He was thrown in prison (32:2)
- He was put in a miry dungeon (38:6)

We count him and others *blessed because of what they endured*.

B. There are other examples in the New Testament.

Stephen, who was stoned to death, and others “did not dishonor God by casting blame or bearing grudges; they exemplified endurance in the midst of terrible trials.” (Swindoll, 174)

C. No one receives a prize unless one runs, pays the price, and finishes!

■ Psychologist Kim Hall writes, “People seem to believe that they have an inalienable right to be happy—‘I want what I want and I want it now.’ No one wants to wait for anything and, for the most part, no one has to anymore. Waiting is interpreted as pain. ... People walk into my office and say they are Christians, but I see no difference except that they want to be happy and now expect God to make it so.

The problem is that, in this country, you can have what you want when you want it most of the time. ... People like the fact that they can buy a 50-foot tree and instantly plant it in their yard. Why on earth would anyone want to wait on relationships or wait on God?”

-- Psychologist Kim Hall, interviewed in *The Door* (Sept.-Oct. 1992). *Christianity Today*, Vol. 37, no. 9.

He points out also...

III. THE REWARDS OF THE MAN NAMED JOB (v. 11).

A. He is our example of perseverance.

■ William Barclay deepens our understanding of Job's endurance:

“We generally speak of the patience of Job which is the word the King James Version uses. But patience is far too passive a word... As we read the tremendous drama of his life we see him passionately resenting what has come upon him, passionately questioning the conventional arguments of his so-called friends, passionately agonizing over the terrible thought that God might have forsaken him...But the great fact about him is that in spite of all the agonizing questions which tore at his heart, he never lost his faith in God... “I know that my redeemer lives (19:25).” His is no unquestioning submission; he struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of his faith was never extinguished. (Swindoll, 174-75)

B. The conclusion of Job's trial shows us the compassion and mercy of God.

He received twice as much as he had before. Faithfulness has its rewards!

■ I Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

CONCLUSION

James is hoping his readers will come to the same conclusion he has—**victory is not always found in fighting back or taking vengeance**. He wants them to know that being long-suffering, patient, stouthearted, and persevering has its *rewards*. God will vindicate and reward us in His time.

In a final word, he mentions taking oaths or swearing, which seems out of place. It seems out of place unless you have suffered. It is easy to say things you do not mean, and even make bargains with God when you are going through difficulties.

(Wiersbe, 162)

God simply wants us to be of solid Christian character, steadfast in our commitment. Just do what you say, don't make a big “to do” about it, just be faithful.

■ John Killinger retells this story from *ATLANTIC MONTHLY* about the days of the great western cattle ranches:

A little burro sometimes would be harnessed to a wild steed. Bucking and raging, convulsing like drunken sailors, the two would be turned loose like Laurel and Hardy to proceed out onto the desert range. They could be seen disappearing over the horizon, the great steed dragging the little burro along and throwing him about like a bag of cream puffs. They might be gone for days, but eventually they would come back. The little burro would be seen first, trotting back across the horizon, leading the submissive steed in tow. Somewhere out there on the rim of the world, that steed would become exhausted from trying to get rid of the burro, and in that moment, the burro would take mastery and become the leader.

And that's the way it is with the kingdom and its heroes, isn't it? The battle goes to the determined, not to the outraged; to the committed, not to those who are merely dramatic. (Larson, 177)

References

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