

## CHRISTMAS HOPE IN A HOPELESS WORLD

### Hope and Patience

James 5:7-10

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**LISTEN:** <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/christmas-in-a-hopeless-world-hope-and-patience/>

The famous writer Ernest Hemingway was hospitalized during WWI due to injuries sustained while driving a military ambulance. He began to observe how patients healed differently, how they used their time of confinement. He discovered that waiting does not break us; waiting reveals us (what we really are inside).

We are thinking today about the connection between patience and hope. We live in a very impatient age. Watch us stuck in traffic, waiting for a red light to turn green. Or notice how some people get nervous when you don't respond to their text or email immediately. And we are the culture that invented the phrase "fast food." Impatience. We want it all right now! Have you ever noticed how much time we spend waiting? For Christmas morning, for the first grade, to have a room of my own, to get a driver's license, to be on my own, to have our own home, to pay off those student loans, to get well, to find happiness, for the biopsy results, or for the kids to call. Waiting to die. Waiting to live.

In Luke 21:34, Jesus said, "Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping" (*The Message*). What a great Christmas reminder--that sometimes when we grow weary of hoping and grow impatient, we resort to shopping, partying, etc., to numb the pain and offer ourselves a distraction from the hard work of waiting.

In our text for today, James helps us with a simple farm analogy. Every farmer knows that there is a time lapse between planting and harvesting. Time is the only thing that can make the difference. The Middle East is very dry. The early rains (Oct.-Nov.) had to come in order for the seed to germinate; the latter rains (April-May) had to come in order for the crop to get that boost to maturity. But what about in between? Truly, we are living between the rainy seasons!

We used to have a Precious Moments figurine of a little boy, who has just planted a seed and is sitting down beside a garden. He is holding a water bucket, with one hand, his chin in his other hand, just watching and waiting for the seed to sprout. Who will tell the little guy that crops don't grow that fast? Who will tell us? Tell us that life is more like growing oak trees than driving through Arby's.

James reminds us that sometimes when we tire of patient waiting, we resort to grumbling (v. 9). The word means to groan, to sigh heavily (uggghhh!). "Instead of complaining," James says, "consider others who have had to learn patience." So let's visit with one of the prophets, perhaps Isaiah. Let's complain to him how we've had to wait two whole weeks for an answer to prayer; or two years for a heartache to mend; or two decades for a loved one to come to Christ. Isaiah, his rugged faced lined with care, his hands folded in an almost perpetual prayer, responds, "Oh, I had to wait 700 years for Messiah to come." Gulp! Let's remember that the Cross of Jesus is founded upon God's infinite patience with us, waiting for us to come home to God's love and forgiveness. Patience!

Four times in this brief passage, the word "patience" (long-fused) appears four times. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that the difference between a courageous person and one who is not is simple: The courageous person is brave ten minutes longer. It's so tempting to lose hope, to grow impatient. Remember that the context of James 5 is found in vv. 1-6, where we read of

wealthy employers exploiting poor laborers and defrauding them out of their wages. Anyone here ever have a work-related heartache? Impossible employment situation? Unfair situations related to your race, ethnicity, your friends at school or your social status?

We heard the choir sing it last week--those immortal words by Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow: "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.' Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men.'" Be patient! God isn't done!

The late Henri Nouwen was fascinated with trapeze artists at the circus. In fact, he became good friends with one of the finest acts in the business, the Rodleigh family. Nouwen talked about the special relationship between the flyer and the catcher. The flyer has to be willing to literally let go of the safety of the trapeze, stretch out his arms and wait to feel the strong hand of the catcher. The flyer cannot do the grasping; he must wait in absolute trust for the catcher [*Sabbatical Journey*, p. viii]. And it is that waiting that contains all the drama. That's why people come to watch. Today, could you let go and trust? Could you be willing to wait in mid-air, and believe that the Catcher will catch you and hold on? Patient hope.