

## **James 5:7-11 - Patience in Trials**

**Sign Title: Patience in Trials**

**October 9, 2011**

We are working our way through the book of James. It is hard to believe there are only 12 verses to go. Last week, James strongly condemned the rich that exploited the poor for their own personal gain. This week, James talks to the poor who are in the midst of trials. They are struggling to make it through. Is that you? Is life hard? If so, this morning's message is for you.

When we are rich, comfortable and healthy, we are excited about what life has to offer. How different it is when times are hard. As Christians, when times get really hard, don't we start wishing we were with Christ? Don't we look forward to the day when Christ returns? One writer put it this way: I have never heard someone say, "Things are going so well; I hope Jesus comes back today!"

When things are good, we want to stay here. When things are bad, we can't wait to get out of here. Today, with a heart of a gentle pastor, James wants to encourage those in his congregation that are suffering in the trials of life.

Before we read the text, I want you to know we will do a little something different. While we will read verse 9, I am not going to teach on it. That is because I taught on it a few weeks ago in our message on slander.

### **James 5:7-11**

The subject of this paragraph isn't hard to find. The word patience is repeated through the passage. Patience in our trials is not a new topic for James. If you remember back to the spring, James began this letter with a similar theme.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

James taught us to look at trials counter-intuitively. We think they are all bad and we need them out of our life. We think that if God doesn't take them out of our life it is because he doesn't know what he is doing or he doesn't love us. James told us we need to look at our trials another way. As Christians, trials are not our enemies, they are our friends. *They are the instruments God uses to mature our faith, to build our steadfastness and to make us mature and complete.*

Let's just admit it, trials are not easy. Nobody is cheering like your favorite football team made a touchdown when trials come our way. Yet, when we really get to the bottom of it, we can have joy in our trials; not because of the trial itself, but because of the spiritual good God wants to use the trials to produce in our lives. How should we handle our trials on a day to day basis? That is the subject of our text. Let's see what God tells us through James.

### **How do I handle a long trial?**

Trials that don't require patience we call inconveniences. The trials James is talking about are trials that will take some time until they are resolved. Why should we be patient? The Lord is coming soon.

### **Be patient because Jesus is coming soon.**

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord... for the coming of the Lord is at hand... James 5:7–9 (ESV)

What coming is he talking about? This is known as the Second Coming of Christ. This is something the New Testament speaks of over and over again. There are more than 300 references to it, one for every 13 verses in the New Testament.

For some of you, this is new information. Let me give you the big picture of Christ. Jesus took on human flesh at his birth. He was on earth 33 years. He died in our place, for our sin, on a Roman cross. He was raised back to life three days later. He spent the next 40 days on Earth appearing to his disciples teaching them and telling them what they were to do. He then ascended back to heaven from the Mount of Olives, just west of Jerusalem. As his disciples were standing there, angels appeared to them and said...

and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11 (ESV)

During his three years of public ministry, Jesus taught extensively about his return.

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:27 (ESV)

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matthew 24:30–31 (ESV)

Christ is coming back, and when he does, there will be no mistaking his arrival. There is no such thing as the secret spiritual return of Christ that Harold Camping was talking about this past spring. If you remember, Harold Camping predicted the return of Christ for May 21st of this year. When it didn't happen,

Harold revised his words to say Christ returned secretly and spiritually, not physically. Let's do a reality check. From what we just read in Acts and Matthew, is Christ's return going to be a quiet spiritual thing or an enormous public event? In Scripture, there is no such thing as the secret spiritual return of Christ.

James also says in verse 8 that the Lord's return is *at hand*. How could he say this? If those he wrote to were to be patient in their trials because Jesus' return was near, yet they died without his coming, is this still a true statement? It is 2,000 years since that statement was written. Is Jesus' return still near? Yes, it is. What *at hand* means is that Christ's return is the next event on God's timetable for history. There is no secret spiritual return then another return later. Christ's return is next.

Even while the disciples were alive people scoffed at Christ's return. They didn't believe Christ would be coming back so Peter wrote to explain it.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 2 Peter 3:8–10 (ESV)

There are a few things Peter teaches tells us about Christ's return. First is that *our time table is not like God's time table*. Last week we had a housefly buzzing around the kitchen that we could not smack. It wasn't an old one. It was a young athletic house fly. We just couldn't kill it. Finally, in desperation, I looked on Wikipedia and see how long a house fly lasted until it died. The lifespan of the average house fly is 21 days. I told Cindy to rest easy because the fly would

be gone in less than a month. Cindy assured me Wikipedia was wrong because the lifespan of a housefly in her kitchen would be less than 21 seconds.

