

Introduction

Remember the slogan, "It takes a lickin' but keeps on tickin'"? Do you remember what product was described this way? Timex watches! Going back to the 1950's, the Timex Corporation sought to demonstrate the durability of their watches through torture-test commercials. Timex watches were shown to survive being tested by paint mixers, jackhammers, washing machines, dishwashers, water skiers, and even an 87-foot dive off of the Cliffs in Acapulco, Mexico. At the end of each commercial the Timex slogan was repeated, "It takes a licking and keeps on ticking." In various ways of life, we all know the experience of takin' a lickin'. This morning we are going to consider what it takes for Christ's followers then to keep on tickin'.

[Read Text and Pray]

The main idea of the verses we are considering this morning would be pretty difficult to miss. Not once but twice, James exhorts his readers to "be patient." Everything in these five verses revolves around patience. And there is a lot to see. In fact, I see no less than seven points related to patience. We need to dig right in.

First, I want you to see . . .

I. The Context of Patience

James reminds us of the context with the word therefore. "Be patient THEREFORE, brothers," he says. The immediate context to which James is pointing is what he just said about the rich. We looked at James 5:1-6 a couple weeks ago. He targeted the wicked wealthy who were setting their hopes on the things of this world and living self-indulgent lives focused on riches here and now. They oppressed the poor by withholding wages and they condemned and murdered the righteous. Their love for the world revealed the darkness of their hearts which manifested in their hostility against holiness. They made life odious and repugnant for the godly.

James had already spoken about the mistreatment that was being experienced by Christ's disciples. Back in chapter 2, he had asked, "Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called?"

The context of patience reminds us why we need it so badly. Life in this world is hard. It is guaranteed to be inconvenient. It is guaranteed at times to be hurtful. It is guaranteed at times to be seriously unpleasant. It is guaranteed that people of the world will oppress others; they will despise the righteous; they will mistreat the just. Some of those in power will take advantage of those without it. People who are fattening themselves for the day of slaughter will seem to get away with lies, unfairness, self-interest, and evil. You will observe injustice and you may well experience it. There will be false accusation. Evil will be called good and good evil. Those who love darkness hate the light, and they will hate those who lives and testimonies shine the light. We need patience because of the nature of the world in which we live.

I looked down at my phone one day this week to see an alert about an article which appeared in the Journal Sentinel. Tim Michels is being called on the carpet for making charitable donations to churches and groups who believe homosexuality is sinful. You would think he was a serial killer! But this is the way this world works. When Christians are persecuted in this world, it will not be because we are such fine moral people. It will be because we are a menace to society, an obstacle to

pleasure. What will be said is this: "What they say makes people feel bad. They are haters and bigots; they are scared of normal people. They are lost in the past, holding to antiquated values which are silly and prudish." Be prepared. Be patient.

But life in this world is hard for more reasons than this. James said at the very outset of the letter that we experience trials of VARIOUS kinds. Anything that tests your faith is a trial. Sickness, inconvenience, financial hardships, death of a loved one, the curse on the world, battling with the flesh—all these are trials of various kinds. They are further reasons why we need to be patient. Patience recognizes that the various kinds of trails we face are not to be occasions of surprise. This is what is to be expected in a fallen world. And these trials are necessary if we are to grow. So what we need is patience.

Melissa, Ariail, and I returned Thursday from a trip to South Dakota. It was a trip of 873 miles from our house to Custer. And we couldn't skip any one of those miles. We had to travel them all, one mile at a time. Thankfully we were able to travel in South Dakota at the speed of 80 mph. I rather like driving 80 mph; it certainly helps the miles pass faster. But it didn't remove any of them. It takes patience to travel. Remember when you were a kid on a trip? If you were like me and my kids, you were asking that question kids start asking no sooner than when you leave your driveway. Right? "Are we there yet?" Parents urge their children to be patient: "It is a long way, and we can only go one mile at a time." Life is no different. When it comes to trials and testings, we all want to know if we are there yet. Sometimes it is several trials at a time, but it is always one DAY at a time. We don't get to skip over any of them. We need to be patient. It is the key to steadfastness.

That is the context of patience, next I want you to see . . .

II. The Duration of Patience

There is another question we all ask when traveling. Adults know we are not there yet, but we still wonder, "How much longer?" That is one reason I really like navigation systems on our vehicles. At the start of the trip, we key in the destination, and then at every point along the way that our curiosity rises, we simply have to look over at the screen which tells us when we are scheduled to arrive. That tells us how much longer we have to endure.

