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Patience

Galatians 5:22-23

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the incredible privilege we have of your word, and the wisdom that is in it, and Lord we are about to again open up your book, we're about to look into it, about to study it, and Father, again, as we say each week, I pray that your Holy Spirit would accompany us, because it is a waste of time without that, it's just words without that. And so Father, as we open up your book, may we have the presence and the privilege of your Holy Spirit to guide us and again, enable us to make your words of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are looking at *Galatians 5:22 and 23*, which says this:
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. We're looking at the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus told us that he was the vine, he told us that his Father was the vinedresser and we are the branches where the fruit is grown. Now I've been saying for a few weeks now that what is

unique about the fruit of the Spirit is that you don't get it by pursuing it directly, that is, you don't get joy or peace by pursuing joy and peace directly. They come from our abiding in Christ. And as I've said many times, the more you abide in Christ, the more he begins to rub off on you. I've said many times before, the fruit of the Spirit represents the loveliness of Christ, and the more you abide in Christ, the more you begin to appropriate that same loveliness.

Thus far we've looked at joy, and we've seen that joy is this settled sense of contentment based on the knowledge that God is a good God and that he is in control. Last time we saw that you find ultimate peace, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ by laying down your arms and by taking up his cross. Well, this morning we're going to look at the fruit of the Spirit that's known as patience, and it is a gigantic subject, in fact it's a subject so large you can barely cover it in one message. There are two different Greek words to describe the two different kinds of patience we're speaking about. One of them is "hupomone." It's a combination of two Greek words, "hupo" which means "under," and "meno" which means "to remain." Hupomone means "To remain under." It's the ability to hold steady, to remain when the pressure of trials are putting you under. And it means so much more than the simple term patience means. You see, patience

conveys this idea that you are simply willing to accept a trial. Hupomone conveys the idea that you are not only accepting it but you're willing to stare it in the face, that you refuse to back down from it and choose instead to stay with it, allowing God's grace to transform you through it.

See, from the moment you enter into the sheepfold, God has been preparing you and me for great tasks that he has for us. All of us have been called to go into the world and make disciples, and the training school that we get enrolled in when that happens is simply life itself. And life itself, with all of its trials is now the training ground that God is going to use to shape and mold us uniquely into the image of his son, that we can go like he did and make disciples. And hupomone, or patience, that is the ability to remain under when these inevitable trials come your way, is directly related to whether or not you believe that God has a purpose for you in those trials. If you see life as just a series of random events or if you can't see the hand of God in a trial, well then patience can't do the work that God claims for it in *James 1:4*, he says this, he says: *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* All right. So what's the work that patience does? It simply remains. It stays. You know, we have an idiomatic phrase they everyone uses that perfectly describes the opposite of

hupomone, the opposite of remaining under. It's a phrase that we apply to circumstances, situations, and trials when they become too much to bear, we say, "I'm out of here." If we really want to add emphasis, we add the modifier, "I am so out of here." Well, hupomone is the exact opposite. It's the grace that God gives to stay put, to say I'm staying right here, and here is the place where you feel that pressure and you feel the pain just kind of washing over you, but you cling to your understanding of who God is and what he is doing in your life and you know that's when you begin to feel what real joy is, that in spite of appearances, God is still a good God and he is still in charge and that grace is transformative and guess what. It comes through patience.

Now, the other Greek term for "patience" is "macrothumeo." "Macro" means "long;" "thumeo" means "temper." Macrothumeo is patience that is long tempered; it is slow to get angry. So while hupomone means to remain under, macrothumeo means to be slow to anger. You know, this aspect of patience is summed up well in two Proverbs. *Proverbs 15:18* says: *A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.* *Proverbs 16:32* says: *Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.* Now, to put both of these words into context, if someone was torturing you for being a Christian, you would need hupomone patience to bear up under the pain and abuse

and to just stay there, but you would also mean macrothumeo
patience to keep you from lashing out at the one causing the pain.
James puts it in the imperative or a command in *James 5:7*, he says:
Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. You
know, everybody loves the idea of being patient but nobody wants to
go through the process of getting there. I'm sure we've all heard
of the old warning: Never, never ask God for patience because he's
going to send you opportunities to practice it. I mean, I think
all of us have heard that. That sort of misses the point of what
the fruit of the Spirit actually is, and I think one of the things
that we have to work against is trying to get patience for
patience's sake, as opposed to growing in patience by virtue of the
fact that we've grown closer to Christ.