My point is that from the housefly's perspective, 21 days is a long time. From our perspective, it isn't that long. It is the same with the return of Christ. Two thousand years seems like a long time, but from God's perspective, it isn't long at all.

Not only that, but Peter says rather than being frustrated that Christ hasn't returned, be thankful he is patient and is giving people more time to repent! Aren't you thankful Christ was patient with you and didn't return before you repented? The reason Christ hasn't returned is not because God isn't keeping his promise but because he is incredibly loving and patient with us. If you are here this morning and you haven't repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus, do it today! Now is another opportunity to repent. God's patience will NOT last forever.

Let's get back to the text. James is making a connection between Jesus' future coming and our present trial. That connection is found in the Greek word he uses for "coming" in this passage. It is the word *parousia*. In Greek, that word literally means "presence." How does this help us make it through a trial?

Have you ever been apart from someone you loved and you started counting down the days until they returned? Every night before bed you put another "X" on the calendar. Each "X" built anticipation because you could see it wouldn't be long until you were finally together again.

In the office, my secretary enjoys telling us about her granddaughter. She is dating a man who was serving in Afghanistan. She didn't know when he could call her so she kept her phone with her all the time. She even took it in the shower in a zip lock bag. She had sticky notes on her wall counting down the days until his return. Every day she took one off. While she could talk to him on the phone, that wasn't satisfying. What she longed for was his presence. She was counting down the days until his return and she had it. That's *parousia*.

Christ's return and presence with us is the hope we look forward to as Christians. We look forward to when we will be forever with the Lord. Could anything be better than having the presence of Christ? Jesus is the one who loves us more than anyone on Earth possibly could. Jesus has done more for us than anyone ever has. The more we understand how much he loves us, the more we love him. The more we love him, the more we count down the days until we are finally in his presence.

One of the things I love about James is that he loves to give illustrations and he gives us three about how we should be patient.

### **Be patient like a farmer.**

...See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient... James 5:7–8 (ESV)

It seems James' older brother, Jesus, went into the family carpentry business. I think James became a farmer because he loves to use agricultural illustrations. In Iowa, we know a little about farming so we can relate to James' illustrations.

Farmers, please correct me if I am wrong, but I believe growing a crop requires a certain amount of faith. There is a significant investment that goes into planting. You have to prepare the soil. You have to plant the seed, which is a huge financial investment. After you have planted, what do you do? You wait. You look at the crop every day. You watch the Weather Channel. You hope and pray God waters the fields in just the right amount and at the right time. It takes patience to be a farmer. You wait for the harvest. No matter what you do, you can't make that corn grow any faster.

The lesson is clear. Jesus is coming back, and he will be on time. He is not coming back until the harvest is ready. In the meantime, we need to be patient, just like a farmer. The harvest is coming but there is no way to make it come any faster. What should we do while we are waiting for Christ to return?

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9 (ESV)

Don't grow weary of doing good. The harvest is coming.

**Be patient like the prophets.**

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast... James 5:10–11 (ESV)

By "the prophets," he is talking about the prophets in the Old Testament. These guys suffered a lot. Take Jeremiah. All he did was follow the instructions God gave him. What did he get in return? He was placed in stocks. He was thrown into prison. He was hunted by men in his own hometown. He was beaten and scourged. He wished he was never born. He nearly died when he

was imprisoned in an old cistern in mud up to his waist. That was our hero, Jeremiah.

Other prophets also suffered. Daniel was deported. Ezekiel's wife died suddenly, and he wasn't allowed to mourn. Hosea had a nightmare of a marriage to a prostitute. Jonah ended up in the stomach of a big fish and came out half-digested. Did you ever notice it is hard to find heroes in the Bible that didn't need to have patience as they suffered long trials?

These are the heroes of our Bible stories. Look what they had to endure! Why were their lives so tough? They just followed the path God called them to take. On that path, they discovered God ordained trials for their lives. In fact, it was the trials of their lives that became the axis God used to do the amazing things for which we remember them.

What did they have to do to make it through? They needed patience and perseverance. James says, with a touch of irony, we consider them blessed! We name our kids after them. We admire them. We want to be like them. But think about this. I don't think Jeremiah felt particularly favored by God when he was dying in an old mud-filled cistern. I don't think Daniel felt particularly blessed when he was taken from his home never to see it again. The prophets were people just like us and do you know what their trials felt like? Trials! We look back and see what God did through them and say they were blessed to be a part of it. If we could just realize that someday we will look upon the trials we are in now and say, we were blessed to be a part of them! (Even if it doesn't feel like it at this time!)



Only in our culture can a kind of Christianity survive that says God wants you happy, healthy and wealthy all the time. Prosperity preachers say that if life is hard or your health is suffering it is because you are out of God's will or you are not walking by faith. That is bologna! Look at the prophets. They were in the center of God's will, and they were living in trials. It is from those trials God gave us the amazing stories for which the prophets are known. For any of them to make it through, they had to be patient and persevere.

