

Introduction:

- A. Someone reminded me this week of a remarkable book I read several years ago entitled, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun*. Brother Yun's story of perseverance and God's power during very dark days of persecution is one of the most moving things I've ever read. Here's one account that happened in about 1995:

Nine prisoners from the men's and women's prisons in Nanyang were to face public humiliation and trial that day. I was one of them. We were driven around the town, while our crimes were read out on a loudspeaker. I was so full of joy at the chance of being paraded in front of people for the sake of Jesus Christ! My heart was bursting with gladness.

On the way to the trial I couldn't contain myself. I'd just seen Brother Huang promoted to glory [he'd been shot by guards] and eternity was so real to me. I sang out to God in a loud voice. The captain threatened me with his electric baton. "Shut up Yun! How dare you sing! If you continue to sing I'll skin you alive." ...

I kept singing loudly... [and this is part of his song]: *I will give my life and spill my blood to please my Heavenly Father, That wearing the crown of life I will enter the kingdom of God.*
[The Heavenly Man, pp.152-153]

- B. The book of James has been tough on us. This man, who was the brother of Jesus, has hammered away on our need to live out the power of God's Word in our lives, especially when we're under pressure. He's taken us to task for the ways our anger, our tongues, our conflicts belie our new life in Christ. But he's also shown us what treasures pressure-packed godliness bring us. Last week, in **Jas 5:1-6** he warned the rich and powerful people that they would have to give account to God. Now today in the next verses he encourages believers who feel the pressure of this wicked world to be patient. His point: **Christians under pressure must patiently trust and obey the Lord till he comes again.** Listen to **Jas 5:7-8...**

I. **BE PATIENT. THIS HARD TIME IS OUR GROWING SEASON. (5:7-9)**

- A. Hard times seem like a wilderness but they are actually the fertile field where believers grow godliness. Out where I'm from there is a kind of quiet excitement come August and the grain fields start to turn golden. That's what is happening in us even when the wickedness in our world seems to be crushing us. When we put our faith in Christ a seed of godliness is planted and trials help it grow as surely as the rains. Just what is growing in you? Your reliance on God, your character, your grace-giving, your longing for your true home. It may seem like you're being crushed by hardship but the Bible promises that "*he who began a good work in you will see it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*" [Phil 1:6]. So, as James said at the beginning, "*count it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" [1:2-4].
- B. So, like God our farmer, **v.8** says, "*You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*" Maybe when you think of the word *patience* you think of waiting out something tedious without complaining; like standing in a long line. But James has made it clear that patience for the Christian is a lot more active than that. Christian patience means waiting well. It means we don't get angry and we guard our words. It means we quash the envy and ambition lurking in our hearts and instead meet life with humility and wisdom. Christian patience is both a wonder and hard work. He says, "*Be patient and stand firm.*" Literally, *establish your hearts.* Hebrews says, "*Fix your eyes on Jesus.*" Ephesians tells us to "*put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.*" Are you doing that? Are you digging in, securing your footing in the faith. Are you ready for the storm and the battle?

- C. The reason we wait well and stand firm has already been stated twice: “because the Lord’s coming is near.” Jesus is coming back for us and that changes everything. The night before his death Jesus told us, “*Let not your hearts be troubled. I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come back and take you to be with me.*” The wicked will not prevail. The world will not end with a whimper. Our trials will not be in vain.
- D. You might want to say to James, “*Let’s just have the benediction and go home on that high note.*” But James jars us with his next words in **v.9**... We can actually grow under the fierce oppression of the world but grumbling against one another is a devastating blight on our growing godliness. Our griping about one another, our whispers and jabs, do more damage to God’s crop than persecution because grumbling against one another destroys love and we are worthless without our love for one another. The world cannot hurt us but we can do devastating damage to ourselves by our grumbling and backbiting. **Jas 2:8** says that “*God’s royal law found in Scripture [is], ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” Not only does our grumbling against one another break that law but our Judge is listening to us do it! **V.9**: “*You will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door.*” Our rooms are wired; our conversations are bugged. God hears our private muttering. And he is ready to walk in the door. Jesus is coming soon!

