

Grace Anglican Network, sermon for Sunday 19th June 2020

James 5:7-12, “Waiting and Trusting in the Lord”

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Well I must say, it’s exciting to know that a number of you will be watching this inside St Bart’s and from St Matt’s together across the day on Sunday. Praise God that we’re back! Even if it is still in a somewhat restricted form.

We had a family dog growing up. A poodle-retriever cross. A bit of an odd-looking animal, to be honest, but he had just a beautiful nature. His name was Sooty. And I still remember the day I got him, and I walked home from Primary School with this gorgeous little puppy in my arms. And as is often the case, when people get a new puppy, there was a bit of a season where I was determined to train my new dog. And we got a few tricks under the belt, but it didn’t take long before my dedication to the task started to wane a little, and then completely - and at that point, little Sooty was as trained as he was ever going to get, which really wasn’t much at all (though he was a pretty well-behaved dog considering).

But one thing I learned at that time was that it’s not actually all that hard to train a dog to do simple tasks - like sitting, for instance. As I recall, it was only about half-an-hour (or so) of instruction, re-enforced over the next couple of the days, before Sooty had pretty much learned to sit on command. It was surprisingly easy and quick to teach him to sit. What was considerably harder, I discovered, was to teach Sooty to *stay*. I could get him to sit - no problem. But staying (seated on all fours) for more than about 2 seconds, that was another question!

You don’t see it a lot these days, but I remember when it wasn’t all that unusual to see a dog sitting outside a shop, or the Post Office perhaps - by itself, not tied to anything, just sitting there, waiting for its owner. Beautifully trained. A picture of poise, control, and patience. I was always impressed by a dog that had learned how to stay (sadly, that wasn’t Sooty).

But what are we really doing when we're training a dog to stay? Well, we're teaching them to wait, of course - but actually, we're teaching them to *trust*, aren't we? To trust the owner's command, that it's good. And to trust that the owner is coming back. A dog that has learned how to stay, is a dog that has learned how to trust.

Now, I need to apologise at this point, for comparing followers of Jesus to a dog, which is essentially where I'm going with this intro, but I think you'll get the point. James begins (v. 7), "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord." It's a pretty good summary of the whole section, actually. And "be patient" is clearly the primary command here. But I'm going to suggest that the heart of this passage is actually about *trust*. Because *patience*, in the Christian life, is all about trusting in God.

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But a bit of context to begin with. James is addressing (at this point) fellow Christians ("beloved" he calls them) who are struggling. They've been suffering in some way (we don't know exactly how) - and there's no indication that the situation is going to ease up any time soon. It's possible that the people James has in mind here are those who are being neglected and oppressed by the corrupt rich people that he just rebuked in the previous passage (vv. 1-6). It's not clear. I think we can at least say that they are suffering some kind of prolonged injustice.

In any case, James is building here on his earlier teaching about suffering in the Christian life more generally, which is based on the assumption that all of us will suffer. We will *all* meet trials of various kinds (1:2). And now, he says: "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord." And then he gives three examples of what godly patience can look like. And I think (among other things), we see in these three examples, a progression or *intensification* of the call to be patient.

So, the farmer works and waits patiently for the earth to yield its crop (v. 7). (v. 10) The OT prophet, patiently and persistently speaks the word of the Lord to Israel in the face of much hostility and rejection. And then finally (v. 12), perhaps the most extreme and confronting example of godly patience through suffering in the bible (besides Jesus) – is the example of Job. Job, who in a long and severe testing of his faith, lost everything of value in this world, and yet did not stop trusting God.

And what we find is that simply having to wait for something is one thing. But when you add into the mix – suffering, pain, uncertainty, opposition, loss – then patience soon becomes a matter of endurance. Perhaps you know what I’m talking about? Just notice how the language changes from being “patient” in verses 7 and 8 – to “endurance” in verse 11: “Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job ...”

You see, is not just about waiting, James says, it’s about persevering. And perseverance, for the Christian, is primarily about what’s going on with our faith. And James knows that the various trials we’ll face in this life, will not only test our patience, they will test our faith. And some people’s faith will fail. Other people’s faith may fracture. And some people’s faith will flourish, *through suffering*. Like Job, in the end.