Are you there today? Does the cross God has you carrying seem far greater than you can bear? Do you think God doesn't love you or that he's abandoned you because life isn't comfy and perfect? Look to the prophets and see the trials they went through and be encouraged to patiently endure.

### **Be patient like Job.**

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord,... James 5:11 (ESV)

I don't have time to tell you all of Job's story, but he is a guy who suffered. In a matter of 15 minutes he received news that he lost all he owned and his children were dead. He then loses his health and has terrible boils all over his body. His friends turn on him. His wife is a great source of encouragement when she tells him to curse God and die. I don't think life can get much lower. Job refused to give up his faith, and he choose to endure what God has brought even though he couldn't understand why God brought it. Check out some of the great statements he says in his trials.

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21 (ESV)

Though he slay me, I will hope in him... Job 13:15 (ESV)

Impressive, isn't it? What is not so impressive is Job's bitter complaining to God. There is much of the book where he doesn't sound like an Old Testament hero, but he is! Job was just a normal person struggling by faith to make it through the trials God allowed, just like you and me. Job wasn't perfect, but he persevered.

What did God do? At the end of the story, God gave him more than he had taken away. Job was blessed by God. James says that you have seen what the Lord brought about and what He purposed in it. Today, we see what God was doing in Job's life when we look back upon it. But when Job was going through his trials, he didn't know what God was doing. Just like Job, we often don't know why God allows the trials we face into our lives. But the example of Job shows us that God has a purpose for them and some day we will understand what God was up to. *God's purposes are always greater than the trials he allows.* Some of those purposes we see down the road in this life but many of God's purposes for our trials we will never understand until we look back upon them from the vantage point of heaven. In that time, we will be glad we persevered through them.

**Trust in God's compassion and mercy.**

The Lord is compassionate and merciful. James 5:11 (ESV)

The Greek word for compassion means "many-bowelled." What in the world does that mean? Today, we say the seat of our feelings is the heart. The ancients went a little further south and said the seat of emotions were the

bowels. We say things like, “my heart hurts for them.” They said “my bowels hurt for them.” God is “many-bowelled.” This means he has an extraordinary capacity to feel empathy and extend mercy to his people. That is where our hope has to ultimately rest when we are enduring a long difficult trial. God isn’t out to get us. He’s out to save us. He is a loving father who promises to not give us more than we can bear, but he will often take us to the limit so he can develop the faith and spiritual endurance we need to be mature and trust him more.

## Conclusion

Missionaries David and Svea Flood made great sacrifices to serve God in the Belgian Congo. Along with another young couple, the Ericksons, they took the gospel to a remote area called N’dolera. Because the tribal chief would not let them enter the village, they only had contact with a young boy that sold them food. David Flood’s wife, Svea, led the young boy to Jesus. Then tragedy struck.

The Ericksons came down with malaria and were forced to return to the central mission station. Svea, who was pregnant, died only days after giving birth to a baby girl. Grief stricken, David Flood buried his wife in the African soil. Emotionally devastated, the young father left his infant girl with the Ericksons at the central mission station and returned to Sweden. Eight months later, both of the Ericksons died.

The young girl was brought to America where she was adopted and became Aggie Hurst. Years later, a Swedish Christian magazine showed up in her mailbox. She couldn’t understand the words but a photo inside shocked her.

It was a picture of a grave with a small white cross on it that had a name she recognized, Svea Flood, her mother.

She took the magazine to a college professor who translated it for her. Missionaries came to N'dolera long ago.... white baby was born... mother died... one boy came to Jesus... boy grew up and built a school in the village... boy led students to Christ... children led their parents to Christ... tribal chief becomes a Christian.

There were 600 Christians in that village because of that boy. That boy eventually became the superintendent of the national church of Zaire and he leads a denomination that has 110,000 baptized believers.<sup>1</sup>

The tragedy of the Floods and the Ericksons is undeniably heart breaking. Their deaths appear utterly cruel and pointless. But with hindsight, and with a little of God's perspective, we can see the incredible good God chose to unfold through their lives.

Are you in a long trial? Endure with patience. Jesus is coming back soon. When he returns, we will see that *God's purposes are always greater than the trials he allows.*



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<sup>1</sup> Aggie Hurst, *A Story of Eternal Perspective*, Eternal Perspective Ministries, [www.epm.org/artman2/publish/missions\\_true\\_stories/A\\_Story\\_of\\_Eternal\\_Perspectives.shtml](http://www.epm.org/artman2/publish/missions_true_stories/A_Story_of_Eternal_Perspectives.shtml)