

PATIENCE IS THE WATCHWORD

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Luke 21: 5 – 19.

We come to the end of a year, the like of which we have not seen before.

As a church, we have had the building work. In February we were able to hold our Holiday Bible Club. Then we entered into the first lockdown, facing the possibility of mass deaths and with the times fraught with uncertainty. We had to get used to freedoms curtailed, draconian rules, and the absence of church meetings, among many other things. We rejoiced to be able to re-open as a church in July, but then found ourselves entering the second lockdown in November. The future as we enter 2021 is very uncertain. Yet there are many reasons for thanksgiving.

So for us going forward, it means that we need to be patient. In that way we will keep our souls (Luke 21:19) and find the Lord's grace and help.

1. The year that was, the year that will be.

We have endured huge inconveniences, and not a few disappointments and losses this year. A lot of it has been very unnatural for our church life. And it looks set to continue. The prospects for January are quite sobering. There is even talk we will still need to be following social distancing and wearing masks in a years time. We cannot promise ourselves that we will be singing again soon. Or having Seekers Club or Fellowship Meals. Our hopes and expectations are quite modest as we approach 2021.

2. Patience proved.

The needed virtue still remains 'patience'. Or words that are like it such as 'long-suffering', 'endurance', 'perseverance' and 'overcoming'. These are all things to do with character, what we are like inside. This inner disposition is then carried through into the everyday decisions and choices we make. It is seen by how we respond to disappointments, setbacks, losses, monotony, drabness and the day of small things. Patience is proved there in the everyday things. The alternative is frustration and anger, complaining and depression.

The importance of patience as a Christian virtue is everywhere in Scripture. It is present in Luke 21:19. This is patience in the midst of tribulation and persecution. Here we see

that by enduring we are able to enter into life. We are not to give up and renounce the faith. Neither should we fight back angrily against persecutors.

Patience is described as 'long-suffering' in Galatians 5:22-23, one of the fruit of the Spirit. The Lord's people are to be patient as the Lord works out His great purposes (Revelation 14:12). In Romans 15:4-5, we are told about the need to have patience with other people. The place of patience is further spoken of in 1 Timothy 6:11 and 2 Timothy 3:10. Hebrews 6:11-12 makes it abundantly clear that there are large issues at stake in us being patient. Then, lastly, in James 1:2-4, we learn that our careful and thoughtful response to trials will help make mature Christian character. And there are plenty of other verses and examples that we could have chosen from in the Bible.

Certainly it is true that we will have fewer bruises on our journey if we are patient, and that we will have greater reason and opportunity for thanksgiving instead. We will be more content and our faith will grow.

3. Patience – playing a long game.

Patience is so vital because the Christian pilgrimage is a matter of being in for the long haul. We have long-term objectives before us and are content to bear with losses in the meantime to secure more long-term goals. We are careful not to put in jeopardy the ultimate prize of entering heaven itself. We are like people in business who carefully build up their business, turning their back on quick short-term gains because of their long-term business plan. So we stay in post, enduring difficulties, because we believe there is a great Day, the Day of Judgment, ahead. This makes us wise in the present, as we turn down short-term gains and easy escape routes to walk the way of true pilgrimage. As Hebrews 6:11-12 has already shown us, we have great promises to sustain us and make patience seem attractive and worthwhile. The prospect of heaven puts all our losses into perspective.

As we read the Bible and take in its message, we see that hardships are part of our normal experience. We are able to see that we are meant to learn and grow through our battle against sin. If we are patient, then we will grow and our lives will bring glory to God. He is the God of hope and peace, who helps us in our weakness and gives us more patience.