

AWAITING JESUS' RETURN: HOW WE WAIT

James 5:7-11

(CSB) Therefore, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Brothers and sisters, do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door! ¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹ See, we count as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and have seen the outcome that the Lord brought about—the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

INTRODUCTION

A New York City businessman moved to the country and bought a piece of land. He'd never been near a farm in his life but had a "Green Acres" yen to enjoy a simpler life close to the soil and farm animals; far from a big city's concrete, congestion, and commotion. He went to the local feed and livestock store and told the proprietor he wanted to take up chicken farming. He asked to buy 100 chicks. "That's a lot of chicks," commented the owner. "I mean business," the man replied. "I want to grow the biggest chicken farm in this county!" A week later the new farmer was back. "I need another 100 chicks." "Boy, you really are serious about this chicken farming," the owner told him. "Yes," the man replied, "if I can iron out a few problems." "Problems?" asked the proprietor. "Yeah. I think I planted that last batch of chickens too close together."

Probably 40% of the world's labor force still makes their living by farming. In New Testament times, this percentage was much higher. They understood perfectly James' analogy between the patience required of a farmer and the patience expected of **Jesus'** followers in awaiting His Return. Through ignorance of farming methods, neglect of guarding crops from pests, or impatience over the often lengthy time between planting and reaping, a farmer can ruin what would have been a bountiful harvest. A boy was once given a patch in his parents' back yard to plant some vegetables. He carefully prepared the soil and planted the seeds. Once these seedlings began to sprout, the parents were amazed over how quickly they seemed to grow. Each morning the boy came in proudly with news of how tall his plants were now. Then, one day, his plants were all found dead. They had dried up from lack of moisture because their roots were above ground. The impatient boy then told the parents he thought he would help them if he pulled them up a bit each day.

Exercising the necessary "patience" while Awaiting **Jesus'** Return is clearly the key idea in our text. One Greek word for "patience" means "a longsuffering, loving attitude toward others." It's found four times in **vss. 7, 8, & 10**. Paul chose this word in **I Corinthians 13:4**: "Love is *patient*," and in **Colossians 3:12-13**, "Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and *patience*, ¹³ accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive." During any apparent long delay, our nerves may become frazzled and frustration with our circumstances or with others may be magnified. This is why James reminds us, "Brothers and sisters, do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door!" James does not use the word for "complaint" of **Colossians 3:13**, which means "to blame" another for a problem. He uses a Greek word that literally means to "groan" or "murmur." It's from a root word meaning "narrow." James warns us against being so narrow-minded in how we react to the opinions or actions of others that we "groan" over having to put up with them in our church family.

A second Greek word for "patience" appears in **vs. 11**, where it's translated "endured" or "endurance." It describes "the ability to stand firm when faced with difficult circumstances." It's the patient "endurance" we can gain from the "testing of our faith" by "various trials" (NASB); the "steadfastness" (ESV) of "persevering under trial" (NASB), which James commends in **1:2-3, 12** in the opening paragraphs of his letter. It's patience in the face of frustrating circumstances and patience in the face of frustrating Christians. Both

describe what our Lord wants us to demonstrate while we Wait for His Return. A farmer went to his banker, a fellow church member, and announced he had bad news and good news for him. "First, the bad news," said the farmer, "I can't make my mortgage payments. And that crop loan I've taken out for the past 10 years—I can't pay that off, either. Nor will I be able to pay you the couple of hundred thousand I still have outstanding on my tractors and other equipment. So I'm going to have to give up the farm and turn it all over to you for whatever you can salvage out of it." Silence prevailed for a minute. Then the banker asked, "What's the good news?" "The good news is that I'm going to keep on banking with you, brother!"

II. HOW WE WAIT

This is our second take on the theme, Awaiting Jesus' Return. Last week we considered How We Are to Watch for Him to Return. Next week's focus is How We Are to Work until His Return. Today we explore How we are to Wait for His Return. As mentioned last week, James sent his letter to believers scattered by persecution 15-17 years after Christ's Resurrection, around A. D. 50. It's striking that when James wrote, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming," he could refer to "the Lord's coming" without giving any further explanation. James had full confidence his readers would understand what he meant because a fervent expectation of **Jesus'** Return and the desire not to be ashamed before Him at His coming were uppermost in the thoughts of first-century Christians. The Apostle John wrote near the close of the first century after Christ's Birth, "And now, dear children, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when He returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from Him in shame" (**I John 2:28**, NLT).

Vss. 7-8 resonated with James' readers: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near." To farmers of New Testament times, crops were so "precious" their lives depended on them. A good crop required their energy in plowing, planting, fertilizing, weeding, and chasing away birds. "The early and the late rains" were standard climate features of the Mediterranean basin's eastern half, of which Israel was part. "Early rains" normally fell from mid-October to mid-November. They prepared the soil for planting and helped the seed to germinate. "Late rains" of March and April then nourished the seeds to maturity and ensured a good harvest. Such rains could usually be counted upon, but their exact timing and amount were beyond the farmer's control. Seed that could have been eaten had to be planted in faith, in hopes of a good harvest. It was not uncommon in New Testament Israel for food to be rationed and for children to cry from hunger in the month or so before harvest. The later the rains were, the worse their hunger grew. Yet, nothing a farmer could do could hurry the timing of a harvest or guarantee the amount to be harvested.

