

Title: James – Patience, Perseverance, Prayer

Text: James 5:7-20

We are finishing our reading of the Letter of James on this last Summer Sunday.

-So turn with me if you would to James 5:7-20.

Last week Christian did a great job of unpacking the prophetic word of judgment James pronounced on those who put their trust in wealth in this world.

-Those who have made of wealth an idol, and have sought to gain more wealth by whatever means necessary:

-exploiting others, taking advantage of slave labor,

-even killing others who get in the way of the almighty dollar.

We live in an unjust world, where greed and selfish ambition run rampant.

-It was true in James' day and is true right down to now.

So listen now to what James calls disciples of Jesus to do in every culture and generation living in this unjust world.

So what does James call us to in the midst of this world of injustices, uncertainties, brokenness and sin?

Quite simply he calls disciples of Jesus to patience, perseverance, and prayer.

-And I didn't even make up the alliteration with 3 P's!

-It's right there in the English text.

-Patience, Perseverance, Prayer.

1. In verse 7 James says, "Be patient then brothers, until the Lord's coming;" so let's start right there with "P #1."

Until Jesus comes again and finally sets all of the wrongs of this world right, be patient.

-Patient, he says, like the farmer waiting for the harvest...

-waiting for the rains to come...waiting for the land to bring forth the crops.

-Patient, he says, like the prophets of old who foretold what the Lord had promised to do for His people,

-but then had to wait patiently, trusting that God would actually do what He said he would do.

My friends, being patient in the face of life's cruelties and uncertainties because we are trusting in God to one day

right them, is the heart of what biblical faith is all about.

It is a reliance on the belief that there really is a God who has created all things,
-there really is a God who is redeeming all things even now,
-there really is a God who will one day bring his great plan of redemption to fulfillment.
Biblical faith in every generation involves actually relying on that belief.

James says it's like a farmer,
-standing in a dirty, dug up plot of earth, where not a single thing is yet seen to be growing.
-But he looks contentedly over the land with a smile because of what has just been planted.
-The farmer doesn't just see what is in front of him.
-The farmer can envision row upon row of corn stalks that are to come.
-The farmer sees by faith what cannot yet be seen with the naked eye.
-The farmer sees a harvest, where some of the rest of us might just see dirt.

That is what James calls disciples of Jesus to hang onto in the midst of life's injustices and uncertainties.
-We are to trust that the day is coming when we will look back at our lives and see that no matter how much dirt we had to plod our way through,
-God was producing something redemptive.
-He was somehow working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purpose.

Hanging onto that promise is what enables us to wait patiently in the present, no matter what the present holds for us.
-We stand firm in hope for what God is ultimately bringing about: a harvest of righteousness.

2. But secondly, being patient doesn't mean we don't do anything in the present, and in the face of life's cruelties.

In verse 11, James writes, "As you know, we consider blessed those who persevered..." Here's P #2.

Farmers don't just stand around looking at the dirt in the field, and hope that something might grow there some day.
-No, farmers plough, and plant, and water, and fertilize,
-they weed and watch, and do whatever they can to

cooperate with God and the weather to bring forth a good harvest.

Farmers work long hours from sun-up to sun-down.
-It takes not only patience, but perseverance.

And James mentions Job in this regard, too.
-Perseverance in Job's case had nothing to do with farming,
-but it had everything to do with suffering the cruelties and tragedies of life in this broken world.

He was a guy in the ancient world who had it all, and who lost it all.
-He had a great family, great wealth, great health, and was blessed in every way.
-But in a series of disasters he lost it all.

Job's perseverance entailed weeping, wailing, crying out to God, despair.
-He verbalized his anguish and pain to his friends and neighbors and anyone who would listen.

And mostly he verbalized his anguish to God Himself.
-If you've ever read the Book of Job, you know he didn't hold anything back!
-Job's "patience and perseverance" was not the stoic English "keep calm and carry on" type.

Job's style was much more Mediterranean, Middle Eastern.
-He was not happy with God and let God know it.
-In fact, Job scandalized his friends and neighbors by the way he talked to God.
-They thought he crossed the line way too many times and really probably deserved his misfortunes because of the way he talked to God.

But ultimately, that's not how God felt about Job.
-God actually showed up and talked right back to Job.
-And God didn't coddle Job, but He didn't condemn him for all of his anguished rantings either.
-In fact, God ultimately restored Job and redeemed his life and his fortunes.