Let’s be honest, no one (in their right mind) reads the book of Job and says, “Sign me up for that!” But it’s an important example for us, isn’t it? To know that there is a way of waiting patiently and faithfully on the Lord, and persevering through even the worst of trials, and the darkest of valleys. And that God is worthy of our trust, and worth the wait! I mean, do you think Job is regretting his decision to keep trusting God now? No! Of course not! He’s with the Lord. He’s in the presence of Jesus. And believe it or not, he can see now (with a clarity that you and I do not yet possess) that all of his pain and suffering, were but fleeting and

passing troubles, when compared with the glory he now shares in Christ. Do you believe that? It'd be offensive, right, if it wasn't true.

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17: ¹⁷“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

No matter what we're facing in life, being patient *as a Christian* - is not simply an exercise in survival or stoicism. We're not called to just grin-and-bear-it. We're called to put our trust, and find our hope in the Living God, and in things unseen - in that which will far out-live and far out-weigh, whatever suffering that God, in his infinite wisdom and love (yes, love!), has allowed into our lives, as he prepares his beloved children for the glory that lies ahead. Ah, it's a hard truth, I know. But oh, so precious.

And don't let the example of Job psych you out. This kind of faith is not reserved for some kind of “super-Christian.” This is the stuff of the normal Christian life as all of us are called to faithfully endure trials of various kinds. So, if you're suffering right now, in some way (as I know many will be) - then James' counsel to you (in v. 8) is, “Be patient” - yes! But also, “Strengthen your heart, for the coming of the Lord is near.”

OR, the other thing we could do is grumble. As we sit in the difficulty of some trial, waiting “patiently,” we could take our pain and frustrations and anger, and start directing it at each other. That's what James warns against in verse 9.

Grumbling and judging one another. And it's not all that hard to find ourselves there, is it. By God's mercy and grace, the trials and hardships we face in this life, for the Christian, can become occasions for our faith to be refined, and deepened, even to flourish. But they can also become occasions for our

sinfulness to rear its ugly head, yeah? Sin is never far away. Crouching at the door (is the way Peter puts it) wanting to devour us. But, you know, so is the Judge.

Did you see that – in verse 9? I think it's one of the most powerful images that James gives us in his letter. "See [he writes], the Judge [that's capital 'J' – the Lord Almighty] is standing at the door!"

On the one hand, this should make us tremble. To know that when we grumble (out of spite), and attack others, and show favouritism, and disregard the poor and all the other things James has been urging Christians not to do in this letter – the Lord Almighty, the final Judge of all, is standing at the door – hearing, seeing everything. That should make us tremble, yeah? And I think that's the main idea here in v. 9.

But it's also part of the deep comfort in this passage, isn't it? To know that our Lord and Saviour is right here with us. Yes, he knows our sin, and we are desperately reliant upon his forgiveness at every point, but he also knows our pain. And the struggles that we and others face. And every single injustice. He sees. And the Great Judge and Saviour of the world is standing at the door. Getting ready to make all things right.

And as those who have received (in advance) the forgiveness of God through the cross of Jesus Christ, and new life in his resurrection, we say, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come back!" And yet we know, too, that the Lord's patience means salvation. It did for us, and should the Lord choose to delay his return any longer, it is only because he wants more people to meet with his grace. And that's worth waiting for, isn't it? And working for? And we don't need to grumble while we wait, do we! (Says he, who preaches to himself!)

But seriously, my brother or sister in Christ, is your trust firmly in him? Right now? Or have the trials of this life taken their toll upon your faith?

Listen, if you know Jesus, then you have at least one thing in common with Job – (v. 11) “You have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” And friends, that is enough.

With Jesus, there is a sure and final hope woven through every trial. This life is not easy, to be sure – but we can now endure any suffering that comes our way, from the position of eternal security. And no hardship can ever befall us that God cannot and is not using for our ultimate good and his glory. We’re not called (always) to understand it; we’re called to trust it. We’re not called to be perfect; we’re called to be patient. And we’re not called to begrudge and grumble; we’re called to love – to love God and each other – in Jesus’ name, as we wait patiently until the coming of the Lord.

And on that Glorious Day, may you and I (and many others, including many who are still to receive the forgiveness and grace of God in Christ) be found among those called blessed, because we endured in faith to the end.

Amen.