

Whinging and whining vs Patience and Perseverance James 5:7-11

In 1999 this book was published by James Gleick, an American journalist.

It's called *Faster: the acceleration of just about everything*,
and what Gleick does
is he documents the incredible advancements in technology
that characterized the 20th century,
and also the effect these changes had on human life.

One of the effects is that we've become less willing to wait for certain things.

For instance, he talks about the types of clothing we might buy
*We no longer buy deep-blue denim jeans with their dye stiff as tin, he writes,
resigned to wearing them for a year before achieving a faded look.
One buys them pre-washed, pre-faded, and maybe pre-patched at the knees.
Who can wait for nature to take its course?
The traditional leather jacket, like a second skin after ten years of wearing,
was not actually comfortable in its first year. You had to make an investment.
Nowadays, catalogues promise an already distressed, heavy, full-grain cowhide,
with pre-loaded legends and sagas in each ruck and crease.
So clothing needs to be the way we want it straight off the rack.*

Of course by 1999, email was already well established,

and Gleick speaks about how email has transformed and sped up
old business such as egg farming.

He quotes an egg farmer from Nebraska as saying
*I started in the egg business twenty years ago when you actually got on a plane
and flew to a city and rented a car and drove to see a customer.
Now I have many customers who I rarely see, but talk to, like dreams flowing
from my brain, via my email system—which is, he brags—cable internet
500kbps blazing speed.*

Now imagine if Gleick were to write second edition, almost twenty years later.

He'd have so much more to say, wouldn't he?

Imagine how much more of our impatience he'd be able to observe:

We now carry our email around with us and some workplaces
have the expectation that you will always be contactable,
There are protocols as to how long you can take before replying.
Now more than ever we are testing each other's patience
as we become accustomed to shorter timeframes.

Which also means that it's becoming even more of a challenge
to practice the Christian virtue of *patience*.

It's our second last week of our series in the NT book of James,

and in today's passage James encourages us *to be patient*.
 Elsewhere in the NT patience is described as a fruit of the Holy Spirit—
 it's something that is produced as we allow the Holy Spirit to be at work—
 But the Holy Spirit always wants to work *with* us, and not *despite* us,
 and so the call is for us to work on becoming patient people.

And in James ch 5, the Holy Spirit has left us with a few things to think about
 as he encourages us in this work.

So what is it that we are waiting *for*? To what end is our patience being directed?
 James ch5, verse 7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.
 James would have wait patiently for the return of Jesus.

If you've been at church for a while
 then you would've heard us say certain things about Jesus.
 That he is God and man in the one person
 That he died on a cross as an atonement for our sin
 That three days later he was raised from the dead
 But another thing you'll hear us say is that one day he will return.
 Maybe this last one we don't say as often as the others (which is a problem)
 But the Bible is pretty clear:
 There is coming a day when the world will be going about its daily business,
 and all of a sudden Jesus will return,
 and no-one is going to miss it!

What's the programme going to be like on that day?
 What's the order of business going to be when Christ returns?

Well, the Bible tells us that a number of things are going to happen,
 One of which is that Jesus will bring judgment upon all the world's evil-doers.

This is the aspect that I think James has first and foremost in his mind,
 because of the passage that immediately precedes verse 7.
 If you were with us last week, you'll remember that Mark explained
 how James is referring the sins of the rich,
 the sins of those who've been withholding wages from their workers,
 and it's the mistreated workers who seem to be the recipients of this letter.
 And James is saying "Just hold on until Jesus returns
 because He's not going to let these thieves get away with it,
 Jesus will bring his justice with him, so wait for him to make things right!"

Many of you would have been following the news
 of the Royal commission into the banks.
 Here are some of our modern day corporate thieves,
 the kind of people James is speaking about,
 and we've seen the destruction they've brought upon ordinary people.

And so it's good to see some justice, isn't it?
Well, take that sense of justice, ramp it up to cosmic dimensions
and you get a picture of what Christ's return will be like.

And it's not only the thieves in business that will get what they deserve,
It's the church leaders whose sins were exposed in the last royal commission,
It's the all the other abusers who serve themselves and ruin people's lives.
Christ's return will be a wonderful day of justice,
but we'll have to be patient.

To illustrate the patience that's required, James uses a farming metaphor.

Verse 8 See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop,
patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.
If there's one thing that's not instantaneous, then it's working with plants.

I don't know if you've driven past that nursery on Eastern Rd
in Turrumurra recently, but they've got big signs up.
We love autumn, because its planting season.
To enjoy the colour of spring you need to be willing to get working in April
and to let time take its course.
And so it is if we wish to enjoy the benefits of Christ's return;
get prepared now, and then be willing to wait.

Why the delay? Why hasn't Christ come already?

Well, the Bible gives a straightforward answer;
it's because God himself is being patient *with us*.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness,
we are told, instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to
come to repentance.

You see judgment day isn't only for those who fill our news bulletins,
It's also for the small-time sinners as well; people like me, people like you.
But God is patient with us, and he holds off on that judgment
so we can turn from our sin and receive the forgiveness that Jesus provides.
When God asks us to be patient

he isn't asking us to demonstrate anything
that he hasn't demonstrated himself.

