

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Attitudes of Faith,
A Series on the Letter of James:
A Humble Faith”
Proverbs 11:17-21
James 5:7-11**

**Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 14, 2018**

Proverbs 11:17-21

A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself. The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward. Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die. Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight. Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.

Introduction

Today marks the final in our miniseries on the Letter of James. Over the past four weeks we've seen what attitudes our faith should hold. In week one, James taught us that our faith must have an active attitude. The Christian is not supposed to be a passive do-nothing. True and pure religion makes outwardly known the inward faith. In week two, the Apostle asserted that faith should have an impartial attitude. In this way, we make no distinctions, or judgments, between us, because the role of Judge is reserved only for God. In week three, we learned that faith should have an attitude of wisdom. Not just any wisdom, but heavenly wisdom, which comes from God and is itself pure, full of good fruits, and impartial. When our faith is directed by this heavenly wisdom we are naturally single-minded in our faith. That's what we learned in week four, that our faith is a focused faith, focused strictly on God, from whom all wisdom and faith come. In order to be single-minded in our faith, the Apostle says we must submit to God. Like I said last week, submission is hard. So how do we foster it? Well, today we'll see just how in...

James 5:7-11

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. 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.

“A Humble Faith”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As James wraps up his epistle, he wants to close by ending on a few pointers. One of these is the command to be patient. How many of us struggle with patience? I know my patience wears thin after a long day of interacting with people. Some people's patience is so short, all they have to do is look at someone and they've lost it. As a society, we are not very patient. One of my favorite movies as a child was *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. I later found out that Gene Wilder despised his role as the magical chocolatier. Regardless, one of the scenes involves the young

lady Veruca Salt. Mr. Wonka is showing the kids and their parents the Golden Eggs Room with the geese that lay gilded chocolate eggs. Miss Salt demands that her father get her a golden-egg-laying goose. After Mr. Wonka refuses Mr. Salt's offer, Veruca breaks out into a song of avarice that ends with this line: "Don't care how, I want it now!" Whether they knew it or not, the writers of this film penned the mantra of several generations of Americans.

"I want it now! I deserve it now! And I don't care how!" We don't have to look very far to hear this. People want money, power, change, and they want it now or yesterday. We are a people who struggle with patience, but that struggle is not limited to our time. The ancients, too, had to battle it; just look at the illustration James provides. He calls to our attention the farmer. I know we have many such agriculturalists in this congregation who might resonate with this illustration. He says, "the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it..." The farmer knows he needs to be patient. He needs to wait for the right moment. Sow too early and the seeds won't germinate. Harvest too soon and the crop will not be ripe. He needs to wait. But I think James is telling us a little more than just "hold your horses." If you think farmers, after sowing the seeds, sit on their hands and do nothing until harvest, then you clearly don't know any farmers. I know precious little about farming, but I do know it requires many long hours and many strenuous days of constant cultivation, pruning, cleaning, debugging, and what have you.

The farmer is patient, but he is not inactive. And neither is he naive. For all his cultivation and efforts, the field and crop are still subject to nature. He knows "the early and the late rains" come at God's will. He also knows the devastating potential of famine, plague, and fire are out of his control as well. In this way, his act of patience is also an act of humility. You see, patience and humility go hand-in-hand, they are two peas in pod, concurrent attitudes of faith. And so the Apostle urges us, "You also, be patient." We are to be patient as the farmer is patient. Humble in the knowledge that God is sovereign and his will shall be done. And patiently diligent in our duties as Christians. We are not to sit idly on our hands awaiting to coming kingdom. No! We are to be fishers of men, cultivators for Christ! Our responsibility is to sow the seeds of the Gospel, to tend to the care of the faithful, and to bear witness to the outsider. Only Christ can provide true nourishment, so we are to point others to him. Just as the farmer does not give up his work because he cannot cause the seed to germinate nor bring the plant to flower; we, too, must not back down from our mission.

This is truly where humility must be resolute. The Apostle urges us to establish our hearts, or to fix our hearts firmly on God. This is why a single-minded attitude of faith is so important. To be focused on God means to submit yourself to him. Submission to God is humbling oneself before the Almighty. At the construction of the new Temple God makes this covenant with King Solomon, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."¹ The first act of true and pure worship is for God's people to humble themselves. Calvin echoes this when he reminds us, "In coming to God, we must always remember that we must possess the testimony of a good conscience, and must beware of harboring the thought that we have any inherent righteousness which would render God our debtor, or that we deserve any

recompense at his hands.”² It is dangerous to presume anything of God. To stand before God with a sense of entitlement is the very act of losing focus on who God is.

