

Be patient like a farmer

- James 5:7-9
- We saw last week that James may have metaphorically thrown open a window in the church and preached up the hill to the rich people, while at the same time reminding each of us that we are not to value riches and wealth more than we should. Nor should we envy the rich, or do whatever it takes to become rich. Now James turns back to his congregation and encourages them, and us, to be patient like a farmer. How long should we be patient, James? “Until the coming of the Lord.” Why should we be patient like a farmer, James? Because the “coming of the Lord is at hand.” In fact, it’s the next thing on God’s calendar. Well, when will that happen, James? “Behold, the judge is standing at the door.” What a picture of God’s readiness to complete His plan and eternal purpose! He is standing at the door. Did you know there are over 300 references to the second coming of Jesus Christ in the New Testament? One out of every 13 verses in the New Testament address the second coming of Jesus Christ. It’s an encouragement to us on so many levels, isn’t it? It’s an encouragement that one day all this mess that we live in, because of man’s total depravity, will be swept away. The old will be done away with and the new will come. When I read the daily newspaper, I groan daily as I see another example of how sinful the world (and my own heart) is. There was a sad and shocking story in the news a couple of weeks ago about a woman in Pennsylvania, 56 years old, who was trying to steal clothing from a donation bin. At 2am. She was standing on a ladder she’d brought for the occasion when the ladder collapsed, breaking her arm and wrist and trapping her in the donation box. She was pronounced dead at the scene when she was found the next morning at 8:30, hanging out of the box, with clothes she had pulled out lying beneath her, and her black Hummer nearby, engine running. The county coroner determined she died from blunt force trauma and hypothermia. What a sad picture of human greed. Then you read about the sweet 71 year old lady, Barronelle Stutzman in Washington State who is facing the real possibility of losing her business, having to pay the million dollar legal fees of the ACLU, because she would not make a floral arrangement for a same sex wedding. She was told by the Washington State Supreme Court that she can no longer operate her business according to her beliefs without facing further legal sanction. I read her story and say, Lord, come quickly. James says, “Be patient, He is!” That gives me hope.
- The Lord’s return is also an encouragement because the One who loves us is coming to meet us. And to take us to be with Him. There are three Greek words that are used in the New Testament to refer to Jesus’ second coming, and parousia, the one used here in James 5, refers to the physical presence of the Lord, who comes to be “alongside us.” Cindy and I have the habit of texting the other when one of us is away from the house but is getting ready to come home. She will send me a message that says, “On my way!” And I know that in about 20 minutes, depending on where she is coming from (but everything is 20 minutes from our house), I will hear the gravel crunching under her tires, I will hear our dog barking, and I will see her car swing around the corner and into view. She’s home! And though we have repeated this scene hundreds of times in our marriage, it means a lot to both of us to be looking for the other to arrive, and to greet each other with a hug or a holy kiss. In the same way, we are to be looking for the Lord to arrive, for that Day is coming and there will be none like it! The people to whom James was writing needed that encouragement, as we do, that the One who loved them was at the door, and He had not forgotten them, and He would be with them. Soon.
- So, how are we to live in the meantime? In between the first advent and the second? That’s what James is addressing here, and he offers us three words of encouragement and exhortation in these three verses. Be patient, establish your hearts, and stop your grumbling.
- **Be patient like a farmer.**

