

James 5 (7-9) – The Thief of Peace

Have you ever seemed to find frustration at every turn? It's like you're already "on edge", but then it just gets amplified. Sitting in traffic, waiting in line, watching as someone who breaks the rules gets what they want while following the rules gets you nowhere. It is easy to identify with the experience of your patience wearing thin, and your peace evaporating.

Patience is a virtue, but a lack of patience is where many Christians fail to be faithful. Their obedience doesn't seem to be having any effect on their circumstances. They wonder how long they'll have to wait on the Lord for an answer or for some sense of relief. They become impatient with life, with God, and with people. And then, at some point, they've had enough and they give up. They've tried doing it the right way, and now they want to try some other way. Obedience doesn't seem to be paying off. But to make your obedience conditional upon "results" isn't submissive it is sin.

The truth is that triumphs and tragedies are not distributed proportionately in this life. If you want to continue to be faithful during the difficulties, to remain obedient despite the obstacles, to please God through all the problems, you must learn to be patient. Instead of taking matters into your own hands, you must put your troubles in God's hands. He will do what is right. The problem is that people feel and live as if their ultimate good must also include their temporal satisfaction. They may indeed let God define a good ending, but *they* define a good life. And when they aren't getting what they want, they lose patience, and they stop being obedient.

The truth is that problems are a promise for the Christian (cf. John 16:33 / Acts 14:22 / 2 Timothy 3:12). And so, you need to develop patience or you will develop an ever-increasing frustration factor. Developing patience is a matter of vision; instead of simply focusing on the problems of now, you must look to the future and the past. Focus on the Lord's return and the Lord's judgment. Look back to the biblical examples of patient people, and look forward to the blessings of patient, faithful obedience.

Vs.7-8 – James is talking about patience with people. Vs.4-6 speak of wicked people enriching themselves by ripping others off, manipulating others through the courts, robbing people’s possessions, ruining people’s lives. But some people had patience, and they turned their case over to God, knowing that his will and his glory are more important than their suffering.

James illustrates this truth about patience using a farmer. In order to have a successful crop he needed both the early (fall) and the late (spring) rains. It was a long season, and he would have to work hard on the land, tilling the soil, spreading the seed, and that work wouldn’t yield immediate results. He had to be patient, he had to hope in the future, and yet the rains were outside his control. In the end, the farmer counted the cost, and he paid the price, because the harvest was worth it. It was valuable and precious.

James says that you have a choice, you have the ability to be patient. As Galatians 5:22 says, patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Christians shouldn’t look for immediate gratification, but look for Christ to return. You will see some measure of blessings in this life, and some problems will be overcome, but the full harvest is yet to come. In the meantime, you must labor, and although your service might go unrecognized, and your problems may persist, God is faithful (1 Corinthians 15:58 / Hebrews 6:10).

You can choose to strengthen your heart by hoping in Christ’s return (cf. Titus 2:11-14 / 1 Peter 4:7). You can live for today by having an eye for tomorrow. You can be patient, strong, stay the course, and remain faithful and obedient, and you don’t have to give in to sin. Jesus is coming back, and he is one day closer every day until then (Romans 13:11).

Vs.9 – You need patience with people, not only those outside the fellowship of believers, who take advantage of you, but also with those who cause you grief within the fellowship. And this grumbling isn’t necessarily referring to something you utter out loud to others. This is talking about an inward grumbling where you are harshly judging someone else. It is an unspoken feeling of bitterness towards another believer. And God knows.

People sometimes lose patience because of what someone else has said or done or neglected to do to them. They get offended, and they give up on the person, or the church, and they don't follow what the Bible says about forgiving them from their heart (Mark 11:25), or allowing the other person a chance to repent (Luke 17:3). This will only build on itself, and this lack of patience will spill over into other lives as well, as the person just grows colder and colder to all sorts of people, even those that love them.

Forgiven people become forgiving people; otherwise, they will become the kind of person who "just doesn't have any patience for anything or anyone anymore". I'm sure you've met these types of people before. The question is, are you becoming one of them? A test of that is if you are becoming more resentful of people who just don't seem to do what you think they ought to, or if you find yourself getting increasingly agitated and aggravated at people for less and less things. Your patience is dwindling, your anger, bitterness, and resentment are growing, and it takes less and less to set you off. You may act calm, but your frustration is amplified. You need a remedy.

James tells you that there is a remedy. You can have a patient, forgiving spirit. You do this by focusing on the fact that Jesus will judge. You must remember that you have your own failures, and you need to stay humble. Forgiven people are forgiving people, and judgmental people will wind up being judged for it. Impatience dishonors God, and it has immediate effects. Impatience is a thief; it robs your peace. And in the temporal sense, you can be given other remedial judgments, the chastening discipline of the Lord. In the eternal sense, your labor in the Lord will be judged, and you will suffer a real loss of reward where your lack of patience affected people.

James describes Jesus as if the ultimate Judge is about to take action. It is high time for humility and past time for losing patience. Will you become a more patient person, or will you become a bitter, judgmental person? A Christian has a new nature, but change isn't automatic. You can use these truths to renew your mind and change your life. But the choice is yours. Will you learn patience? Or will you let impatience rob your peace?

People have the wrong idea about godly patience. They think patience is simply keeping a stiff upper lip, keeping your mouth shut, keeping your opinions to yourself, keeping your feelings in check. They think that patience means you won't enjoy life. They think patience is like indifference. Patience is a blessing, but it is a blessing that almost no one wants, because it is a blessing that almost no one believes is actually a blessing. And they are impatient about leaning to be patient, and the blessing of patience.

But what if you could patiently deal with problem people and tense situations, and have grace under fire? What if you were able to keep your cool, not just outwardly, but inwardly, no matter what? What if you never blew up or lashed out in anger? What if you never held on to a grudge? What a blessing that would be! People feel justified in their frustration, and think that they would suffer untold numbers of injustices otherwise. But the truth is that bitterness only injures yourself. Nothing stops happiness like bitterness. And nothing robs peace like impatience.

When you become impatient, you have a wrong mindset, and it leads you to be fighting the wrong enemy. The enemy isn't the other person or the situation. The enemy is the sin that you sink into as a reaction to the person or the situation. That is what is stealing your peace. It isn't the situation; it is your reaction. And it is your inner reaction. You can do something about it, even if the other person never gets it right, never makes it right, or doesn't even care. Even if the situation never gets any better. It isn't dependent on them or on circumstances, it is dependent on YOU.

Your challenge isn't the trials you go through. Your challenge is whether or not you will trust that God loves you even though he allows you to go through them. Jesus proves himself to you in this way. He knew that his Father loved him despite the fact that he was sending him to earth to live a persecuted and sacrificial life. Jesus knew it was all worth it, because he was going to save *you* through his own suffering. He asks you to identify with him through yours. Will you accept the challenge? Or will you keep letting your peace get stolen while blaming everyone else? The choice is yours.