When it comes to the need for patience in living one day at a time, James tells us how much longer we need to endure. He says, "Be patient, brothers, until the coming of the Lord." That's how much longer we have: until the coming of the Lord. That means as long as you are alive on this earth, you need to be patient. It has to endure until Jesus comes or you die one or the other. And that sounds like a long time. But in truth it is not very long. Put 60, 70, or 80 to 90 years or so up against eternity. They are nothing. On the one hand you and I have to be patient every single day we live, but on the other hand, when Jesus comes, we won't have to be patient for the rest of eternity. It is key for us to see the need for patience as it is: it is really NOT very long. It just seems like it. It is like how slowly the time seems to pass when you are in the car, but when you arrive at your destination, the time just flies. So how you look at it makes all the difference. In your mind, know that the patience you need is for a short while for the eternity of exceeding joy in the presence of the Lord for all his people when he comes.

And that brings us to point number 3 . . .

III. The Hope of Patience.

Being patient is all about a desired outcome. It requires present endurance with the confident hope of a future result. Black Elk Peak is the highest point between the Rockies and the Alps. It is located in the Black Hills of South Dakota. One of the highlights of our trip this week is that Ariail and I

climbed Black Elk Peak. It was a difficult climb. Ninety percent of the 3.3 mile trail is uphill. It was a hot day on rough terrain, but reaching the top was worth every ounce of exertion. As we started back down the mountain, we encountered several hikers now ascending in the hottest part of the day. They were wiping sweat and moving slowly. But we were able to encourage them. We told them they were almost there and the destination was more than worth it! If they would remain steadfast, they would not regret it! They would soon arrive at the top and be able to take in the beauty.

This kind of hope was woven into the drive of Jesus to endure the agony and shame of the cross. The writer of Hebrews tells us to run the race that is set before us looking to Jesus, who FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS. You see, the patient endurance of Jesus was fueled by hope. The hope that was set before Christ was the joy of pleasing the Father by dying in the stead of guilty sinners to redeem them, to justify them, to sanctify them, and to make them his children.

This is what James is telling us about patience. The hope that sustains patient steadfastness is well worth it, because that hope is the coming of the Lord! When he comes he will right the wrongs. He will usher in eternity. The oppression of the wicked will be eliminated. All who oppose the kingdom of Christ will be overturned. The curse of sin will be over. We as his people will be brought into the glory of God. He will distribute to his people crowns of life.

It is like the experience of the farmer. He has a precious crop in view. But he knows that it will not come instantaneously. In hope, he plants and he waits. The early and late rains in Palestine were key. The early rains came at the beginning of the planting season. They were critical for the germination of the seed. The late rains came nearer to the harvest time. These rains swelled the crop and increased the fruitfulness of the harvest. The patient farmer knows that the outcome he desires depends upon the rains. He knows God has a purpose in the rain and it has to fall so that the harvest will be rich and full.

Likewise, God has a purpose for us in all the trials that lie between now and the coming of the Lord. They are preparing the disciples of Jesus for the day our Lord will return. Instead of being fattened for the slaughter, we are being prepared to be like sheaves gathered into his barns that we will glorify him as we share in his glory! It is like what Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 8:18 – “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” All of the oppression and all the hostility will be judged and eliminated by King Jesus as He comes and brings his kingdom with him. This is the hope of patient endurance.

And that brings us in James’ presentation on patience at last to . . .

IV. The Definition of Patience.

James says in verse 8 that being patient means to establish your heart. Patience in our lives arises out of a heart that is set to love and trust in the Lord. Proverbs tells us that we should keep our hearts with all vigilance because from the heart flow the springs of life. James is telling us we must set our hearts. The same word is found in Luke 9 where Jesus “SET HIS FACE to go to Jerusalem.” He was unbending in his resolve. He persisted in his procession. It was evident to all around that he was determined to proceed to the city of David knowing that is where he would be crucified. It was time for him to be taken up and he established his heart for that purpose. Even so James says that we should establish our hearts for what is ahead.

And what is ahead is the coming of the Lord. The cross lay before Jesus, the arrival of Jesus is what lays before us. For the wicked, the coming of the Lord will be a day of slaughter. For the faithful disciples of Christ, it will be the day we see him face to face. And we want to be pleasing to him. Living with patient endurance pleases him. Taking up our crosses is what he calls us to do. Setting our hearts to endure whatever we must to be found faithful to him—that gains his approval. The steadfast of heart are the ones who hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This patience, this steadfast and established heart persists in looking to the coming of the Lord. It does not shrink back when the world persecutes. It does not lose hope when life’s supplies are meager. It persists in faith even when injustice abounds. It continues in hope when afflicted by disease and even heart-wrenching circumstances. Relentlessly, godly patience keeps trusting because it keeps looking to the coming of the Lord. It is driven by the determination to be pleasing to Christ. Is this your goal today? Day by day by day, every Christian should resolve anew to live with a fixed and steadfast heart so as to be found faithful when Christ appears.