And so, You too James says in verse 8,
you too be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

But it's hard to be patient, isn't it?

There are so many challenges that test our patience!
One of them is other people!

What is it about other people that tests our patience?

Well, how long have we got? There's all sorts of things aren't there?

From personal habits that irritate us
to more substantial shortcomings that might make life really hard for others.

Its doesn't take much for us to start sounding a little like Linus in this cartoon
 "I Love mankind" he says, "Its people I can't stand!"

But James doesn't want us to lose patience with one another

Verse 9 Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.
 The Judge is standing at the door!

Is he saying that you can't say anything negative ever? No, of course not.
 The reference to being *judged* reminds us of what James has said in ch 4:11,
 where he warns us of *passing judgment* upon each other,
 where we hold people to a standard that's beyond that of the Bible,
 where we make assumptions about others without having the full picture.
 This is the kind of grumbling he's warning us against,
 when our impatience leads to unfair conclusions about our neighbours.

This is very easy to do within a church community,
 we sometimes enter into churches with certain expectations of others
 and when those expectations are not met we can start to grumble, cant we?

What's the problem with grumbling about others?

Well, James says that if we start to judge others, then we too will be judged.
 The problem with impatience is that we'll loose our grip on the prize!!!

Now this warning needs some further explanation.

There are a number of places in the NT
 where we are told that sinful behavior can disqualify us from eternal life.
 Sensitive hearts can receive these verses and become troubled,
 and we can start to doubt our salvation.

Friends, we can be sure that our salvation is secure
 and that it's not going to be placed in jeopardy by our imperfections.

But, the Bible does warn us: if we *take advantage* of God's grace
 by deliberately and willfully and self-consciously sinning,
 in the sense of we no longer care about God's standards,
 or we use God grace as a license to behave as we wish,
 then no, our salvation is no longer assured.
 The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this "cheap grace",
 we accept God's forgiveness and then pay scant attention to holy living.

And one way to receive God's grace cheaply and dangerously
 is to indulge ourselves in ongoing grumbling against our brothers and sisters;
 to give up being patient with one another as we wait for Christ's return.

How else might our patience be challenged?

Well, we could also lose patience with the word of God,
 or rather with *people's responses* to the word of God

Have a listen to what James says in verse 10 Brothers and sisters,
 as an example of patience in the face of suffering,
 take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
 As we'll hear next week, James is about to make mention of Elijah,
 the OT prophet who preached at a time when God's word was not welcome.
 Elijah spoke in the age of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel,
 an age when this evil queen, Jezebel,
 was executing those who would speak on God's behalf.
 For the sake of self-preservation it would have been easy to not speak out,
 to put God's word aside when the heart was being turned up,
 to lose patience with the slow and seemingly pointless exercise of speaking
 God's word.

But the OT prophets persevered.

And we too live in an age when God's word is not appreciated,
 when our modern-day prophets are silenced,
 where in some parts of the world they are imprisoned and killed.
 And so what's the temptation?
 Instead of waiting for these truths to be vindicated by Christ's return,
 we become embarrassed by them
 or we start to replace them with other values and philosophies;
 ways of thinking that are more acceptable to those around us.

But James wants us to consider the prophets of old.
 They didn't give up on God's word!
 They patiently stood by it, enduring the scorn of others.

And he also wants us to remember the example of Job!
 Do you remember Job? This time last year we were thinking about Job.
 The OT character who underwent a spiritual test
 with the loss of his family and his wealth.
 But what explained to us is never explained to Job;
 we know his suffering is a test from Satan but Job is none the wiser.

Now this kind of inexplicable suffering has got to test your patience, doesn't it?
 Why am I still sick? Why am I redundant, again?
 Why do my relationships always crash and burn?
 And so the temptation is to blame God and to stop being Christ's disciple.

Job's wife places the temptation right in front of him:
 "Are you still maintaining your integrity? She taunts Job. Curse God and die!"
 In other words: "Lose your patience with God, don't wait for him to answer
 or to make things right again. He's allowed you to suffer, so give up on him!"
 But how did Job respond? James tells us, verse 11 You have heard of Job's
 perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of
 compassion and mercy.

God did answer and God did make things better for Job,
and God will do the same for us when Christ returns,
So don't give up! Keep on being patient!
Lest we disqualify ourselves from the prize.

It's interesting that back in verse 8 where James uses an agricultural metaphor.

If there's one thing that will test my patience, then it's got to be plants.

When we moved in to our current house there were some bottlebrush shrubs
And I thought to myself
"I don't like the bottlebrush. I think they're ugly plants, with ugly bark,
thin leaves, lots of twigs, they attract those awful noisy miners,
and they're everywhere you look."
I don't like them, so I cut them down.

But you may have noticed,
that we are currently in the flowering season for bottlebrushes,
and I have to admit, I've found myself thinking,
"They're actually quite impressive when they're in full bloom!
Maybe I should have left them!"
11 months of the year the bottlebrush isn't much to look at,
but when they get going, they're very impressive.
And so I now regret my lack of patience!

There is a great reward for those who are patiently wait for Christ's return.
And there will be great regret for those who are impatient.
Christ *is* coming, so let's pray that God's Holy Spirit will fill us with patience.

Pray.