

Our primary focus during Lent has been to grow closer to the Lord in our personal relationship. Unfortunately, there are many barriers that can separate us from God and keep us from truly experiencing His abiding presence and grace in our daily lives. This morning let's look at one of these barriers—our lack of patience while waiting for the Lord to answer our prayers. Many of us, especially yours truly, are not very patient people. You know patience is something that we greatly admire in the driver behind us, but not in the driver ahead of us. Donna and Rhonda were walking home after church one Sunday, casually discussing the morning worship service. "That was a great message on patience this morning," remarked Rhonda. "Yeah," responded Donna, "but it was five minutes too long." It's a fact that we can also be impatient in church and with the Lord.

As we conclude our study of the Book of James, let's see what he has to say about patience in the fifth chapter, verses 7 through 11.

Read James 5:7-11

Waiting is a thread that runs right through the very fabric of the Bible. If we try to pull the thread out, the whole fabric would unravel. For example, God promises Abraham and Sarah a child, and they have to wait 25 years for that promise to be fulfilled with the birth of Isaac. Moses is called to liberate the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and spends 40 years in the Sinai Desert herding sheep, waiting for the burning bush that will reveal to him his opportunity to act. God commands Samuel to anoint a young shepherd boy named David as the second King of Israel, but David has to wait 14 years before God's promise is fulfilled. Isaiah foretells of the coming Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, who through His suffering and death on the cross will bring redemption to the world and accomplish God's plan of salvation. But 600 years pass before the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem.

Let's be honest, waiting is not something we as human beings enjoy. Having to wait for someone or something is difficult for most of us. What we want, we want right now; we live in a microwave society. We don't like to wait in line at the grocery store or at traffic lights. We are always in a hurry and wanting to save time; thinking that the time we save will give us more time to do the things that we really want to do.

In a way our modern technology has made us impatient. Our culture is based on the desire to do as much as possible as quickly as possible. We live in an instant-gratification world that demands satisfaction and results right now. Because of this, we have invented all sorts of time-saving devices that are supposed to make life easier. We are the people who invented instant everything: instant orange juice, instant mashed potatoes, instant reply, smart-phones, Minute

Rice, and fast food which is really a double oxymoron since so often it's not fast and food it never is! A man asked God for patience and said that he wanted it "right now!"

Do you ever get impatient? Well, next time consider Walter Shane and his family who live on an island off the coast of Alaska. When they get the urge for a pizza, Walter calls in their order and patiently waits – 3 days. The "fast" food is jetted to them by airplane from Anchorage. The cost includes the price of the pizza plus \$23 for shipping. The next time you are waiting for your order at one of the local restaurants think about Walter.

This impatience to get to a desired result can cost us sometimes in the long run. For example, when the stock market goes through a major correction, many people concerned about their investments will sell their stocks, and in some cases at a loss. They want their money right away, but as many experts will tell you, if you wait out the storm, everything will be okay in the long run. But it does take patience and some faith. The point is that waiting is sometimes beneficial; something good may happen if we wait, such as growth, maturity, and change. But these take time; so, we must be prepared to wait.

James illustrates this fact with the image of the farmer who is patiently tending his field, waiting for his crops to grow. Having grown up working on a farm, I appreciate the cycle of growth, and all the steps required to grow vegetables, cotton, and timber. The farmer cannot reap the harvest on the same day that he plants it. Rather there is a period of waiting. The growing season varies depending on the plant, the condition of the soil and the amount of moisture it receives. Radishes can grow within several weeks, corn within several months, and trees within several years. It takes a young pine tree 16 years to produce pulpwood and over 20 years to produce saw timber in the South. Farming is not for the light-hearted; patience is definitely one of the job requirements. Like the farmer we need to learn that we can't sow and reap on the same day.

One time a warden asked a man on death row what he would like for his last meal. The inmate said: "I would like to have a huge piece of watermelon." "You've got to be kidding," said the warden, "this is December; watermelons have not even been planted, let alone harvested." "That's okay with me," replied the inmate, "I don't mind waiting."

While James is talking about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, this particular passage provides some insight into how we can remove the barriers that separate us from God who comes into our lives every day. James tells us to stand firm, strengthen our hearts, and trust that God will see us through whatever we are facing at this time. There is a legend about an Eastern monarch who wanted to inscribe a phrase on his royal ring that would help him through any crisis or hardship in life. He consulted his wise men and they came back with these five words: "And this too shall pass." The same is true for us if we stand firm and trust in the Lord.

