

James 5:7-11 *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.*

Dear Christians patiently waiting for the Lord to come:

A guy's car stalled in heavy traffic just as the light turned green. The chorus of car horns honking behind him didn't help matters as he tried to get the car going again. Finally, the poor guy got out of his car, walked to the first driver behind him and said, *"I'm really sorry, but I can't seem to get my car started. If you'll go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and blow your horn for you!"*

Patience is at a premium in our world. We live in a society where we want everything immediately if not sooner! Send a letter in the mail? Why, that snail mail takes a whole 2 days! Or, the famished teenager comes home from basketball practice and has to wait 10 minutes for mom to get supper done. *"Are you kidding me, Mom? I'm going to starve if I don't eat right now!"* he says as he opens the refrigerator door 15 times looking for something to tide him over.

James talks about patience today and puts it into the context of Advent: waiting for Jesus. He encourages us to **"Wait for Jesus With Patient Faith"** (I) *Patience isn't always easy*, but (II) *Jesus makes patience possible*.

I

James is writing to Christians who were struggling with disillusionment because of persecution. You and I can't even begin to imagine what it must have been like to be hunted down, harmed, and often forced to flee one's home simply for believing in Jesus. Can you imagine trying to live patiently when being ridiculed, beaten, and arrested for your faith? We have trouble being patient when the TV remote battery is weak or the line in the check-out lane is more than two people long! So these new Christians, getting kicked around, were struggling with patience.

Having to wait a long time for something good to happen when bad things are happening to us can really grate on the nerves! They were getting worn down. One of the signs of disillusionment that cropped up seems to have been in-fighting, getting short with one another. James says, ***"Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming...Don't grumble against each other...or you will be judged."***

A missionary to Africa of another church body told of a family that stored up a year's harvest of grain. Each day the parents would ration out just enough grain to sustain the children. They were nourished, but not filled. One day one of the sons found an extra bag of grain in a storage area and came running back to the house ecstatic. He jumped for joy as he told his family about the "extra" grain he'd found. He father had to calm the boy down as he explained to the children that they could not eat that bag of grain...because it was seed for planting the next crop. The children struggled to understand why they couldn't eat it when they were so hungry. But the parents knew that *more food* today would mean *no food* at all the following year.

We can just imagine the internal complaints of those hungry children as they watched their father throw all that grain into an empty field. But the father knew something the children didn't. He knew from experience that *"short-term pain would bring long-term gain."*

When we forget that truth, it's easy to grumble and complain and get short with one another. But that accomplishes nothing. Bitterness just grows like mold on old bread. Sometimes we get fed up with someone and just lay into them and criticize them and then say, *"Well, I just had to get that off my chest!"* But that's medicine the devil prescribes, not Jesus. God leads us to practice self-control,

find the positive, and ***“build others up”*** in Christian love. Christian homes, congregations, and schools are not immune to impatient grumbling. James writes these words to fellow Christians -- and that includes us.

II

While patience isn't always easy, the Lord Jesus does make patience possible. He gives us a vivid example: ***“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.”*** Farmers have no choice but to be patient. They plant their crops and then depend totally on God to make them grow. Rain, sunshine, germination -- all of that is out of the farmer's hands and in God's hands. The fact is, when you and I quit trying to *play* God and control everything that happens, we become much more realistic about life and are more apt to practice godly patience.

The persecuted Christians James is writing to couldn't really do anything about their mistreatment. So James advises them, ***“Be patient and stand firm.”*** Why? Because Jesus is coming back. ***“The Lord's coming is near!”*** His implication? *“I wouldn't want to be the people who are messing with and hurting you! Jesus will settle accounts with them.”*

James mentions another example of patience: ***“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.”*** James may be referring to any number of prophets sent by God who were terribly mistreated by the Israelites. Think, e.g., of Jeremiah. For 40 years he patiently preached to Israel. Most of the people, however, hated and abused him and ignored what he said. 40 years of preaching and so little to show for it! But Jeremiah believed and when he died he went to heaven. What's 40 years of difficult work compared to an eternity of enjoying the tranquility and joy of heaven?

James continues, ***“You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.”*** Job -- what a story! He lived through the death of 10 children, had his cattle stolen, saw his health go down the tubes, and even his wife mocked and cursed him. Yet, in the end, not only did God bless Job with a new family and home, but he also gave Job godly wisdom and eternal hope that comes with persevering and hanging on to God's hand for dear life.

But here is the biggest reason patience is possible: ***“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”*** It isn't that God has a little bit of compassion and mercy...to ration out in little pieces (like the African parents and their grain). The Lord is ***“full of compassion and mercy”*** -- head to toe. Everything that happens to us, whether we understand it or not, has an eternal purpose and brings eternal blessings. Look how **patient God was** in sending his Son. For over 4,000 years God made plans to send the Savior. He patiently waited until the time was just right in history, and then he was born in that little Bethlehem manger to live perfectly for us. In patience God allowed the Romans and Jews to put Jesus to death -- so that the greatest good would come about: the forgiveness of every one of our sins. And now for 2,000 years Jesus has been patiently waiting for every last brother and sister of his to come to faith -- and then he will come again at just the right moment in history and take us all to be with him in heaven.

God's patience with us makes our own patience possible -- even when the chips are down, even when others might be impatient with me.

So, if someone honks their horn at you this week, smile, wish them (at least in your own heart) a “Merry Christmas,” and remember that will never happen to you in heaven! We're just waiting patiently for our very patient Savior Jesus.

Amen.