SUMMARY: Waiting well for Jesus to come back does not only require us to stand firm under pressure but also to love one another no matter what. So **be patient. This hard time is our growing season.**

Christ’s return will not just bring relief and harvest. He will also *reward* those who have been faithful to him. **Jas. 1:12** says... Now in **vv.10-12** he reiterates that.

II. BE PATIENT. OUR PERSEVERANCE WILL BE REWARDED (5:10-12)

- A. **Vv.10-11a**... Every Old Testament prophet had two things in common: they delivered God’s Word and they got hurt.

Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Habakkuk—all of them. I was reading yesterday about a prophet in 2 Chron. 24 whom I didn't even remember. He told God's people to change their ways "*But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord's temple.*" There's a story Joel Osteen won't tell you! And that obscure prophet was *blessed!* He was blessed because he honored God's Word and, in the end, he is the one whom God will reward.

We are not prophets but every believer is a bearer of God's Word—hearers and doers of the Word—and thus the prophet's fate is ours: trouble and blessing. The privilege of living out God's Word under pressure leads to **life's greatest blessings.** Here in our sufferings we **fellowship with Christ.** We **lose our death grip** on this dying world. We find a **home** in God's family. We give up **death for life**, the **Spirit of God** dwells within and among us, and will **overcome the world** and **reign** forever with Christ. **Troubles and trials don't impoverish Christians. They drive us into our treasures.** Those who wait well for Jesus, who persevere under trial, will be blessed as surely as the prophets of God.

- B. Speaking of suffering, says James, take Job. V.11b, "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." Most of us have heard someone refer to "the patience of Job." That's from the KJV of this passage. Now wait a minute?! Have you *read* Job. **He doesn't actually come off as a real patient guy!** He is frustrated and angry. He wants to take God to court, for goodness sake!

Job bore an onslaught of terrible trials and devastating relationships without knowing why. He was a man in the dark pounding on the bolted door of heaven and hearing not a whisper from the other side for the longest time. **But what Job did not do was forsake God.** His wife told him, "*Curse God and die,*" but he would not. He persevered, meaning only that he did not give up on God even when God did *not* immediately come to his defense.

Persevere like Job because, James says, “You have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” Job was humbled by God—not only by his crushing troubles but by God’s presence. That humbling was God’s great gift to him. Then God told him to pray for his foolish and needy friends. And the Bible says, “*The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the former part.*” The Lord’s compassion and mercy.

- C. In the paragraph before this James told us to wait well and then surprised us with the warning about not grumbling against one another. Now that kind of thing happens again. He tells us again to wait well—to persevere—and then warns us about another kind of dangerous words: v.12... When he talks about swearing, he means when people use God’s name to improve their credibility or to lend force to their words. “*I swear to God...*” “*By God...*” “*O my God...*” You don’t have to use God’s name to coerce his compassion or to prove that you’re on his side or to show that you’re serious. Never use God’s name in vain. **Do not hijack God’s great name. Do not steal God’s reputation to build your own.** He will not underwrite our anger nor cosign for our rash words.

SUMMARY: Be patient. Our perseverance will be rewarded.

Illus.: The book, *Mayflower*, by Nathaniel Philbrick is the story of the Pilgrims coming to America in 1620. Their governor and spiritual leader here was **William Bradford**. We know him best for leading the first Thanksgiving. But this passage about his last days caught my attention:

In the winter of 1657, Bradford began to feel unwell. His health continued to decline until early May when a sudden and marvelous change came upon him. ... “The God of heaven so filled his mind with ineffable consolations,” Cotton Mather wrote, “that he seemed little short of Paul wrapped up unto the unutterable entertainments of paradise.” ... That morning he told those gathered around his sick bed that “The good Spirit of God had given him a pledge of happiness in another world and the first fruits of his eternal glory.” He died the next day. [Chap. 11, page unknown]

Conclusion

So when you're under pressure—when the world around you is going to hell in a hand basket and you feel your temperature rising, or when death in one of its various guises seems hard upon you—**wait well and persevere** because:

- **Jesus is coming soon** and he will set all things right. We will never regret waiting for him. But don't grumble against others.
- Those who wait well despite suffering, like the prophets and Job, are blessed. **Persevering leads to God's blessing.** We're blessed *now* and we'll be blessed *forever*.
- And when trials press hard upon us there is this sure truth about God: ***"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."***