

James 5:7-10
Waiting for the Lord

Main idea: God encourages us to patiently wait for the coming of the Lord. Can we do that? Do we have any choice?

This third week of Advent, we lit the pink candle, and some of you think that's weird. I know because before I started learning about all this Advent stuff, I thought it was weird, too. Even as I was lighting the pink candle this morning, I'm sure some of you were thinking, "Oh no! He's lighting the wrong one!" Like, shouldn't the different colored candle, the pink candle, be last, because it represents the culmination of Advent or something, and it somehow represents the coming of the Lord? I thought the same thing.

But this just shows how much I didn't yet understand Advent. While Advent is certainly about counting down the weeks until Jesus comes, it's even more about waiting with eager anticipation.¹ And as hard as it is to wait like that, waiting itself is a virtue to be developed in us.²

And for that reason, the pink candle represents joy.³ Being more than half way through the season of Advent, we can wait for the coming of the Lord with joy because we know that He's coming soon.

I remember waiting with joy many Christmas mornings before opening presents, because I didn't know what I was getting. For many months, I had carefully written out my Christmas list, and I had given it to my mom, and she said she would give it to Santa. But even after doing all that, I still didn't really know what I was getting until I unwrapped my presents on Christmas morning. I'd think, "Oh, I really hope I get a Gameboy! And some He-Man action figures! And some Micro Machines!" Remember those things? I'd think to myself, "I think I've been good enough this year to get everything I want! So, I think I just might get them!"

I might.

I had joy because I hoped that might get some things I really wanted. But as Christians, as we look forward to Christmas, we have an even greater hope. We have the sure hope of receiving Jesus.⁴

Turn with me to James 5:7-10. And please stand with me for the reading of God's word. James 5:7-10 says this:

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. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:7-10)

Father, help us to be patient. Help us to trust You, and Your timing, and help us even to fear You, knowing that You are the Judge. Help us to be in reverent awe of Jesus. In Jesus's name, Amen.

¹ The practice of waiting in advent is rooted in verses such as Isaiah 40:31 and Micah 7:7

² Waiting is encouraged by verses such as Psalm 27:13-14

³ Because the coming of Jesus is news of great joy. Luke 2:10

⁴ Romans 5:5

One thing that I've found as we've been emphasizing Advent this year is that it directs us to have a more reverent awe of God.⁵ As Baptists, we often emphasize how we can have a great and personal relationship with God, and that's true,⁶ but we sometimes neglect the idea that God Himself is awesome,⁷ and holy,⁸ and the Bible never says we can come to God on our own terms. It tells us to come to God on God's terms.⁹

For example, the book of Leviticus is all about how the Jews were to approach God. It talks about all the Jewish ceremonial laws,¹⁰ and about how the offerings were to be conducted,¹¹ and even about what the priests were to wear.¹² And all of this was to remind us that God is to be worshiped and feared.

Leviticus 25:17 says:

You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 25:17)

This is a common phrase that you'll find several times not only in Leviticus, but throughout the Bible,¹³ that you shall fear the Lord your God. We often point out that the word "fear" can also be translated "awe," and that's true, but I want to point out this morning that it can also, also be translated "be terrified by," from which we get the word "terrible."¹⁴ So, when we approach God, or rather when God approaches us, as Jesus was coming into the world, is it great, or terrible? Should we wait with joy, or with terror?

Well, either way, our passage in James this morning encourages us to wait for the coming of the Lord. As we've been talking about these last couple weeks, the season of Advent is all about waiting with great anticipation for the coming of Jesus. It's distinct from Christmas in that Christmas is about how Jesus came, and Advent is about expecting His coming.

But I wonder if some of you these past few weeks have thought that it's kind of strange to practice Advent at all today. After all, we don't have to wait for Jesus to come. He already came!¹⁵ Jesus came and lived on the earth 2,000 years ago! And even when the book of James was written, Jesus had already lived and even died.¹⁶ So our passage in James isn't talking primarily about the first coming of Jesus, but rather about His second coming. As James tells us, we're to wait patiently for Jesus to return.

And that can be hard, because we know that when He returns, Jesus will establish His kingdom on earth, and He'll reign for 1,000 years,¹⁷ and we'll get to go to be with Him forever.¹⁸ So we have this huge promise from God to look forward to, and yet we have to patiently wait,¹⁹ like kids on Christmas morning.

