

What Are You Waiting For?

Scripture: James 5:7-11

Introduction

What are you waiting for? Maybe you are waiting for something to happen in your life? Maybe you are waiting for God to do something special in your life or in the church? Maybe you are not waiting at all, you are just going through the motions? Let me encourage you to put aside the *busyness* of life for a moment and listen to what God's Word says about waiting. As we have gone through the book of James on Wednesday evenings, we have seen one key theme: *Doing the Word of God*. We are not to be only *hearing* the Word of God, but we are to be *doing* it. Saying we will do something is different from actually doing it. Doing the Word of God means that we do not just affirm what God said, but that we obey Him and do what He said. Probably one of the more familiar passages in James is on *faith* and *works*, where he raised the question: *Is only faith important, or is how we demonstrate our faith important, too?* James wrote:

James 2:18 *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

An inactive faith, a faith without works accompanying it, is a dead faith. But a living, active, healthy faith in Jesus Christ will result in the type of life that resembles Jesus Christ. Throughout the book of James, he told us how to live out our faith. If we say that we are a Christian, that we have genuinely accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then we will live in such a way that demonstrates that faith. We will live in such a way that outwardly shows what we inwardly believe. Oftentimes, that can be difficult. Have you had those situations where you knew what the right thing to do was, but you did not want to do it? For instance, someone cursed you and your first reaction might be to tell them a piece of your mind, maybe with a fist or two. It might be hard to do the right thing when you are attacked. Our tongues can get the best of us, especially when we do not get what we want or perceive someone else is doing wrong. Several times, James wrote of the danger of an unbridled tongue.

Today's passage is about patience. That is something that is difficult for many of us to "do." We do not want to be patient. In our American culture, we typically want things right now. I for one am a fan of fast food where I can order my food, pay at the window, pick it up and continue on to where I was going. That works really well until you get to the drive-thru window and the person there tells you to pull up and they will bring it to you. You know then that it may not be as quick as you were expecting. What gets me is when I drive off, especially after having waited for a while to get my food, only to realize several miles down the road that I didn't get what I ordered. So much of our culture is about having things quickly and conveniently. We have express lanes in the grocery stores. We have ATMs to get our money quickly. We have highways and interstates to help us get from one place to another in less time - unless it is Capital Boulevard during rush hour. Try that for a quick trip home.

As you go through tough times in life, you may grow impatient. You may ask God, “When will this get better? When are things going to change?” In today’s passage, James addressed people who suffered at the hands of evil oppressors. Rather than fighting back, James called them to patiently endure their circumstances and to trust in God to make it right. As we live out our Christian faith, James tells us the following:

- Be Patient on God
- Be Ready for Jesus
- Be Steadfast in Faith

Be Patient on God

In verse seven, James wrote the following:

James 5:7 *Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.*

James called the church to be patient on the Lord, and not just patient for Him to do anything, but for Him to return. The world is waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. In fact, all of creation is groaning for it. Things are not as they should be and we are all waiting for God to make it better. The thing is, though, Jesus Christ has made it better through His death and resurrection. Anyone who places trust in Him is promised a better day, an eternal life of better days. But, we are left here to live out our faith while patiently waiting for Jesus to return. There is both a right now and not yet element to our faith. We are changed and saved right now when we accept Jesus, but we are still waiting for God to make all things new and to take us home in heaven.

There are days when I wish He would just come on back and take us to glory. There are days when I just think the world has gone too far. Then I remember, God has a plan. He sees all of the world, all of history, from beginning to end, as a painted picture. We don't see that. We may catch a glimpse of it from time to time, but none of us can see the completed picture. But God does. Therefore, we should trust that God knows what He is doing and will come back to set things in order as He promised. It is like a farmer who must labor without knowing what the weather will bring or the type of harvest he will have. For the farmer, though, the final result of his faithful labor and God's gracious gifts of sun and rain were worth the wait. How much more, then, is our patient waiting for the Lord?

Be Ready for Jesus

Although God tells us to be patient, we are also to be ready. James wrote:

James 5:8 *Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

While James knew that Jesus was coming back and would set all things right, he did not know when it would happen. None of us know, not even the Mayans knew, which we found out last December. What James did know was that we should be prepared for it. Jesus said He was coming back, and that was two thousand years ago. If we can say anything about Jesus' plan to return for us, it is that He is not in a hurry. We should be patient, yet ready for it. Do not be like the five foolish virgins who did not have their lamps ready when the bridegroom came. They missed out on the wedding feast. Likewise, we must patiently wait on Him but also be ready for Him at anytime.