You know, the world has all kinds of reasons to want to grow more
patient and all kinds of techniques in order to achieve that.
You're all familiar with them, you know, count to ten, you know you
can chant "serenity now" as many times as you like, you can
practice meditation, you may just become a lot more patient than
you were before. But the patience that God is speaking of here is
a different kind of patience entirely. It grows not from
technique. It grows from relationship. You see, the one -- it's
one thing to be told to be patient by some angry bureaucrat at the
Department of Motor Vehicles. It's another thing to be told by

your mother or your father or some other one that you love that you need to hang in there, you need to be patient. The difference lies solely in the fact that you have a relationship with one and not the other. You automatically trust the one; you have no reason to trust the other. You see, it's the relationship that is the source of the fruit, and the patience that God is speaking about is directly related to the other fruits, and that all of them together display the loveliness of Christ, and it is he who we have this relationship with. So as we draw closer and closer to him, his loveliness becomes part of what we see and understand and practice and imitate, and eventually that loveliness begins to define who you are. His joy becomes your joy when you fully begin to grasp his loveliness.

Now, again, we've said joy is fully understanding that God is good and he's in control, and you don't get that kind of understanding until two things have taken place. You have to first have this experiential knowledge of the fact that God is good, and secondly you have to understand that he's in control. Here's the problem. That usually doesn't happen until you find yourself in circumstances that are spinning out of control. And when things seem to be spinning out of control, when circumstances threaten to take your joy away, then when you begin to stick with it, when you remain under, when you practice patience, well it's then and only

then that you begin to realize by experience that God can indeed get you through this. And as you get through it, you begin to realize that all of the fruits are connected. I mean, as you abide in Christ, you begin to learn that his patience was a function of his joy which was a function of his peace, and as it soaks into your consciousness that God's perfect son left heaven itself and entered earth in order to give you life, that for the joy set before him he endured the cross, well it's then that his joy begins to become your joy. And the same is known as the fruit of the Spirit known as peace. I mean, you begin to develop and grow that fruit when you realize that the peace of God is really peace with God, that your relationship with him has put an end to this spiritual warfare that's been running in the background your entire life. Well, patience, like any other fruit, begins to grow in our lives only as we begin to grow in our relationship with Christ. As we abide in Christ simply by studying his life, we begin to learn how vastly different Jesus' idea of patience is compared to what we have in our heads about patience. And the same is true with God the Father. And I would go even further to say that a great deal of our disappointment with God stems from our misunderstanding of this particular fruit of the Spirit. We have a faulty conception of God's patience. We've embraced a corrupt version of our own, and for that, there is great consequence. Our conception of patience is off, our practice of patience has been corrupted, and

the consequences, well, they can be deadly.

First let's look at our faulty conception. You see, we in the west, we are the victims of one of the most destructive inventions that has ever been created. It was created some time around the late 1500s by a man by the name of Peter Henlein. He perfected a way to reduce a clock in size small enough so that it could be carried on an individual's person. Now, this had a profound affect on the way people in the west began to view this idea of time. You know, the Eastern way, the biblical way of viewing time has always been far more fluid and far less specific. The day was broken down but it was broken down into only four parts: it was morning, afternoon, evening, and night. Folks still worked, they went to work, they were paid a day's wage for a day's work. And the length of time devoted to the work was dictated by the work itself, not by these outside forces like time clocks. If you were a farmer and it was harvest time, you labored until the harvest was finished. You see, it was the task itself that dictated the time spent, not the hourly wage. Well, now thanks to Henlein's invention, the average person can break down each day into 24 separate hours, and he could carry that invention with him wherever he went, and that invention, the pocket watch, well, it changed everything. It changed the way time in the west began to be organized, and the primary goal was something that it had never before that before, it was efficiency.

Efficiency became the new goal of virtually everything. But here's the critical part. Efficiency is seldom even a part of God's way of doing business. God is constantly choosing the inefficient way to get things done. You know, he could have built the ark in a second, but he chose Noah, and the construction took literally ages. From an efficiency aspect, that's terrible.

