

## “Sage holiday advice from Jesus’ brother”

(James 5:7-10 NIV)

“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!”

**Christmastime always promises gladness.**  
Expecting joy, we decorate our homes, give and receive gifts, and gather our families.

**We occasionally reach our anticipated highs; sometimes we end up sad.**

That's why red and green trigger happiness in some, but to others they signify gloom.

**Forget Christmas; they look forward to partying New Year's Eve.**

**Even ministers run into Christmas hitches.**  
**With a box of chocolates, one Christmas, we got this note from an elderly friend:**

*“Dear Bob,*

*Knowing that you do not eat sweets, I am sending the candy to Norma-and nuts to you.”*  
Some therapists report that December-January is their busiest depression-counseling time.

Holiday's:

- Long lines;
- Unexpected bills
- High charges;
- Tight schedules;
- Weather delays;
- Impatient youngsters;
- And last-minute cancellations test even saints.



**For folks with frayed nerves James, Jesus’ half-brother in the flesh, wrote sage advice.**  
**His “Be patient” counsel fits well, doesn’t it?**

**When James wrote this epistle, Christians didn’t observe Christmas.**

Christmas celebrations began centuries later.

**In his youth, he observed Passover, Pentecost, Hanukah, and other Jewish holidays.**

**Most of us recall many Christmas seasons.**

You might say we’re “seasoned veterans.”

**Christmas isn’t usually the primary cause of people’s sadness.**

Holiday challenges aggravate feelings already present in folks who have a certain world view.

**To what world perspective do I refer?**

**These folks consider a happy, secure future as a human right.**

- Guaranteed protection wherever they go.
- They draw up long lists of rights and they demand that others fulfill them.
- Anyone opposing their wishes angers them.

**For thousands of years, this “We’re entitled to joy” world-view has had promoters.**

**Some cunningly support it; others unwittingly contribute to this perspective.**

- Many preachers, e.g., tell us they know what our future is.
- Some companies intimate that they can secure our future.
- Politicians promise carefree futures.

**How realistic are the expectations of joy?**

**Can we know the future?**

**Can we control coming events?**

**Can bright minds cover all eventualities?**

“TIME magazine once published a story about a 2-foot-long, 40-pound package that arrived at the Troy, Michigan, post office addressed to a Michael Achorn. The post office phoned Achorn's wife, Margaret, who cheerfully went to accept it.

“As she drove the package back to her office in Detroit, she began to worry. The box was from a major retailer, but the sender, Edward Achorn, was unknown to Margaret and her husband, despite the identical last name.

“What if the thing was a bomb? She telephoned postal authorities. The bomb squad arrived with eight squad cars and an armored truck. They took the suspected bomb in the armored truck to a remote tip of Belle Isle in the middle of the Detroit River.

They wrapped a detonating cord around the package and, as they say in the bomb business, 'opened it remotely.'

“When the debris settled, all that was left intact was the factory warranty for the contents: a \$450 stereo AM-FM receiver and tape deck console. The only mystery was: Who was Edward Achorn and why did he send Michael and Margaret a nice Christmas present?”<sup>1</sup>

**If only Margaret and Michael Achorn had known whether or not there was an exploding box in their future.**

They could have enjoyed the AM-FM stereo receiver and tape deck that was now only debris.

If only the folks on that cruise ship had known the New Zealand Island volcano would erupt.



**It’s virtually impossible to know, let alone, control the future, isn’t it?**

- In 1831, William Miller, a Baptist farmer from Low Hampton, New York, preached widely that the Lord's Second Coming

would occur in 1843-44. Thousands of people followed him (they became known as "Millerites"). The era produced other noted end-time prophets: the Christian Advent Church and 7th Day Adventists resulted from William Miller’s movement.

- **Charles Taze Russell preached similarly in 1870s giving rise to Jehovah’s Witnesses.**
- Dr. Cumming, a London based minister of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, prophesied the imminent end of the world. The dates he predicted slipped by calmly. Cummings finally fixed on a date in 1867 for the Great Catastrophe. His influence with his flock diminished, however, when they found that he renewed the lease on his house for twenty-one years, only two months before.<sup>2</sup>

**Predicting the future is impossible.  
It’s also hard to know what’s in another person’s heart, isn’t it?**

<sup>1</sup> From sermon, “He came to us” *Dynamic Preaching* Dec 1990, p-21.

<sup>2</sup> From “The Get Ready Man” *Dynamic Preaching* Dec 1990, p-9,10

**“Does that boy or girl like me, or should I court someone else?”**

**In 1946 my parents took us by train to visit relatives in Chicago, where we went to a huge amusement park.**

A set of scales advertised that it would not only tell you your weight, it also claimed to foretell your future—whether you would marry and how many children you would have.

I inserted my penny and out came a card telling me that I would marry and have children. It even printed pictures of them—all eight of them—an extremely ugly octet of kids.

**Regardless of the person’s IQ, religion, or political views, he/she cannot predict with any more accuracy than those scales.**

- **During the late 1800s in eastern Tennessee, a moonshiner known as Big Haley became renowned. The woman's real name was Mahala Mullins. Mahala weighed about 500 pounds, so the moniker "Big Haley" “stuck” with her.**

Big Haley and her sons ran a reliable moonshine operation. The quality of their product stood legendary. Big Haley didn't dilute her booze and she dealt honestly.