The Book of Job seems to show us that God is not dismayed when we bring our pain and sorrow and anger and loss right to his feet and dump it there.

In fact, that is what perseverance looked like for Job.

- It was about persevering with God even when Job was furious with God because of life's injustices and cruelties.
- It was about crying out to God and even yelling at God because of the things God allows to happen to His people.

In the midst of it all, somehow Job can still say, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I will see Him with my own eyes. How my heart yearns within me." (Job 19)

- That's Job, like a farmer, looking at all the dirt he is standing in the midst of,
- but looking forward in hope to the day when God would make sense of the mess of his life, and show him the harvest.
 - In the meantime, he simply persevered as best he could.

3. And this is where prayer comes in. P #3.

"Are any of you in trouble," James asks in verse 13, "They should pray."

- Prayer is the primary tool God has given us to help us patiently persevere in the midst of a difficult life.
- Prayer is our lifeline.
 - It is the walkie-talkie from the frontlines of battle to the General in charge calling for help, re-enforcements, or air coverage.

Prayer is what Job was engaged in when he was crying out to God.

- Prayer was the constant communication Job had with his heavenly Father.
- And even though when we read Job's way of talking to God we might think, "Yikes, is that really prayer? Are we allowed to talk to God like that?"
- Well, the Bible says yes indeed.
- Just read Job, or the Book of Psalms.

Or listen to James when he simply says, "Are any of you in trouble? Well, Pray!"

- Tell God what's going on.
- Cry out for help.
- Tell God how you feel. Vent it all at His feet.
- God can take it. He already knows how you feel anyway.
- So admit it. Spill it. Get it out on the table.

Or if you're happy, James says. Pray about that, too.

-Prayers of praise and thanksgiving are also part of a healthy relationship with God.

-Go ahead and sing! James says.

And if you're sick, call the elders of the Church to pray over you.

-Prayer isn't just about you and God, it's a community activity, too.

-We pray with and for each other, and the prayers of God's people are effective, James says.

-They avail much.

And sometimes when we are overwhelmed by life, or stricken by sickness, we can't seem to pray.

-We are just done in.

-That's when the prayers of others actually take over for us.

-We lean on our brothers and sisters in Christ to lift us up.

-We depend on their prayer lives when ours is faltering.

And if one of us ends up wandering away from the faith, James says,

-the rest of us are called upon to prayerfully seek them out, and love them back into the community of faith.

It all takes prayer, and you know what, it all takes patience and perseverance, too.

And as we begin this new season of Fall, I would urge all of us to take these three words with us every day.

-Patience, perseverance, prayer.

If you remember nothing else from the Letter of James, remember those three P-words.

-Memorize them. Recite them to yourself throughout the day.

-Remind yourself again and again that this life of discipleship is a marathon, not a 100 yard dash.

It take patience, perseverance over the long haul, prayer.

We need to remind ourselves that the people around us have not arrived yet at some perfected state of "sainthood" either,

-and they need us to practice patience, perseverance and prayer with them, too.

-As they do with us!

And the world and culture around us.

I don't care what side of the political spectrum you are on,
-everyone is in turmoil these days.
-It seems like everyone is anxious, everyone is angry.

How about a little patience with each other.
How about a little perseverance and going the extra mile for each other.
How about a little prayer for each other, particularly for those you think are "your enemies" in our country currently.

Jesus says we need to love our enemies and pray for them.
-So start right there.

Whoever it is that is making your blood boil these days,
-try praying for them, seriously praying for them.
-I don't know whether it will ultimately do anything to change them, but it might just change you and me,
-and that would be a pretty good start for changing the culture around us.

Patience, perseverance, prayer.

As we come to share communion together this morning,
-join me in inviting Jesus to come and feed us today with more of who He is.
-For He is the truly patient One.
-I know full well how patient and long suffering he has been with me over the course of my life.
-And He is the truly persevering One,
-who went through death and hell for us.
-For our salvation, enduring betrayal, arrest, whipping, beating, spitting, derision, and death on a cross.
-And he was faithful to the end, persevering for us.
-And He is the truly Prayerful One,
-who even now is interceding for us before the throne of grace,
-always in constant communion with his heavenly Father.
-always praying for us, His people.

As we take the bread and the cup, give thanks for His patience, perseverance, and prayer for you.
-And invite Him to build those same traits in you so that you might grow to become more and more like Him.
-Or as James would say, so that you might become mature and complete, not lacking anything, and so may receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.
Let's pray.