We've come to view efficiency as the highest goal when God does not view it that way at all. It started in the 1600s by starting to make the hours of the day more efficient, and a few centuries later we had the industrial revolution which constantly sought ways to increase efficiency among factory workers. They were constantly doing these time motion studies, looking at how an individual would do one particular action on a production line, because everybody knew at that time the most important thing was to squeeze the most amount of efficiency out of an hour. And so they found out that by changing one little detail in the way a worker assembled something, you might be able to gain a few seconds per unit. The net effect on that one precise movement might be nothing but when you add those up over a year, all of those seconds begin to add up, and they begin to have value. And so the inevitable began to happen. Hours began to be broken down into minutes, minutes were broken down into seconds, and now today, I can proudly say that I have right here on my wrist, got it at Wal-Mart under \$15, an instrument

that breaks time down into hundredths of seconds. Do I really need to know the hundredths of seconds? You see, efficiency seems to be all that matters when it comes to time. The measure of the value of the moment is no longer measured by the content of the moment but by what efficiency we can squeeze out of it.

You know, there's a saying, it's particular to the west, particular to New York, which is really the most intense of all these western civilizations: Time is money. And you're wasting my money. That seems to pervade everything in our culture. And it sums up the way things have been for the last couple of hundred years, and it's affect on the human psyche has been devastating. And this is not at all the way God relates to time. You see, the biblical way of relating to time is much more in accord with the natural rhythms that we see all around us. It goes all the way back to Genesis. *Genesis 8:22*, God says this: "*While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*" See, these are natural time patterns that God sets out in scripture. They're patterns, as one author puts it, of slowness and then suddenness, of great activity such as sowing and plowing followed by prolonged periods of slowness as the crop starts to develop. As the farmer waits until the crop is ready, and then the slowness gives way once again to suddenness. If there's any pattern that God observes, it's that one, not the one that we're

under. And in every case, it's the activity itself that determines the quality and the quantity of the time spent, not the efficiency of the labor force or the time clock. That's how God relates to time. I mean, listen to what God said in *Ecclesiastes 3*, he said this: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

See, God's timing is not at all like our timing, and this is just my observation. I believe a very sizeable percentage of people who are unhappy with God are in reality unhappy with God's understanding of time. They are impatient with God's patience. See, we in the west, we have been coddled and nurtured and taught to want everything yesterday, and so we begin to apply a very unnatural, a very contrived way of looking at time, and we apply it to a God who has never treated time this way. And we wind up

feeling abused or abandoned because we think God must be ignoring us or just refusing us when in reality God may simply be operating on an entirely different timetable than the one that we operate on, and God rightly refuses to adapt to our corrupted notions of what time is. You know, there's plenty of evidence in scripture that points to God's timing being wholly other than ours, and it flies right in the face of the way we in the west view time. I mean, God readily acknowledged that the world even makes a mockery of the way he relates to time. Listen to what he says in 2 Peter 3, he says: *Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."*

See, we have God here flat out telling us he doesn't view time like we do, and he's responding directly to the scoffers who've heard God's promises and have seen years and years and years go by without any action on God's part. So what do they conclude? God's not to be taken seriously. And God says in 2 Peter 3:8, he says: *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that*

all should reach repentance. You see, God's management of time and patience is simply unacceptable to a culture that has made a God out of efficiency. I'm personally very thankful that God waited at least 2,000 years for me to be born, to rebel, to get broken, and seek repentance. You see, if it wasn't for the fact that he is patient towards us, not wanting any of his own to perish, well, then very few of us would have entered into the kingdom of God. And so when I am tempted to grow impatient with God's patience, it's helpful to remember that without that patience, all of us would have been doomed. See, we have no idea whether or not God's patience is going to continue for another 50,000, 100,000, million years or if it's going to end this afternoon. See, that's all in God's timing. Like I said, God's timing is nothing like ours. And all we have to do is look to scripture for examples. You know, God tells Abraham he's going to provide him a son. 25 years later God makes good on his promise. And not once did God feel compelled to tell Abraham the length of time it would take to fulfill that promise. Not once did he ever tell Abraham that the answer to his promise would take two and a half decades. God's timing is not our timing. Moses flees into the desert and it's a good 40 years before he hears God speak to him from a burning bush. So we wonder, did God just forget about Moses? Or is a 40-year delay perfectly appropriate in God's economy? God's timing is not our timing. Joseph. Joseph gets falsely accused of rape, he gets

imprisoned, and he's sitting in a jail cell for over two full years. And he just sits there until God arranges circumstances to give him his freedom. And we see in each of these cases God is willing to literally wait years before he acts. And what is amazing is in none of these cases is there ever a hint of an apology for his tardiness. Well, the reason why God wasn't sorry is because he wasn't tardy. He was absolutely not efficient, granted, but he wasn't tardy because everything he does he does perfectly, including his timing. So it just might be that God's timetable and ours are vastly different.