Standing firm also means that we are putting forth some effort to follow God's guidance in addressing the issues before us. Christian waiting is not like waiting in line at the Motor Vehicle Department or waiting for medical tests results. Christian waiting is not passive. Instead, it is an active waiting in which we prepare for what will be and ready ourselves for the coming of God's Spirit. If we are to become the person that Christ wants us to be, then we must decide that we want to change, that we are going to try and walk closer with the Lord each and every day. In our waiting, we need to be aware of God's hand directing our decisions and actions; we must be active participants in this transformation.

James also tells us to wait without grumbling and complaining against one another; did you hear that? You know, we are a lot better at complaining than we are at waiting. When people experience difficulty, they begin blaming and attacking those who are closest and dearest to them, as well as those who may actually be responsible. Waiting irritates us and then we take it out on those around us. You're been there haven't you; either you were the one dishing it out or the one having to listen to it? This grumbling and complaining destroys the peace around us and, in the end, makes the situation worse. We also miss out on the opportunity to demonstrate our trust that God will see us through anything.

Then James hits the issue of suffering head on. But instead of lecturing his readers to endure trials and suffering, James tries to inspire us by asking us to reflect on the example of Job. We often refer to the "patience of Job," but patience is a far too passive term in this case. There is a sense in which Job was anything but patient. As you read the tremendous drama of his life, you see Job resenting what was happened to him, questioning the conventional arguments of his so-called friends, and agonizing over the terrible thought that God may have forsaken him. Few people have ever spoken from their heart to God as Job did. But the truth is that while he struggled with his situation and questioned the reason for it, Job never lost his faith in God.

We all know from experience that the Lord does not work on our timetable. A man once saw a friend pacing and asked him: "What's the trouble?" To which the friend replied: "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't." Having to wait for the Lord can be painful at times, such as waiting for the results of a medical test, for a loved one to come out of surgery, for the approval of a loan, for a new home, for the right job, or for reconciliation with a loved one or friend. One man admitted: "I don't have near as much trouble with God's will as I do with His timetable."

A man asked God: "How long is a million years to You?" God replied: "To Me, a million years is a second." Then the man asked: And how much is a million dollars to You? God smiled and said: "To Me, a million dollars is like a penny." The man thought for a moment and said: "God, can I have a penny?" To which God replied: "Sure, just give me a second."

Yet if we are out of step with His timetable, then we have a difficult time understanding His will. Abraham and Sarah experienced this as they waited for the promised son; the Israelites grew impatient as they waited for freedom in Egypt and settling in the Promised Land; and we wait for God to answer our prayers and to remove whatever is weighing heavy on our hearts and minds this morning. But God's time for us, like God's time for Abraham and Sarah, Moses, and David, may be later than sooner. Our waiting may be short or long. We must remember that everything is in God's time. Trusting in God allows us to walk in faith knowing that God will always seek the best for us and will work things out in the way that is the best for everybody concerned.

God calls us to walk in faith. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28 where he told us that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who walk in faith trusting in His promises. A visiting priest was attending a men's breakfast in the Ohio farm country. He asked one of the local farmers in attendance to say grace that morning. After everybody was seated, the old farmer began: "Lord, I hate buttermilk!" The priest opened one eye and wondered to himself where this was going. Then the farmer loudly proclaimed: "Lord, I hate lard." Now the priest was getting worried. However, without missing a beat, the farmer prayed on: "And Lord, you know that I don't care much for raw white flour."

Just as the priest was about to stand up and stop everything, the farmer continued: "But Lord, when you mix 'em all together and bake 'em up, I do love fresh biscuits. So, Lord, when things come that we don't like, when life gets hard, when we don't understand what You are saying to us, we just need to relax and wait until You have done mixing, and probably it will be something even better than biscuits. Amen." The point is that God works all things out in His time for His children, we just need to be patient and walk in faith.

Believe it or not, God is never late; too often we're just in too big a hurry! God may not come when we want Him to, but God always comes in time. God makes a promise; faith believes it; hope anticipates it; and patience quietly awaits it. May we each have the faith and patience to wait on the Lord as He works out His plan in His way and in His time. Amen