

LEARNING GREATER PATIENCE

The first-century saints endured much for their fidelity to the Lord. By the close of the first century, these suffering servants of the Christ were being persecuted almost beyond measure. Amidst the persecution and tribulation that befell them, many of these early Christians were almost ready to give up their faith. By inspiration, James encourages the child of God to greater patience in the face of trials: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7). The word “patient” translates the Greek *makrothumeo*, meaning “patient endurance; longsuffering.” The idea is that of bearing up under adversity, patiently waiting on the Lord through the trials of life. The inspired penman uses three illustrations so that these early Christians might learn greater patience: the planter (5:7), the prophets (5:8), and the patriarch Job (5:11). What can these teach us about patience?

James first calls our attention to the planter or farmer: “Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (5:7). Anyone who has ever planted a garden knows that it requires much patience in waiting for the harvest. Not only that, but the farmer is resigned to accept whatever God has in store for him in the course of his planting, watering, and waiting. As a general rule, the planter is rewarded in the end for his patience with an abundant harvest. The child of God who patiently waits upon the Lord will in the end be rewarded.

James then calls our attention to the prophets: “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience” (5:10). These powerful proclaimers of God’s word were made to suffer to a degree most of us will never know. Reflect on the hardships endured by Jeremiah, whose own people sought to kill him. Consider the turmoil in the life of Hosea, which God used as an illustration of His relationship with Israel. Think of the constant persecution of Elijah at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel, and the times he felt like giving up. We realize that the faithful prophets of the Old Testament were made to suffer much affliction and anguish simply because they were trying to do what was right. The child of God who is striving to live according to Divine precept will suffer persecution just for trying to live right (2 Tim.3:12). We must patiently endure, realizing that in the end God will right all injustices, and reward the fidelity of His saints.

Finally, James calls our attention to the patriarch Job: “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (5:11). The Bible proclaims Job to be a “perfect and upright man” (Job 1:1). In spite of his faithfulness, he was made to suffer unimaginable trials and calamities. He endured the loss of all of his physical possessions. He endured the loss of his ten children. He endured the loss of his physical health. Yet Job remained faithful to God, and by the end of the Biblical account, we see just how merciful and full of pity God is as he restored

unto Job that which Satan had been allowed to take away. The patience of Job arose from a heart that had determined to trust God no matter what (Job 13:15). At times in our lives our faith will be tested. We must resolve now to face these struggles with a heart fixed on the goodness and grace of God. In so doing, we will be able to patiently endure whatever may be thrust upon us.

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