

The Third Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia! (Matthew 11:10)

Sermon Text: James 5:7-11

Is Jesus really the One? ...the One who comes from God the Father's side? ...the One through whom the entire universe is powerfully created? ...the One whose words powerfully crushes your fears, silences doubts, and calms anxiety?

John the Baptist was not so sure. "*Are you the one who was to come,*" he asks, "*or should we expect someone else?*" ([Matthew 11:2](#)). Why John asks this becomes crystal clear when (1) you see him locked up in prison and (2) when John sees what Jesus is doing.

Just scan over the chapters before Matthew 11. Jesus heals the sick ([4:23-25](#)). He cures the snowy-white skin of leprosy with a touch ([8:1-4](#)). He commands satanic demons to flee ([8:28-34](#)). He strengthens the legs of a paralyzed man ([9:1-8](#)). He not only does these things, but he chastises the self-righteous, judgmental Pharisees ([5:1-7:28](#)). He has miraculous power no other human being has. His authoritative words can silence even the most vocal of critics. Yet, John sits in prison— wondering if Jesus has the power to touch his life.

"Patience" might not be the first word that comes to mind when you face serious life-challenges. "Patience" probably does not characterize your emotions when someone hurts you. "Patience" may not describe how you wait for God's many promises to take effect. Yet, James urges: "**PATIENTLY WAIT FOR THE LORD'S COMING.**" He explains how you wait: "*Strengthen your hearts*" and explains why you wait: "*See your eternal outcome.*"

James 5:7-11

⁷ Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is 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 each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ Brothers, 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 consider 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.

Yes, James knows how difficult it is to put that encouragement into practice. If you ever felt anger rush through your entire body, if your mind ever concocted ways to get even with your abuser, then you know the last thing you want to hear is: “Just be patient.”

For the believers reading this letter, patience was long gone. You see, they are going to work. At work, they use their God-given health and God-given talents in order to earn a well-deserved, honest living. They work to the best of their abilities in order to help their company succeed. They lift their eyes up to God and trust that he uses paychecks to provide their every bodily need ([Psalm 145:15-16](#)).

Yet, when payday arrives, these believers discover their wealthy bosses are cheating them! Some workers are not getting paid. Others are paid, but receive less than promised. Still others are actually murdered— either their bosses kill them or they starve and freeze to death because they did not get paid ([James 5:1-6](#)). The last thing anyone wants to hear is James’ plea: **“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.”**

The trouble here really goes beyond a paycheck. The problem is: (1) a child of God is suffering, and (2) God doesn’t appear to be doing anything about it.

Maybe you have found yourself wrestling with that same problem. Cancer enters your life. Now it means weeks of radiation, months of chemotherapy, possibly surgery, and then a half-year of recovery! And you never worked around hazardous materials and never smoked! You suffer and it appears God will not cure you.

You help your family. You answer their phone calls. You give them money and a helping hand. You go out of your way to address their concerns again. In return, they accuse you of not caring enough about them! You are reflecting God’s love to others, but it does not feel worthwhile doing something God commands if you agonize for it.

Your conversation is meant to strengthen your relationship. You want peace in this relationship, but the other half refuses to work together. You are imitating God’s forgiveness; you do what is right, but your relationship languishes. It feels like God is not granting you the justice you deserve!

Some days you feel like John the Baptist— recalling all the great works of God, but sitting all alone. You may feel like these early believers— hard-working, honest employees suffering at the hands of the wicked! Little by little doubt creeps up. ... doubt that God is able to help ... doubt that God will actually help!

That becomes more believable when you **grumble against each other**. I mean, how tempting to look at someone else’s life and conclude that God cares more for someone else than he does for you! “I’m always sick, but my chain-smoking-neighbor is not!” “My family gripes at me— and my friend, who does not lift even a finger to help his mom— is loved!” “I strive to hold my tongue and not argue, but my relationships are never strengthened!”

Yet, if we **grumble against each other**, we are involving Jesus, the Judge. If we feel someone has “it” better than us, we are really saying that the Judge does not care about our needs or emotions or life. We are accusing our God of hurting us! We are accusing our God of being unjust! If we want to believe that God hates us or chooses to harm us, then know this: **The Judge is standing at the door!**— ready to return at any moment! If he discovers your grumbling has severed you from him, then **you will be judged**.

My dear brothers and sisters who, through faith are brought into the family of God, **PATIENTLY WAIT FOR THE LORD'S COMING!** Here's how you can wait: *Strengthen your hearts.* Of course, James is not telling you to exercise or take your heart medication. He is not some football coach inspiring you to "Dig deep!" and "Persevere!" even though challenges arise. James knows you will have troubles and sometimes those troubles will pierce so deeply into your heart. Yet, he points to Jesus and his saving work for you and urges: "Stand firm! *Strengthen your hearts!* because Jesus is coming soon!"

