

Sermon for December 15, 2013 – Advent 3

James 5:7-11 (NKJV)

Theme: **Wait For The Lord . . .**

- 1) *With the patience of a farmer.*
- 2) *With the perseverance of the prophets.*

⁷ *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.* ⁸ *You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.* ⁹ *Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!* ¹⁰ *My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.* ¹¹ *Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord-- that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.*

Do you remember how hard it was waiting for Christmas as a child? I do. I knew where my parents hid my presents. Every so often, when my Mom and Dad were away working, I would sneak into their bedroom, go into their closet, and look at the presents, shaking them, trying to guess what was inside. It was hard waiting for Christmas, waiting for those wonderful gifts that I knew were coming.

I am sure that my impatience might have annoyed my parents every once in a while. I would ask for something, in the summer, and they would say: “Just wait, maybe you’ll get it for Christmas.” Wait for Christmas? But I want it now! What if they forget? I might never get the thing I want!

Sometimes I would get in arguments with my brother and sister before Christmas. My parents would tell us that if we didn’t stop fighting, we wouldn’t get our gifts.

Why am I telling you all these stories? To illustrate the Christian life. We, God’s children through faith, are all looking forward to the wonderful deliverance, peace and glory that Christ promised to give us when He comes again. No matter what our age is, we are all children waiting for Christmas. But waiting is hard. We want God’s gift of relief from all sin, pain and sorrow now. We want eternity and glory to begin today. Like impatient children we often find ourselves thinking: “I want happiness now. Why do I have to wait?”

Just like little children, waiting irritates us to the point that we find ourselves lashing out at our siblings. We hold grudges, pout when someone hurts us, try to get even, whine and complain. Sometimes it’s enough to make our heavenly Father warn us that if we don’t stop it, we might not get the gift He is planning to give us. Yes, it can be hard to wait for Christmas.

Let us then pay careful attention to our text for this morning and learn patience from Jesus’ half-brother James. Let us learn to **Wait for the Lord:** *1) With the patience of a farmer and 2) With the perseverance of the prophets.*

Part One: *With the patience of a farmer*

Our sermon text for today is a wonderful text for Advent. The word “advent” actually appears twice in the Latin version of our text. Advent means “coming.” Jesus is coming soon and the Lord wants us to be prepared.

Sad to say, we often live our lives as if He'll never come – at least not in our lifetime. So many years have passed since the LORD made his promise.

Little children waiting for Christmas can sometimes make the remark: “it seems like Christmas will never come.” Sometimes we have to remind them that it most certainly will – that every day that passes is a day that brings us closer to Christmas. God the Father has to remind us of this as well: every day that passes is a day closer to Christ's reappearing.

Sadly, it's human nature to be impatient - to want things right now. For the Christian it is especially difficult. We want to be away from this sinful earth. We want to be with our God who loves us so much, that He sent His Son to take away our sins. We don't want to suffer; but this is exactly what we can expect on this sinful earth. The Christians to whom James originally wrote our sermon text constantly faced oppression and persecution. It would have been so much easier to simply give into the world and avoid all the mockery they experienced for their faith. It would have been so much easier to simply live for themselves and pursue material things.

But James warns against this. He says: *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.*

“Patient” is an interesting word. The first definition my dictionary gives for it is this: *bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint.* Think about that definition for a moment. Let it sink in. Our Savior wants us to be patient, bear our trials calmly – without complaint.

Now, we are certainly not patient by nature. So where does our patience come from? It comes from God's promise of forgiveness. It is only when we view Jesus' patience with us: how he bore our sins upon himself to the cross in order to suffer and die for them, that we are able to patiently bear the cross God lays on our lives. Bask in Jesus' forgiveness for you, and you will be able to forgive others. See him endure all sorts of trials for you, and you will be strengthened to endure for him. Patience is hard. It is not something that comes naturally, but that must be learned through many trials and adversities. But patience is a great gift of God. Patience is the ability to look through the painful, fearful here and now, into the future – knowing that better days are coming. James uses the following example.