- A farmer in many ways is completely dependent on the weather, isn't he? He can do all the right things to prepare the ground and sow the seed, but without the proper amount of rain and sun, his crops don't stand a chance. He depends on the weather, particularly the rain. And who is completely in control of the rain? God. If it rains too much, the crop will rot in the ground. If it doesn't rain enough, the crop will die on the vine. And this text teaches us a powerful principle about being patient like a farmer: we have to trust God completely with what we cannot control. Better, we GET to trust God like that. We get to trust God completely with what we cannot control. He gives more grace to do just that. How much time and energy do we spend every day fretting about things over which we have no control? And to what end? Jesus said, "Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" Or we could add, would worry or impatience a single drop of rain to your fields? Or a single dollar to your income?
- I love Keith Green's song, "He'll Take Care of the Rest," especially his verse about Noah: You just think about Noah, Shoulderin' his umbrella, When there wasn't a cloud in the sky, All his neighbors would laugh at his pet giraffe, And they would oh-ho, snicker as he passed by. But the Lord said "Hey Noah, Be cool - you just keep building that boat, It's just a matter of time, 'Til they see who's gonna float, You just keep doing your best, And pray that it's blessed And hey Noah, Ill take care of the rest, I'm THE weather man."
- You know, what we learn from Noah was not only did he trust God completely with the things that were outside of his control, but he also trusted God completely with the things that were under his control! What was in Noah's control? The ark. He was called to build the ark. His obedience was just as necessary as the rain. He couldn't control the rain: that was on God. He could control his obedience. That leads to the second encouragement James gives us here:
- **Establish your hearts.**
- James says it again in verse 8, "You also be patient." Then he says, "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." The word in Greek that James uses several times for patience in this passage is makrothumeo, and it refers to being patient with people. It means to suffer long with people, and not give in to the temptation toward anger or punishment. The people James is addressing weren't struggling with first-world problems, when their printer has run out of ink while in the middle of a big and important job. That's not to minimize the suffering that we do have, but it does help put it into perspective. What are we to do? Establish our hearts. That means we fix our hearts on what is certain. One writer said it means that we put iron in our hearts. It's what you do for a basketball goal or a swing-set if you don't want a strong wind to blow it over: you drop concrete into the hole around the base or around the pole. You establish your heart when you read and believe the Word; you're dropping concrete into the base, giving you a place to stand.
- You know I deal with a lot of fear in the classroom every week, because most people are terrified of public speaking. And I tell them that we are afraid of it because of two reasons: it matters to us that we do well, or at least that we don't look stupid or awkward. And, because we are uncertain of the outcome. Take either one of those away, and the fear is gone. Well, I hope you don't take away the first one, so that you really don't care how you do. That's apathy, which brings a whole new set of problems with it. So, how do we take away the second reason, the uncertainty about the outcome? Well, we can't take all of it away, and that's where faith comes in for the believer. We walk by faith, not by sight. But we CAN take away part of the uncertainty! In public speaking there is an inverse-proportional relationship between nervousness and preparation. As preparation and practice goes up, nervousness comes down. The better we know what we are going to say, the less uncertain is the outcome. For believers, we have the same promise from God with regard to our hearts: the better we know and put weight on the truth of God's Word, the less fearful we become. About silly stuff like whether the printer is going to work. And about big stuff as well.

- Establish your hearts with this truth: the coming of the Lord is at hand. Paul tells the Thessalonians that the day is coming when Christ comes “to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.” Because of that Day that we long for, how are we to live in this day, when the world is still broken and our struggles with sin and sinful people continues?
- **Do not grumble**
- Again James comes back to our speech. In Ephesians 6, Paul told masters, or those who employ others, “stop your threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him.” Here James tells all of us to stop our grumbling against one another. Why is this what James focuses on here? Because when we grumble against one another, we are not putting iron into our hearts, we are taking it out. We are chipping away at the concrete foundation of our soul. We are complaining, either under our breath or out loud to others, about another brother or sister in Christ, taking something into our control that is absolutely outside of it, and we do so at our own peril and the peril of the body. Sometimes we grumble against people that we think have hurt us in some way. If they have, and it rises to the level of sin, then we must follow Matthew 18 and go to them privately and give them an opportunity to repent. But often we grumble against others just because we have this idea that if we pull them down just a little, it makes us rise a little. If I can make him look worse in someone else’s eyes, then doesn’t that make me look a little better?
- Some of you have read Jonathan Edwards’ resolutions. One says, “I am resolved to never do anything I wouldn’t be doing if I knew it was the last hour of my life on this earth.” We would be well served to resolve the same thing, and include how we speak about others in that resolution. Why? Because James says it, “the Judge is standing at the door.” I have told you before about trying to train one of my sons when he was 2 or 3 years old to stay in bed when I told him to. I had read him a book and prayed for him, and he had had plenty of water, but he just wouldn’t stay in bed. Cindy and I would hear him banging around in his room 2 minutes after I had tucked him in. So one night I tucked him in, told him to stay in the bed, and then I waited just outside the door. It took about 20 minutes and at least ten spankings, before he realized that he had to obey me. And that it would be good for him to obey me. When it finally dawned on him that Dad was standing at the door, his behavior changed. Can I say to you parents who are struggling with the same disobedience with your five year old that you saw in that child at two: you have to win the battle. You have to stand at the door until you do win the battle. Why, because you hate your child? NO! Because you love your child. Because when you win, that child also wins. His or her heart learns to trust the authority of their parents as a good thing. They know you are standing at the door, not to catch them in doing wrong, but to help them in doing right. And they learn that their heavenly Father is there too, all the time. They learn to lean back into His arms, knowing not only that He loves them, and enjoys their fellowship.
- Be patient like a farmer. Establish your hearts. Stop your grumbling. And take courage! The Lord is standing at the door.