

Proposition: *Christians must patiently await the Lord’s coming to bring final justice, even when it is tempting to give up on God because the wait seems too difficult in the midst of suffering, too costly in a world where being faithful so often prevents success, and just too long to endure.*

**Introduction** – Story about listening to a sermon on patience when I was a kid. Do you empathize? Does the Christian life seem a drag to you? Do the promises of the Bible, once so precious to you, now feel stale? Does having to do the right thing all the time wear you down? Wasn’t the cross supposed to take care of all my problems, all the Church’s problems? Are you tired of waiting for justice, for blessing, for reward? Why is being patient so difficult?

## **A. Patience is to Graciously Endure Suffering because the Judge is Coming (vv 9-11)**

This is precisely what the poor, oppressed believers whom James addressed needed to hear. In the previous passage (Jas 4:13-5:6), James confronted the rich and presumptuous people in the church who regularly abused their brothers and sisters. Here, James promises the victims that deliverance is near.

### **1. God is our Savior, but He is also our Judge**

God is returning as Savior and Judge, and he will avenge his people when he returns (2 Thess 1:5-7a). But James warns us not to grumble in the meantime, for the grumbler’s impending judgment is near—right at the door! Grumbling against one another is speaking against the law and judging it (Jas 4:11). We are to refrain from grumbling *to others* by complaining about our difficulties and grumbling *about others* by blaming them for our difficulties. You must examine your own behavior so you will be ready to meet the Judge. The coming Lord is Judge of the believer and unbeliever alike. Suffering is always a tough test for even the most patient person. Suffering at the hand of an oppressor is even tougher. But take heart! God is a just Judge who will save those who patiently await his judgment.

### **2. The prophets and Job: Is complaining allowed while we endure suffering?**

Why does James point to the prophets and Job as people who, instead of grumbling, patiently suffered and endured? The prophets are obvious examples. Many of the prophets endured hardship, suffering, and humiliation—most obviously Jeremiah (Jer 11:21; 20:1-2; 38:6), but also Ezekiel who was not allowed by God to mourn his wife’s death while ministering to the exiles (Ezek 24:15-27), Daniel who ministered in the shame of exile (Dan 1:3-6), and Hosea who God commanded to marry an adulterous wife to model God’s relation to his “wife” Israel (Hos 1:2-3). Two OT prophets were martyred: Zechariah son of Jehoida (2 Chr 24:20-21) and Uriah son of Shemaiah (Jer 26:20-23).

But Job’s endurance of suffering was of a peculiar kind. Although he complained (grumbled?) about his undeserved suffering to his friends and demanded an explanation from God, he nevertheless did not sin (Job 1:22; 2:10). Job’s righteousness was finally vindicated when God restored his health, wealth, and family, and rebuked Job’s friends. It is true that Job’s patience waned at times as he spoke (Job 3:1; 16:3), but he persevered in faith that God would be just in the end (Job 16:19-21; 19:25-27), therefore God vindicated and restored his servant. The example of Job teaches us that suffering and perseverance are rooted in God’s purposes with the goal that we will know Him as a compassionate and merciful God. It may be difficult to patiently trust God through your suffering, whether it is failing health, financial struggles, or evil oppression. But the prophets and Job demonstrate that God will save and deliver those who patiently endure to the end.

## **B. Patience is to Always Tell the Truth and Trust God with the Consequences (v 12)**

### **1. To swear or not to swear, that is the question**

Verse 12 is a clear paraphrase of Christ's teaching regarding oaths (Mt 5:33-37; cf. Lev 19:12). Many understand Jesus and James forbidding all oaths as a new covenant command that supersedes old covenant instruction. But a careful reading of the whole Bible clearly demonstrates that proper oaths continue to be lawful for new covenant believers. Paul put himself under oath (Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; 11:11; Gal 1:20; Phil 1:8; 1 Thess 2:5, 10). Jesus accepted being put under oath (Mt 26:63-64). God himself swears oaths (Lk 1:73; Acts 2:30; Heb 7:21, 28). See also the Confession's teaching (WCF 22).

## **2. Tell the truth (in love), even when it hurts**

Jesus' teaching on oaths was unique, but it should have been obvious considering how duplicitous and deceitful oath taking became. Jewish people in the first century were mindful of the danger of taking the Lord's name in vain (third commandment), and that guilt accrued if they did not keep their oaths to the Lord. But instead of striving for faithfulness in their words, they devised ways to create non-binding oaths that had the sound of solemnity. For instance, they would not swear by God's name, but they would swear by "heaven", "earth", "Jerusalem", or anything else that sounded serious, thinking that such oaths (those not literally sworn in God's name) were not binding. We must simply and soberly tell the truth, shoulder our responsibilities, and keep our commitments. Patience is difficult because telling the truth in love in this fallen world seems to so often lead to failure, relational breakdown, uncomfortable circumstances, and negative consequences. But God is a truth-telling God, and he desires lovers of the truth who will trust him with the results.

## **C. Patience is to Expectantly Wait for Christ's Second Coming (vv 7-8)**

### **1. Is the Lord's coming really "near"?**

How near was the Lord's coming for Christians in the first century? James (and all orthodox believers) understood that Christ's second coming (the *parousia*) was imminent and could be very near. The apostles did not teach that the Lord's coming *must* be near, only that it *could* be, and that believers should always be ready. The situation is exactly the same today.

### **2. Fighting back is not worth it**

Until he returns, we must wait and be patient, even though waiting for relief from suffering can seem intolerable at times. We must not take matters into our hands by fighting back our oppressors. Patience for those oppressed is necessary in light of the trials described in James 4:13-5:6 (cf. Ps 37:7-11; Lk 18:1-8). We as God's people must patiently await our vindication when Christ the Judge will return to eradicate all injustice. James forbids rebellion and fighting back, and instructs his oppressed brothers to patiently endure suffering, waiting on the one who rightfully judges (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19-21; cf. Heb 10:30).

### **3. Wait like a farmer**

The early and later rains (autumn and spring) are typical weather patterns in the land of Israel and are reflected in the OT (Dt 11:14; Jer 5:24). James teaches that the way to holiness is a process of growth, and patience is what allows for holiness to grow. Just as the early and later rains arrive at the appointed proper time, the coming of the Lord will arrive just in time. Nothing the farmer does will hasten the rains. He must wait and be ready. So also the Christian cannot hasten the Lord's coming. He must wait and be ready by taking care to guard his words, endure suffering, and look hopefully for Christ's coming. Yes, waiting for relief, for salvation, for vindication is difficult. No doubt the wait for the Church has been very long. But Jesus will come. The Day of the Lord is imminent. It is "near" in that sense. So we must wait with expectant hope.

**Conclusion** – In closing, how shall we encourage ourselves to patiently await the Lord's coming salvation and judgment? Consider the highly appropriate exhortation in Hebrews 11:32-12:3.