A good "outcome" for a farmer (including "Job") obviously required much patience and faith, and the ability to endure many difficult circumstances and challenges. James states this is even more true of the challenges we can expect to face as followers of **Jesus**. When He Returns, the environmental factors His followers might be facing in the field (country) where we are planted—religious persecution, job stability, adequate food, clothing, and healthcare, military conflict—are often matters largely beyond our control. Our challenge as Christians is to steadfastly honor Christ and trust Him with patience until He chooses to Return, to dramatically change our circumstances, or to call us to Himself in Heaven. In the early 1940s, Christians worldwide believed they saw many confirmations Adolf Hitler was the Antichrist foretold in Scripture (**II Thessalonians 2:1-11; Revelation 13:1-38**). They were convinced **Jesus** would Return soon to destroy him and bring the world as they knew it to an end. How many of us were alive then? Were any of us already His followers? If not, then we would never have had opportunity to be born or to be reborn by Christ's love.

Vss. 7-8 tells us to expect a "coming" Lord who will set all things right. **Vss. 8-9** emphasize "the Lord's coming is" so "near" that our "judge" already "stands at the door," ready to announce His Return and ready to call us to account for our actions toward His church at any moment! **Vss. 10-11** present "the outcome that the Lord brought about" in the life of "Job" as an encouragement to us. "The Lord" is most "compassionate

and merciful" and eager to fulfill His purposes in the lives and satisfy the hopes of "those who have endured" with patient trust in His care. "Brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name as an example of suffering and patience.¹¹ See, we count as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and have seen the outcome that the Lord brought about—the Lord is compassionate and merciful." James has in mind patient endurance of hostility toward us as **Christ's** followers; perseverance when our trust in the Lord is put to severe tests, as when the severity of tragedies we may need to endure or the delay in our dearest hopes being realized may temporarily make the Lord's promises seem falsely hollow. Patient perseverance will always result in a good "outcome from the Lord" who is "very compassionate and merciful." **Jesus'** Return at just the right moment when He knows this is best guarantees all this and more!

We may bring trials or suffering upon ourselves by misreading or running ahead of what God wants us to do. A middle-aged farmer longed to be a preacher for years but was unsure if this is what God wanted. One day as he worked in the field, he stopped to rest under a tree. As he gazed at the sky he saw clouds that seemed to form the letters "P" and "C." He thought about this and suddenly realized "PC" could stand for "Preach Christ!" He immediately jumped up, sold his farm, and set out to preach Christ; convinced God had shown him what to do. But he proved to be a pitiful preacher. After one pathetic sermon, a neighbor turned to his wife and whispered in her ear, "I'm not so sure that God wasn't just trying to tell him to 'Plant Corn!'"

CONCLUSION

A young man farmed a small piece of land with his father. Several times a year, they would load an old ox-drawn cart with vegetables and go into the nearest city to sell their produce. Except for their name and their patch of ground, father and son had little in common. The old man believed in living life contentedly; seeking God's presence and blessing whatever he did. The boy was usually in a hurry—the go-getter type. One morning, bright and early, they hitched the ox to the loaded cart and started on their long journey. The son figured if they walked faster and kept going all day and night, they'd make it by early next morning. He kept prodding the ox with a stick; urging the beast to get a move on. "Take it easy, son," said the old man. "You'll last longer." "But if we get to market ahead of the others, we'll have a better chance of getting good prices," argued the son. No reply. Dad just pulled his hat down over his eyes and fell asleep on the seat. Irritated, the young man kept goading the ox to walk faster. But the ox's stubborn pace refused to change.

Four hours and four miles down the road, they came to a small house. The father woke up, smiled, and said, "Here's your uncle's place. Let's stop in and say hello." "But we've lost an hour already," complained the son. "Then a few more minutes won't matter. My brother and I live close yet we seldom see each other." The boy fidgeted and fumed while the two older men laughed and talked away almost an hour; rejoicing over God's goodness to them. The father then took his turn leading the ox. As they approached a fork in the road, he led the ox to the right. "The left is the shorter way," said the son. "I know it," replied the old man, "but this way is much more scenic." "Have you no respect for time?" his son asked impatiently. "Oh, I respect it very much! That's why I use it to see beauty; to enjoy each moment to the fullest." The winding path led through graceful meadows, wildflowers, and along a rippling stream—all of which the young man missed; preoccupied and churning with anxiety. He didn't even notice the splendor of the sunset that evening. Twilight found them in what looked like a huge, colorful garden. The old man breathed in the aroma, listened to the bubbling brook, and pulled the ox to a halt. "Let's sleep here," he sighed. "This is the last trip I'm taking with you!" snapped the son. "You're more interested in watching sunsets and smelling flowers than in making money!" "Why, that's the nicest thing you've said in a long time," smiled the dad. A few minutes later he was snoring—as his boy glared back at the stars. The night dragged slowly for the restless son.

Before sunrise the young man hurriedly shook his father awake. A mile down the road, they happened upon another farmer—a total stranger—trying to pull his cart out of a ditch. "Let's give him a hand," the old man whispered. "And lose more time?" the boy exploded. "Relax son. You might be in a ditch sometime yourself. We need to help others in need—don't forget that." The boy looked away in anger. It was almost

eight o'clock that morning by the time the other cart was back on the road. Suddenly, a great flash split the sky. What sounded like thunder followed. Beyond the hills, the sky grew dark. "Looks like a big rain in the city," said the old man. The son grumbled, "If we'd hurried, we'd be almost sold out by now." "Take it easy, son. You'll last longer and enjoy the life God gives us so much more," counseled the kind old gentlemen.

It was late afternoon by the time they got to the hill overlooking the city. They stopped and sat down for a long, long time. Neither of them said a word. Finally, the young man put his hand on his father's shoulder and said, "I see what you mean, Dad." They turned their cart around and began to slowly roll away from what had once been the city of Hiroshima.

We can only wonder what lasting sorrows the delays in our Lord's Return, despite our fretting and impatience to the contrary, might be saving us from; or what joys we might miss by our prodding and impatience. "Therefore, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near."