But, does God want us to just sit at home ready and waiting for His return? Does He want us to just come to church week after week feeding our needs, while the rest of the world is dying and going to hell? No! This passage underscores the urgent need to share the good news of Jesus Christ. How many in the world do not know Jesus Christ? How many in just our community do not know Jesus Christ? When we compare our needs, whatever they are, with the need for people to hear and to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is *no comparison*. None! Within a five mile radius of Good Hope Baptist, there are roughly twenty-four thousand people living in the communities. Many, if not most, of them do not know Jesus Christ. Yes, we should patiently wait on the Lord, but we should also be patiently working and ready for Him. We need to be making disciples and supporting missions while we have time. Jesus said that the fields are white for harvest. There are disciples to be made. When Jesus returns, will he find us and our community ready for Him. Will He?

Be Steadfast in faith

Lastly, if we are to be patient and to be ready, is there anything else we should be doing? Yes there is! James wrote that we are to be examples of the faith. In fact, just about the whole book of James is about living out our faith. If we say we believe in Jesus Christ, then James says, "Show it!" He wrote:

James 5:9 *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

Perhaps this is another example of "bridling the tongue." I asked someone recently how many conflicts are started by someone who just didn't keep their mouth shut. He said, "Probably all of them." Now, certainly we ought to speak up when things are wrong. For instance, brother Billy Bob is cheating on his wife, or sister Susie is gossiping in the church, or someone else is openly sinning and you know it. What is our responsibility in those situations? If you think that it is to tell the pastor or to just ignore it, you are wrong. We, the whole church, are commanded to address sin within the church. That is one of the responsibilities church members have to one another - to hold each other accountable to Jesus Christ. But we should not grumble against one another. This means we should not complain in a mean spirited way. Grumbling and fighting amongst ourselves only makes things worse.

James also wrote that the Judge is at the door, another indication that God is nearby. Think of two kids who are misbehaving and hear mom or dad walking towards their room. They may say to one another, "We better get our act together because mom and dad are at the door." When Jesus returns, what will He find us doing? Will He find us being faithful to Him? Will He find His people being the Church or misbehaving in church? Seriously, if Jesus walked into the church building today, would He say, "Well done my good and faithful servant?" My prayer is that He finds us all faithful in the work He has called us to do. It's hard to be the Church, though, if we look like the rest of the world. When the rest of the world looks at you, do they see you or do they see Jesus Christ in you? That's an important distinction. Believers in Jesus Christ ought to look like Him. I am not saying that they should be perfect, but they should at least resemble Him. After all, the Holy Spirit is molding us into the image of God's own Son. When it comes to difficult situations, James wrote that we are to be steadfast in faith.

James 5:10-11 *As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

When times are tough and being patient on God and ready for Him is hard, we can find encouragement from people of the faith. Remember Job who lost his family and possessions and yet remained faithful to God. Scripture says that when these terrible things happened to him, he grieved, but he also worshipped God. He praised God. When tragedy happens in your life, what will likely be your response? If you are like me, it may be, "Why me, God? What have I done to deserve this?" That is a very real question based on our response to pain and suffering. But remember how Job responded to it. He admitted that he deserved nothing. He brought nothing into his life and he was going to take nothing with Him. We are only stewards of what God graciously gives to us, which by the way, includes our very lives. When we commit ourselves to Him, we commit everything to Him. You cannot serve Jesus Christ as Lord and hold back from Him. He is either Lord over your entire life, or He is Lord of none of it. Which do you want it to be? And that does not mean your life will be free of trouble. Far from it. But Jesus encouraged us with this statement:

Luke 6:22-23 *Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*

Therefore, be steadfast in your faith. Know that God is working, that Jesus Christ will return, and that those who wait on Him and genuinely trust in Him, have a great reward waiting for them. Like the song says, *what a glorious day that will be!*

Conclusion

Therefore, what are you waiting for?

Are you waiting for something to happen in your life? Are you waiting for God to do something either in your life or in the church. Maybe you are waiting for more people to come be a part of our congregation? Maybe you are waiting for something great or miraculous to happen before you commit to something greater? Whatever it is, let me encourage you today, to be steadfast in faith. We will go through tough times, people will be difficult and oftentimes sinful, but God is at work and God has a plan for you, for His church and for this community. The question you should ask yourselves is this: Are you where you need to be? Are you faithfully serving God right now, right here, where He has you? Because if that is not the case, then you should pray that God puts you where you will be.

Living out our Christian faith is not going to be easy. We will face discouragement from time to time, but, we should remember that we all live in a broken world that is plagued by sin and suffering. It affects the church just as it does the world outside. But we need to be patiently waiting and ready for Jesus to return and at the same time demonstrating our faithfulness to Him until that day comes. And this is hard to do when we may not see the fruit of our faith. It is hard to believe in something when you cannot see it. But faith means knowing something will happen without being able to see it. Consider this, though: Maybe you are looking for it in the wrong things. Maybe evidence of your faith is not in numbers and activities, but in a growing faith, a closer walk with Jesus, and a more intimate fellowship with His people, whoever they may be. Maybe there is fruit and you just haven't noticed it. But even if you are walking through a valley, if that is true, the good news of God's Word is that you do not walk alone. Jesus said that He is with us, even until the end of the age, and that is something worth waiting for. Thanks be to God. Amen!