⁵ Having a reverent awe of God causes us to serve Him. Hebrews 12:28

⁶ Knowing Jesus IS eternal life, after all. John 17:3

⁷ Deuteronomy 10:17

⁸ It even says that God's name is Holy. Isaiah 57:15

⁹ Jesus is the way. John 14:6

¹⁰ Such as in Leviticus 23:33-44

¹¹ Such as in Leviticus 1:1-17

¹² Such as in Leviticus 16:4

¹³ Deuteronomy 6:13, Joshua 4:24, 2 Kings 17:39, Psalm 67:7, 1 Peter 2:17, Revelation 14:7

¹⁴ According to BDB, אָרַע (H3372): 1a2) to stand in awe of, be awed, and 1c) to make afraid, terrify

¹⁵ John 1:14

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

¹⁷ Revelation 20:6

¹⁸ John 14:3

¹⁹ For the sake of brevity, I'm condensing much of what happens in the end. Forgive me.

How do we do that? And do we really have any choice in the matter?

James gives us a couple examples of how to wait. The first is in verse 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 5:7)

James tells us that the coming of the Lord is at hand. It's soon. And he compares that to how a farmer waits for his crops. What would happen if a farmer didn't wait for his crops? They'd be ruined. If the farmer planted his crops one day, and then immediately attempted to harvest them the very next day, there would be nothing to harvest.

Or say the farmer does wait, but not long enough. How long does it take for corn to grow? At least 60 days, right? And usually probably closer to 90 days. Ok, so say the farmer plants his corn, cultivates it, and then waits for a full month before harvesting it. What would happen? It wouldn't be ready. So he patiently waits for the early and late rains, and only then harvests the precious fruit of the earth.

But does he really have much of a choice? I mean, if he doesn't want to waste his time and money, he pretty much has to wait. He has to wait for the seed to take root, and then wait for it to germinate, and sprout, and then wait for it to grow into maturity, and only then would the wise farmer harvest the crop.

In that way, verse 8:

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:8)

Now, do we have a choice? Well, yes, but only if you're willing to miss out. There's only one way that leads to enjoying the fruit of the land, because there's only one way that leads to eternal life.²⁰

And, actually, the farmer made his choice long before the period of waiting. He made the choice to plant his seed. And in the same way, God made the choice to send His seed, His offspring (Jesus), long before we chose to receive Him.²¹ So biblically speaking, our choice is completely dependant on God's choice to show us grace.²²

The second example of how we're to wait for the coming of the Lord is in verse 10. It says:

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:10)

God spoke to and through many people in the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament.²³ They spoke about many things: life and death, judgment and mercy, but perhaps what they're most known for was when they spoke about the coming of the Lord. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, they prophesied

²⁰ John 14:6

²¹ Eve first received the promise of Jesus as the seed. Genesis 3:15

²² God's choice is primary. John 15:16

²³ Hebrews 1:1

about Him.²⁴ They longed for Him.²⁵ They were mistreated by their own people because of how they called everyone to repent and put their hope in Him.²⁶ And they had no choice but to wait for what they spoke about.²⁷

And now James is telling us that we're to wait for Jesus's second coming in the same way. We have no idea when it's coming about.²⁸ Unbelievers ridicule us for our faith in Jesus and belief that He's going to return.²⁹ And yet, we're to suffer with patience while we wait for the Lord.

Why? Why would we willingly put ourselves through that? I mean, wouldn't it be an easier and better life if we just gave up believing and lived however we wanted, and didn't let our faith get in the way of what would otherwise be great relationships with friends and family? Why should we believe any of this?

Well, I hope it's because we know that the Lord's coming is good. He's going to wipe away every tear, and there will be no more death or mourning or pain anymore.³⁰ In the end, everything will be very good.³¹

And yet, verse 9.

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

That sounds a little scary. The Judge is standing at the door. The Lord is returning soon, and He's coming back with judgment. He will judge the nations.³² And James seems to be saying that we're at risk of being judged if we judge or grumble against others. Jesus said this:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:1-2)

And that sounds scary, too, because I think we've all been guilty of judging others. So once again, why should we believe any of this? Why should we feel like we're guilty sinners, when everyone else in the world says we should just eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die?³³

Well, there's this little thing called truth.³⁴ It's true that Jesus came, and died, and rose again.³⁵ And since that's true, then we can also believe Him that He's coming again.³⁶

So is the coming of the Lord good, or bad? Is it great, or terrible?