You know, when we look at the son of God, we see even more signs that God's patience is wholly unlike ours. It is from, in fact, a different universe than the one that we are used to. You know, I've said this many, many times, there really are two different universes that we all operate in. One is the world that we all live in, it's the world of work and school and families and friends and bills to pay and people to see, places to go, the stuff that we're all so familiar with, and the other is the kingdom of God. You know, we celebrate Christmastime, but Christmastime really is a celebration of one universe intersecting with another. Jesus Christ came to this planet to bring us the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God to the kingdom of earth. You see, his kingdom operates outside and above time as it operates outside and

above this world. But here's the kicker, here's area the critical part. His kingdom is the real one. Listen to what he says in 2 *Corinthians 4*, he says: *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* See, you've got to get it in your mind that there's this eternal kingdom running right along side this kingdom that we operate in, and the fruit of the Spirit is what grows in that eternal kingdom, and the more time you spend there with the king, the more fruit you're going to bring back with you. See, the patience that the world understands is the ability to kind of hold your fire, the ability to kind of not blow your stack. You know, we think of patience and somebody who's patient as somebody who doesn't easily fly off the handle. Patience in this parallel universe of the kingdom of God is much, much bigger than that, and the closer we draw to Jesus Christ, the more we begin to see life from his perspective, the more we begin to see time itself as he sees it.

So what is patience from God's perspective? Listen to what he says in *Galatians 4:4-5*, he says this: *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* Now that little phrase "when the fullness of time had come," that phrase sweeps us back right into

the Garden of Eden to the fall of mankind. There in the Garden, God made a promise to mankind and the serpent that one day someone would come to crush the serpent and redeem mankind. It took literally thousands and thousands of years for that time to reach its fullness; but it did, and the birth of the savior in that barn in Bethlehem was as precisely timed as anything that NASA has ever attempted. And we speak often of God's sovereign control of this universe. We say there's no such thing as even one random molecule that operates outside of God's sovereign control. In God's kingdom there's also no random days, there's no random weeks, there's no random hours, minutes or even seconds. See, in the fullness of time, God took on flesh so he could lead a perfect life and die in our place. Every single moment of that miracle was part of the sovereignty of God, and patience is the ability to see that. Now, the closer you draw to Jesus Christ, the more you're going to find the fruit of patience growing within you. And again, that's what Jesus means by saying: *"Abide in me and you will bear much fruit."* Well, practically speaking, here's how this happens. The key to developing patience has nothing to do with trying to be patient. It has everything to do with renewing your mind. It has everything to do specifically with the way you see yourself and your relation to God and his kingdom.

You know, the key to patience is really similar to the key to real

estate. In real estate, the three most important points to always remember is what? It's location, location, location. Well, the key to patience is similar, but it's perspective, perspective, perspective. We have to understand that our perspective in the west is genuinely warped and way out of sync with the biblical notion of time. So we have to go to the source for both our correction and for the remedy, and that source is God's word, the Bible. You see, it is your mind that enables the fruit of patience to grow and it is God alone who is capable of growing your mind. *Romans 12:2 says: Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Here's the question. How do we renew our minds when it comes to this idea of patience? Well, every time we feel our patience being tried, we need to ask ourselves a certain set of questions about our perspective. Three questions. Number one, what is happening; number two, why is it happening; and number three, how does God want me to respond? Those are the questions.