V. The Threat to Patience

In verse 9, James tells brothers and sisters in Christ not to grumble against one another. You know, God has given believers to each other to be a help for us to live patiently as we await the coming of Christ. The proper functioning of each member contributes to the growth of the body as a whole. We are to encourage each other. We are to admonish each other. We are to build each other up. Brothers and sisters are to minister our gifts for the cause of strengthening each other. But we are still prone to sin. We fail one another and offend one another from time to time. And we will have to deal with the tendencies of the flesh to be envious of each other and to be self-indulgent. Some of us manage to repeat the same sins despite efforts of other brothers and sisters. We are tempted to grow weary in doing good. Each of these challenges can easily lead to grumbling against one another.

Grumbling is a sign of a lack of gratitude. It overlooks the grace one has received and focuses on what we have not received as though we deserved more. It reflects a spirit of entitlement. It is self-righteous. It is divisive. It reveals impatience. It is NOT what Jesus wants in the body of his followers.

James reminds us that Jesus comes as Judge. Although his followers will not be condemned along with the rest of the world, we WILL be called to account. The sinful use of our tongues to complain and to assault one another will not be celebrated on that day. The wrongful use of the tongue endangers rather than promotes patient endurance. The fellowship of the family of God is crucial to the steadfastness of each of us. Do your words within the body fortify your brothers and sisters? Do they strengthen steadfastness and hope? Do you grumble, or do you inspire patience? Let us examine our tongues and let us resolve to inspire one another to be steadfast in heart.

Now we come to James’ sixth point about patience . . .

VI. The Models of Patience.

Examples always help. We want to know what principles look like when put in practice. So what does patient steadfastness look like? James points us to the prophets and to Job.

First, let’s think about the prophets. As James mentions, they had the honor and high privilege of speaking the very word of God. They spoke to the people in the name of the Lord. They were mouthpieces of God. However, being honored by God to be entrusted with his words did not result in easy living. Consider these. Elijah was threatened with death and ran for his life. Hosea suffered

the heartache of a wayward wife. Jeremiah was beaten, placed in prison, in the dungeon, and threatened with death. At one point he was thrown into a muddy cistern where he sank into the mire. Daniel was cast into the lion's den. Tradition tells us that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh. We could go on. Jesus summed up the way the Jews had treated the prophets. He lamented: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" In his sermon to the Jews, Stephen asked, "Which of the prophets did your fathers NOT persecute?"

James says, "We consider them blessed who remained steadfast." They were honored of God to speak his word, but they were dishonored by the people to whom they were sent. That is patience. It is remaining faithful to the Lord without turning back even when the world turns against you. Patience is embracing what Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." It is blessed to become an example to others when you endure mistreatment for the cause of Christ and his gospel.

But James also points us to Job. Persecution is not the only test of patience. So it is when calamity strikes our lives. It certainly struck Job. His faithfulness in serving God was put to the test as in one day he lost his oxen and donkeys and sheep and camels and servants and all his children. Then he was stricken with sores all over his body and suffered miserably. And then his wife turned against him. Friends came to his side, but they only accused him of doing wrong. Nevertheless, Job remained faithful. He was steadfast in patience. He recognized that God was fully justified in taking just as he had given. He refused to back down from his conviction that his redeemer lives and would stand upon the earth. He still looked ahead to the day he would see God. This, brothers and sisters, is a model of patience. Faithfully following the Lord does not mean you will have an easy life. The godliest of persons in the scripture faced the most difficult of challenges but remained steadfast in looking ahead to the fulfillment of the promises of God. This is the way we are called to live as well. Do not be surprised at the fiery trial as though some strange thing is happening. God has promised his people MUCH MORE than a rose garden, but not here and not now. Hold on. Keep trusting. Join Job in saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Join with him in asking, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" Let us affirm along with Job, "I know that my redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon he earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God."

We come finally to point number seven.

VII. The Assurance of Patience.

We do not learn only about Job's example when we consider Job, we also learn about God. We learn that all of the suffering Job experienced was by divine design. God had a purpose and a compassionate goal. And the goal was that Job would know Him better. This indeed was the outcome. Job declared at the conclusion of the book, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." The single, all-surpassing object of value in the universe is this: to know God. In his compassion, the Lord teaches us through all our circumstances that he is the one pursuit of true and lasting value and his purpose in our lives is that we have more of him. Jesus put it this way: "THIS is eternal life, that they KNOW YOU, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

This is the truth that sustains patience in us—God has a purpose and a plan and a design. He knows what he is doing. Actually he is being Himself—compassionate and merciful. In His mercy and compassion, he has designed that we know Him. That is eternal life. It is the one thing in which to

boast. Knowing Christ is the one thing whose value surpasses all else. It is hard and often painful to get our grip off of things of lesser value, but thankfully that is what God does. Let us be patient with our Father who knows best for us and designs our experiences to bring us exactly there.

Conclusion

Patience is the key for keeping on ticking even when we take a licking.