²⁴ Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5), and resurrected (Psalm 16:10)

²⁵ 1 Peter 1:10

²⁶ Matthew 23:37

²⁷ Matthew 13:17

²⁸ A puzzling verse, for sure. Matthew 24:36

²⁹ It's actually quite logical to be ridiculed by those who reject Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:19

³⁰ Revelation 21:4

³¹ Which is the fulfillment of Genesis 3:1

³² Psalm 110:6

³³ 1 Corinthians 15:32

³⁴ Everyone will know it. John 8:32

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

³⁶ But don't just stand there waiting. Acts 1:11

You know, Christmas is a great holiday. I can remember many Christmas mornings when I had no choice but to wait with anticipation. My brother and I were eager to open our presents, but we had to wait for mom and dad to wake up. It was terrible! And we tried our best to be quiet and to let them sleep, but often the anticipation was just too much, and inevitably, we'd wake them up early in the morning so that we could all celebrate Christmas.

Needless to say, we weren't very patient.

It's hard to wait for something good, but I think it might be even harder to wait for something bad. One of the worst things my mom could say to me when I disobeyed in some way as a child was, "Just wait until your father gets home!" Have you heard that before? You see, the anticipation of the punishment was often worse than the punishment itself. It's hard to wait for something good, but it might be even harder to wait for something bad, and I think most of us would much rather just get it over with so that it's done and in the past, right?

So, one question we need to answer about our text this morning is simply this: is the coming of the Lord good, or bad? Is it great, or terrible?

Well, let's see what some of the prophets said about it, who waited with suffering and patience. First, Joel 2:31.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come. (Joel 2:31, KJV)

That's the King James Version. Several of the more recent English versions translate that word "terrible" as "awesome,"³⁷ but I think "terrible" might be more accurate in this context. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.³⁸

So, is the day of the Lord great, or terrible? Well, it says both, right? So maybe another verse will help. Malachi 4:1.

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 4:1)

Well, that sounds pretty terrible. The day of the Lord will burn like an oven. All the arrogant and evildoers, that's all of us, for all have sinned,³⁹ all of us will be stubble. That sounds pretty terrible. But check out the very next verse. Malachi 4:2.

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. (Malachi 4:2)

Well, hey, that sounds pretty great. The day of the Lord will bring healing for those who fear God, and we'll leap with joy.

³⁷ Such as the ESV, LITV, and MKJV. The CSB is similar, translating it "awe-inspiring."

³⁸ Hebrews 10:31

³⁹ Romans 3:23

So I think Scripture teaches that the day of the Lord is both great and terrible. From our perspective, it's both good because on that day we receive forgiveness of sins,⁴⁰ but also bad because it's on that day that our sins are judged.⁴¹

So what day is James and the prophets talking about?

Well, technically, James is talking about the second coming of Jesus, but the Old Testament writers actually combined the two days that Jesus would come, His first and second coming, and called them both the day of the Lord. And it's interesting that even though these days are historically at least thousands of years apart, because Jesus first came 2,000 years ago, and still hasn't returned, Scripture, even the New Testament, at times, refers to both of these as the day of the Lord's coming. And as such, both are said to be great and terrible.

Check out Revelation 6.

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:12-17)

So, who can stand? No one. It says that everyone, whether kings or generals, rich, slaves, or free, everyone hid themselves on the great and terrible day of the Lord. You see, we're all sinners.⁴² None of us can stand before God guiltless by our own authority.

And yet, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.⁴³ Not "might be saved." SHALL be saved. We don't wait with joy with a very slim chance of hope. We can have full confidence that we shall be saved as we confess Jesus as Savior.⁴⁴

Because here's the thing: only God is your Judge.⁴⁵ That's a fearful thing, but it's also a comforting thing. You are not your judge, and your neighbor isn't your judge. And you're not your neighbor's judge. Because of Jesus dying on the cross for us, God now looks at all who will look to Him and declares, "Forgiven. Righteous. Blameless."⁴⁶ You are perfectly loved and perfectly whole in Jesus.⁴⁷ And if our Judge has declared all this over us because of Jesus's first coming, then we wait with joy for His return.

So all I'm saying is that while we're to come to God on God's terms, God's terms are fulfilled in Jesus. Not works, but grace.⁴⁸ So don't live as if life depends on you. Rest in Jesus, and wait for the Lord.

⁴⁰ It's through His blood poured out for us that we're forgiven. Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 1:7

⁴¹ Romans 2:12, 16

⁴² Psalm 14:1-3

⁴³ Romans 10:13

⁴⁴ Acts 16:31

⁴⁵ Psalm 50:6

⁴⁶ Acts 13:38, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Jude 1:24

⁴⁷ 1 John 4:18-19

⁴⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9