Now, a while back I had an experience that helped me put all of this into its proper perspective. I was flying to St. Louis for a wedding, it was a 9:20 a.m. flight, I left the house at 6:45 in the

morning, got to the airport at about 8:30. Security line took much longer than I thought it would. I was in there for almost a half an hour. By now it was 9:00 o'clock. I talked to the guy in the red jacket, I showed him my boarding pass and he pointed out to me where gate 110B was, and by the time I got out of the security line, it was 9:18. Okay. I had about two minutes to get to a gate which was about 500 yards away. See, I already knew I had an arrangement with the airlines, most of you have the same arrangement, if you don't get there on time, they leave without you. Well, I did an OJ Simpson for those 500 yards and I got to the desk just as the doors were closing. And it was then that I realized that if you don't show up within 20 minutes of boarding, they have the right to give your seat to somebody else, which is precisely what they had done. And so with a very pleasant smile, the attendant looks at me panting and says, "May I book you on another flight?" I called Janice, I got myself a cup of coffee, I opened up my Bible and I settled down for a long wait. And it was a perfect time to ask myself those three questions about perspective on time and patience. Number one, what happened? Well, the airline kept its agreement: I didn't show up, and they left without me. But here's the big picture. I didn't crash, I didn't get arrested, it didn't even cost me any more money. I just had a three-hour wait. It was an irritation. It wasn't a tragedy.

The first perspective in learning patience is to take a step backwards, to see things in context of the big picture. And often times that's all it takes. Now, the second perspective in learning patience asks why is this happening? Now, here is where my relationship with the world and God's parallel universe connect. *James 1:2* says: *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.* Joy's another fruit of the Spirit and it's that sense of contentment, knowing that God is a good God and that he's in control. And now the question is this. Was God in control of gate 110B? That's the question. I mean, that was the question for me that morning. You know, we often say that we trust God and I have no doubt that we mean it, but I think we mean it on the wholesale level. It gets very, very different when you get down to retail. And the question is does God control that as well? Listen to what David said in *Psalms 31:14*, he said this: *But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hand.* Now can you say it and really mean it, Lord, I really do mean this, my times are in your hands. You see, on the wholesale level we understand that to mean that my years, my seasons, my life, it's all in your hands, Lord. But what about retail? What about my days, my hours, my minutes, my seconds, what about moment by moment? Is God really the Lord of every moment? Well, if he's

not, then we have a problem because my life and your life really is my days, my hours, my minutes, and seconds all strung together. And it was readily apparent that three of those hours leaked out of gate 110B, and there was nothing that I could do about it so the question was did God forget something? See, the only way to experience the hand of God in your life is to be able to trust him, not just on the wholesale level but on the retail level as well. And sometimes that means facing retail struggles.

You know, I remember I got to the airport, I knew I was a little bit late so I was praying and I was praying for wisdom, praying for patience, I was praying God would get me a seat on that plane. And the first three hurdles that I faced, I prayed and God answered, "Yes." Okay, you and me, God, we got this thing knocked. It all went smoothly at first. In fact, everything went perfectly until the steward told me he had given my seat away. Here's the question: Did that make all of those prayers that I had prayed previously, all of those answers a joke? I mean, the question is are my times really in his hands, and is that so only if things go my way? Or is the power of God and the fruit of the Holy Spirit more evident and more powerful when things don't go my way? The first case is a god who promises you good luck and good fortune. The second promises you peace, patience, and joy in spite of your fortune. Which case do you think God wants to nurture in us? You

see, patience is not magic. It is part of a circle that begins and ends with the sovereignty of God. See, that was my answer to my second perspective question on patience. Number two, why is this happening? I can honestly say that Janice was more upset for me than I was for myself. I mean, God and I have been here many, many times before and all of us have because we all know that stuff happens in our lives. God never promises anyone a road around trouble; he promises instead a guide path through it. So I've got 40 years of retail trouble that God has guided me through, and I've also had my share of wholesale troubles not unlike every single one of you. But you know, after all of those years, I can say with certainty the words of *Psalm 46: God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*. You see, I'm able to experience the fruit of patience when I know by experience that my times are in his hands, and that only happens when I know that all things work together for good, including gate 110B. I can't know that if I don't abide in Christ, if I don't enter that parallel universe of the kingdom of God. And Jesus encouraged that not just on a wholesale level where everything is kind of theoretical but on the retail level where life itself is lived. Think about what he told the disciples in *Matthew 10:29*, he said: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many*

sparrows." Jesus is trying to get across them the level of care and interest that God has for them, and he's choosing a sparrow because the value of a sparrow is so low, it took two of them to equal a penny, and Jesus is saying, you know, if they can't fall outside of the Father's will, how do you think you can? Jesus is saying there's no limit to how particular, how low, how concerned God will go when it comes to his children.