In the same way, James urges us not to “grumble against one another.” We are not to groan and judge another’s faithfulness by our standards, because, he suggests, we will be judged more severely by God. To be presumptuous of God and judgmental of our neighbor is not the definition of humility and patience. Now, Calvin does note, “We may, indeed, groan, when any evil torments us...” We are allowed, even encouraged to speak truth to power, name the evils of our age, and condemn them. If we want the devil to flee from us, we must resist him, we must name his lies, decry his insults, and rebuke his servants. But, Calvin continues, we are not at liberty to be “querulous one against another,” arguing “with the Lord against another.”³ Those we cannot denigrate are they who are made in the image of God. That which we cannot derogate is a person’s walk and relationship with God. We must be patient in our waiting for his kingdom, and we must also be patient with our neighbors in their journey with him.

As another illustration, James uses the prophets to stir us in patience and humility. He doesn’t elaborate much on this, because his immediate audience would’ve known exactly what he was talking about. The Old Testament prophets endured much suffering in their ministry to God. Jeremiah was exiled, imprisoned, and reviled. Hosea’s wife cheats on him as a reflection of Israel’s adultery against God. Amos is forced to prophesy outside of his own country, preaching condemnation on the rich and powerful. Even Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”⁴ Yet, in the face of all opposition, God’s prophets continued their duty to proclaim his Word and bear witness to his truth. Nothing could or should stop us from being focused on him. Blessed are they who remain steadfast under turmoil. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”⁵

When I say this, I know it oftentimes sounds too easy. And the saying is true, “if it’s too good to be real, then it probably isn’t.” While our salvation is very much real, the promise of a life free of strife and free of sadness is not real. Nowhere does God say, “if you just do these things then everything will go your way.” This is where true humility comes in. The Bible does say, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22). “Cast all your anxieties on God, because he cares for you” (I Peter 5:7). “Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (Luke 12:25). People like to quote these verses when there is anxiety and worry. Why is that? Because the only way we can have true patience and true perseverance is through humbling ourselves before God.

Our God is powerful and awesome. His sovereignty means he has control over all things and maintains the salvation of his people. Having said that, sometimes he does give us more than we can handle. Not out of some cruel jest, but to remind us to rely fully on him. He might not remove the turmoil or the grief, but he will see you through it. God is not some far-off deity playing with his marionette puppets. He’s right here. He’s accessible to us if only we humble ourselves before him. We can’t come into his midst thinking we’re “all that and a bag of chips.” We can’t stand at his throne and demand he do something for us. Even when we feel God is

being unfair, the truth is, we have no room for making demands with him. We have nothing to bring to the bargaining table. True humility is knowing we are nothing before the Almighty. True patience is flipping that humility over to rely solely on the Almighty. True faith is knowing the Almighty will deliver us and fulfill his promises. Our job is to be steadfast in our faith, just as the farmer is steadfast in his care for the crop. We do our duty as stewards of God's provisions, and, in the end, his harvest will be as bountiful as the whole Church from across time and space.

When our faith takes on an attitude of humility, we are coming before this amazing and magnificent God and saying, "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love. Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee. Take my will and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine."⁶ Turning ourselves over to God takes a lot of patience and a lot of humility. And if the Prophets teach me anything, it's that God's love is steadfast, even when ours is not. He'll give to his own that steadfastness for the journey of faith. All we need to do is turn to him and say, "Yes, Lord, Thy will be done."

Let us pray. Almighty Father, you are our stronghold, in you can we place our trust. Forgive us for the times we trust in ourselves, in human charisma, and in worldly powers. Teach us to have the patience to endure and a patience sparked by faithful living. Teach us to be humble, to rely fully on you, for you are our Sovereign King and Creator. May our obedience be manifested in giving ourselves fully over to you and giving of ourselves fully to our neighbors. In the name of Christ, the name above all names, do we pray. Amen.

¹ II Chronicles 7:14

² John Calvin, *Heart Aflame*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999. Page 284

³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles*, Grand Rapids, MI: CCEL. Page 316

⁴ Luke 4:24

⁵ Matthew 5:10

⁶ Frances Ridley Havergal, *The Presbyterian Hymnal*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990. Hymn 391