Those facts, together with the problems of arresting a mountain clan, caused local law enforcers to pretty much leave them alone. To make a name for himself, a newly-elected sheriff once attempted to arrest Mahala. The judge who signed the arrest warrant just smiled and told the sheriff to be sure to bring her in.

**The sheriff and his deputies found Mahala's cabin with no trouble. He knocked on the cabin door, entered, and informed Mahala she was under arrest. He discovered, though, that Mahala was bigger than the cabin's doorway. After some futile effort, he decided not to arrest her after all.**

**When the judge later asked the sheriff about Mahala, the officer complained that, "She's catchable but not fetchable."<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Fred Brown. “Hancock Moonshiner was ‘Catchable But Not Fetchable,’” The Knoxville News-Sentinel (July 22, 1990), Section B, pp. 1,6 quoted in sermon, “He came to us” *Dynamic Preaching Dec 1990, 21*

**The future may seem catchable, but in mountain vernacular, it isn't "fetchable.**

- 1) We're all here and gone in a few decades.
- 2) The future's "un-fetchable" because no person or group can control everything.

See if you identify with this scene written by an irritated journalist. "Hurry as we may," he wrote, "we are hemmed in by a surging crowd in front and a dense throng of people pressing in from the rear. One man digs his elbow into me, another a pole; one bangs my head with a plant . . . You can be considered foolish and thoughtless . . . if you go out . . . without your will made." **Sounds like a typical Christmas shopping crowd, doesn't it?** The same writer later complained, "Here you may pay a big rent for a miserable house. Everyone dresses above his means."<sup>4</sup>

The irritated writer I just quoted was the Roman Juvenal, circa A.D. 60 to 140.

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<sup>4</sup> Harold E Kohn, *Adventures in Insight*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1967, Quoted in Flight to Egypt, Dynamic Preaching, December 1989.

For millennia, human nature has not changed.

Life shifts in ways humans can't control.

You may have heard about a Spring Valley, Illinois man who had his wife's diamonds and rubies mounted in a ring for her birthday.

**He tied a birthday card and ring to a helium balloon and put the combo in his car.**

When he opened the car door at home, the helium balloon with card and ring slipped out heading for the clouds.



**Have your dreams, hopes ambitions for the future gone up in the clouds?**

**Is there some way to know, lay hold of, or to control the future?**

**Times change; people come and go.**

**God remains the same: eternal, all-wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful.**

God controls all space and time.

He'll always be here.

**We assure our future by doing**

**God's will, loving, and trusting him.**

**We secure our future by trusting God.**

**James and the entire Bible emphasize that same truth about trusting God.**

**God expects our service, trust, and honor.**

He requires us to grow and mature in our relationships with him and others.

**God continually tests our life-progress.**

Those of us who live in farming communities constantly see the principles of maturing.

Crops require proper soil conditions, water, cultivation, etc.

**We realize the time it takes time for corn stalks to grow and to produce grain.**

For us to properly grow and mature, we must trust Jesus, serve him, and love one another.

By patiently trusting God, we human beings grow, mature, and become productive.

If I understand correctly, certain amounts of stress strengthen the corn plants.

**In human beings, maturing takes time, along with certain amounts of stress and practice.**

**The recipients of James’s letter underwent daily patience tests.**



**Suppose next August you hear loud noises in a nearby cornfield.**

When you investigate the cause, you discover several cornstalks arguing over which does the best job, and which looks more attractive.

You hear other stalks complain about the locations they were given in the field.

**This analogy might sound silly, yet the Bible warns us often about complaining and judging others.**

God expects production from us:

**“by their fruit you will recognize them.”<sup>5</sup>**

Color, IQ, ability to speak, looks, education, or financial success mean nothing to the Lord.

**God expects us to bear fruit for him.**

**This life is testing time.**

The Lord promised this about the testing we undergo: **“He will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it...”<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:20 NIV

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13 TEV. Read also verses 1-10 regarding complaining. God deplores it.

**James lived in tumultuous times:**

**“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.”**

**What does “stand firm” mean?**

- A) We don't give up.
- B) We don't judge others.
- C) We do not complain.
- D) We patiently wait for the Lord to judge others.

**Our world suffers of a near fatal infection of “grumbling and complaining syndrome.”**

Jesus assured us he would return to judge and correct the world's injustice and wrong.

**Note the last two sentences of our text:**

**Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”**

Many scholars think the last sentence means that Jesus will soon return to judge.

**The phrasing of the sentence makes me think Judge Jesus stands right outside our doors listening to us talk.<sup>7</sup>**



**If Jesus is among us close, will hear us grumbling and complaining?**

**Or will he hear and see us happily producing the fruit of his righteousness, faithfulness and love?**



**“In your hearts, do not think evil of one another... Love truth and peace.”<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup>The Lord willing, I'll explain next week the strong evidence for my thinking.

<sup>8</sup> Zechariah 7:10 and 8:19