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

Imagine a farmer in Palestine, where, for most of the year, the ground is bone dry. Imagine sowing seeds in this type of dry soil - trusting that the rain will come, even though every sign of nature seems to be saying that it won't. After a time, the heavy autumn rains come, causing the seeds to sprout and grow, but then another dry season starts. During this time a farmer needs to have patience and trust that his crop will not be destroyed – that the spring rains will come. If he isn't patient and does something desperate, he might ruin his crop.

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Just as the farmer has no power over nature to make it rain, but must simply pray, wait and trust in the Lord's mercy; so also we have no way of knowing when Christ will return and must simply wait, pray and trust in Christ's mercy.

And how should we wait? By “establishing our hearts” in God's gracious Gospel promises. Just as a farmer sets his heart on God's promise to send rain, so we set our hearts on God's promise to come and rescue us. And we have every reason to trust that Jesus will come. He already came once to be our sacrifice for our sins. He has already purchased and won us from all sin, death and the power of the devil with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. If he has already done this for us, we can

be sure that He will come again – just as He promised. Let us then be prepared and wait patiently for him – just like a farmer waits patiently for His crops to ripen.

Part Two: With the perseverance of the prophets.

I noticed something with my children: when they get impatient, they often take it out on each other. Sadly, this is true of God's children as well.

Our brothers and sisters in the faith ought to be the people we treasure the most. But, instead, we often grumble against them. "He insulted me first." "No she did." "He looked at me wrong." "She said something nasty to me." These aren't the excuses of little children – these, sadly, are the excuses of God's children who complain about other members in a congregation. Like little children we are tempted to pout over something someone supposedly said about us. Like little children, we are tempted to excuse our unchristian attitudes towards someone by saying: "he started it". Like little children we are tempted to complain because someone got to do something we wanted to do – or didn't do something the way we wanted it done. We allow ourselves to easily get offended.

This is why the apostle James says: ⁹ *Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*

These are strong words that we all need to hear. Just as any parent hates hearing his children fight and complain with each other, so the LORD absolutely hates seeing and hearing these things from us. The Judge is at the door – he is coming at any moment. The LORD knows our hearts. He hears everything we say and sees everything we do to each other – and it breaks his heart when we grumble and complain about one another.

And consider who the Judge is that stands at the door: it's Jesus, who endured the enormity of our sins, and the punishment we deserved because of them, in order to save us. If we grumble against each other, even when we think it is justified, do you think our Savior is pleased? Do you remember the parable Jesus told Peter about the merciful King who forgave the unpayable debt a servant owed him? That forgiven servant hunted and shook down a fellow servant who owed him a small amount. When the king heard of this, he rescinded his forgiveness, because the servant didn't forgive as he was forgiven (Mat 18:23ff). James' warning reminds us of Jesus' words at the end of that parable: *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart (Matthew 18:35)."*

May the LORD forgive us for all the times we have acted in an unloving, unforgiving and simply childish way to fellow Christians. And forgive us He does! Jesus came that first Christmas to be our Savior and bear all our sins away. He forgives us. More than that, he gives us a spirit that wants to live at peace with him and all people – even those who hurt us.

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord-- that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

When you consider facing suffering and adversity in life - especially from other Christians - consider how Old Testament prophets persevered through their suffering. Their lives were not easy. Elijah's king tried to hunt him down. Jeremiah was considered a traitor by the very people he loved. The prophets were hated, reviled and persecuted – but they still persevered. They prayed for those who hated them. They worked tirelessly to get their countrymen to repent. How were they able to do this? They kept God's promises before their eyes and never stopped trusting in the coming Messiah.

And how did God bless their perseverance and trust? Our text points us to the example of Job – and how *the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.* (Job 42:10 NKJ). His suffering had an end, and when it ended – the LORD showed that He is most merciful and compassionate.

God is faithful to his promises, and this is why we can wait for the LORD with patience and perseverance. Hold on to His promise to come again in glory so that you can confess with St. Paul: “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*” (Rom 8:18 NKJ)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we wait for the Lord’s return, let us not merely act like children. Let us be God’s children who have the patience of a farmer and the perseverance of a prophet. Love one another. (cf. John 13:34) *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* (Col 3:13 NIV84). This is how you can show the world that you are God’s dearly loved children. This is how you can point out to your neighbors with excitement that our eternal Christmas is coming soon. Amen.