That may sound like an odd answer to suffering. "Be patient in suffering because Jesus is returning soon?" Yes! He can return because he has completed his saving work! He already used his innocence to wash away your guilt. He already burst out of the grave with eternal life in his hands! He already entered heaven and rules over all things! The only promise left is for Jesus to return.

When he returns, he will gather all people around his throne and separate the wicked from the righteous, just as a shepherd separates goats from the sheep ([Matthew 25:32](#)). When your Lord returns to judge, what will he see on you? He sees Jesus and a perfect patience that followed the path to the cross. He sees Jesus and perfect contentment as he suffers an unfair crucifixion. He sees Jesus and a perfect trust that the Father will grant justice! When you stand before the Just Judge of the universe, God stares at you and sees Jesus and his perfect life wrapped around you!

So, how can you be patient in suffering? Because Jesus calls you his child. Your Jesus cares so much for you that he removes your grumbling for all eternity. Remember what he has done for you. *Strengthen your heart* as you remember that you belong to God. **PATIENTLY WAIT FOR THE LORD'S COMING** as you *See your eternal outcome.*

That's why you are patient. You are preparing your hearts for eternity. **Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.** Isaiah the prophet is chased out of his hometown and out into the woods. He hides in the crevice of a tree and people cut the tree down (and yes, he is in it). Consider the prophet Elijah. He proves the one true God exists—and receives a death sentence ([1 Kings 18:16-36](#)). Wicked queens and kings hunt down the prophets of God ([1 Kings 18:4](#)). The priest Zechariah is murdered in the temple ([Matthew 23:35](#); [Zechariah 1:1](#)). Jeremiah receives a message from God and speaks it. Yet people plug their ears, beat him up, toss him into a pit, and humiliate him. Daniel prays to God and gets thrown into a lion's den because of it. So many prophets over hundreds of years spoke and lived as God wanted them, but they still suffered.

So, why bother following a God who appears unable to rescue them? Because the prophets looked at Jesus and *saw their eternal outcome.* These prophets know Jesus is coming to bring them victory over death. They know Jesus comes to snatch them from the fires of hell so that they can sing eternal praises to the Lamb! They know this life is weighed down with tears and sorrow, but Jesus comes to wipe away all tears forever! **We consider blessed those who have persevered** because they now enjoy eternal life to the fullest!

You, also, **PATIENTLY WAIT FOR THE LORD'S COMING!** *See your eternal outcome!* You are heading to the same heaven in which the prophets live! I am not saying, "Well, life's tough. I'm sure you can't wait to enter heaven." James does not say that either. He points to heaven as your eternal reward. While you stand firm in your faith until the end, James points to another great example to follow.

You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. In the blink of an eye, Job lost his cattle, his house, his family, his wealth and health, and his friends. His wife insists that he curse God and die. Yet, Job takes hold of God—as difficult as it might seem. He believes: "*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised*" ([Job 1:21](#)). In the most dire of situations, Job knows (1) God is still with him and (2) God will still bring him to heaven.

Through this difficult suffering, **see what the Lord brought about.** Job recognized that life is not about getting more stuff. He learned how God controls his health. Even though penniless, he sees God as the great Giver. Even though in mourning, his heart boasts in his Redeemer ([Job 19:25](#)). In every earthly challenge Job's trust in God grew stronger.

Yes, even though we see suffering, we know God is still there. He works behind the scenes, operating in ways to increase our reliance on him. Answering us in ways to know that his thoughts are better than our thoughts.

So, yes, even though cancer invades life, remember how you can pray to a God who handles your health. Even though family may be a source of pain, reflect Jesus' forgiveness. Even though arguments break out, imitate the patience of God. And yes, sometimes we may not know how certain tragedies work for our good this side of eternity—but one thing we do know: we have an eternity reserved in heaven. **PATIENTLY WAIT FOR THE LORD'S COMING;** remain in the one true faith; *see your eternal outcome!*

John the Baptist never saw Jesus powerful break into his prison, bend apart the jail bars, and break John out. John saw something greater: his Savior.

Even though he languishes for doing good, he *strengthens his heart*. Jesus came as God promised! Jesus paid for the sins of the world—just as Isaiah foretold! Jesus rose from the dead, thereby breaking death forever! He locks his eyes on Jesus and trusts his life will forever remain at his side.

That's why he patiently waits on his God. John *sees his eternal outcome*—and you do too. In suffering, remember that your God has not forsaken you. Trials strengthen our reliance on God. Suffering teaches us to trust that God's ways are higher than our ways—and that his ways are meant for our eternal good.

"PATIENTLY WAIT FOR THE LORD'S COMING" James writes. *Strengthen your hearts as you watch for your Lord's coming. Grow stronger in your saving faith as you See your eternal outcome.*