So how does God want me to respond when gate 110B shuts its doors in my face? Well, my time is in his hands. I mean, he chose to give me three more hours than I had figured on, so I got my coffee, I got my Bible and I was blessed. There was no cosmic meaning other than the one that I got and that was my third perspective question on patience: How does God want me to respond? Well, you ask the question what is patience? Here's my answer. It's the realization that the hand of God is behind every event in my life and that my times are in his hands. Let me just say that again. It's the realization that the hand of God is behind every event in my life and your life and that my times and your times are in his hands.

How do we get patience? Well, we get it like we get all of the fruit of the Spirit: We get it by abiding in Christ. The more you hang out with Jesus -- I say this over and over again, the more you

enter into his parallel universe, the more he's going to rub off on you. Well, how do we grow patience? We already know not to ask God for that gift because he's going to give you opportunities. That stems from our understanding. And our understanding of the problem is that patience only grows in trials. *James 1:2 says: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* God is saying the testing of our faith develops perseverance and maturity and completeness. In short, patience. *1 Peter 4:12 says: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* I wish there was a way around it, but the fact is, we grow patience, we grow almost all of the fruit through struggles. And God allows them. You know, gate 110B was this tiny little retail struggle, but it points to what patience is all about, because if it happened beyond the hand of God, then there's no point in growing patience because all of life then is basically just a crap shoot. You're either lucky or you're not. But if my times are indeed in his hands, if God really is the Lord

of every hour, of every minute, of every second of every day, well, then patience is just a broader, deeper understanding of his sovereignty over time.

You know, it took thousands of years of patient waiting for a promise God made in the Garden of Eden to happen. 2,014 years ago or so, we had our first Christmas. We all know it's been 20 centuries since Christ rose into heaven. We know he's not yet returned. And so even a casual reader of scripture knows that God's idea of patience is vastly broader and deeper than ours. But here's the point: It's we who have to adapt to him, not the other way around. See, God also knows that his concept of time and patience is what is real. He knows that our concept of time and patience has been corrupted, and he knows that for that, there are real consequences. God is well aware that there are scoffers and mockers who treat his patience with contempt. We know that God is waiting patiently for the very last one to enter into that parallel universe that is his kingdom, and we know that while he waits he is building his patience into his children. It's part of who he is and part of who he wants you and I to be. You see, we know the kingdom of God patiently grinds on minute by minute until God's promise made in the garden is complete, and that day is coming. *2 Peter 3:10* says this: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the*

heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

It's God's announcement. There's no fanfare, there's no hyperbole, and there's also no escape. I once heard of a young seminary student who was giving a sermon about God's endless grace and patience, and he was going on and on until the professor finally stood up and said, "Stop. Just stop." He said, "I'm sorry, but you're wrong." He said, "God's patience and grace is great but it is not endless. It has limits, and it has boundaries. And woe to him who winds up outside of those boundaries."

And so the question I want to ask to anyone here today is are you still outside of those boundaries? And are you counting on his infinite patience? That could be the biggest mistake you've ever made. You see, God is waiting patiently for the very last soul to have his eyes opened and his heart changed, and if he's speaking to you right now, speak to me, speak to an elder, speak to anyone who

can help you get this right right now. But if you're inside the kingdom already, know this: God is shaping and molding you even now into the image of his Son, and patience is a big part of that image, and when he's working that into you, remember David's words from *Psalm 31*: *But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God". My times are in your hand. Let's pray.*

Father God, I thank you for your sovereignty over everything. I thank you for your sovereignty over time itself. And Lord, I just understand how easy it is particularly for us in the west to have a truly corrupted understanding of time and how you operate within time. And I think of all of the heartache of so many individuals that I've spoken to who feel that they've been abandoned or kicked to the curb, when in reality, they're part of your ongoing work in their lives but you're just not going at the speed that they thought you would. Lord, you don't adapt to our time frame; we adapt to yours. Give us the grace and the wisdom to understand that, and the ability to grow our patience by growing closer to your Son. Give us the ability to understand that it is him and him alone that holds every single aspect of who we are, including our time. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.