

Let Us Adore Him

JOY

James 5:7-10

1. Joy is active patience.

2. Patience is active waiting.

3. Waiting is active joy.
- James 1:2-4

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Joy

James 5:7-10, 1:2-4

It's hard to imagine any better definition of joy than what we watched earlier, right? Children seem to embody joyfulness; they come by it naturally. I think it might be partly because of their innocence – most of them have not experienced the hardships, difficulties, traumas, and grief that many of us experience as we get older. Tragically, some children have, and we pray God's mercy and the preservation and protection of their innocence in whatever they may have faced.

But as we get older and we go through those hard experiences of life, doesn't it seem like the things we lose in the process are the four themes of advent: hope, peace, joy, and love? Don't you find that interesting? Those are the very things that Christ came to restore to us, and from today's reading in our daily Advent devotional, we realize that as we trust in God *while* we go through those difficulties, one of the very things we gain is joy. Let me say that again: as we trust in God while we go through those difficulties, one of the very things we gain is joy.

Let's read the passage, and then we'll unpack it in order to gain some practical discipleship in our Christian journey. Would you help me honor God's Word by standing as I read it? Thank you.

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:7-10, niv)

When we are confronted with a passage about patience, we might want to jump past it, especially when it talks about being patient in suffering, and not grumbling. How many of us have grumbled while waiting in line for something that was taking a little too long on a stressful Monday morning? If this doesn't feel a bit convicting for most of us already, this passage falls on the Sunday of Advent when we celebrate joy! Even the Advent candle color changes to pink to represent that suffering isn't going to last and that joy is coming. It feels almost contradictory to have a passage about patience in suffering without grumbling against our brothers and sisters during the week when we are celebrating joy.

The question before us is: Can we have joy in the midst of patient suffering? We struggle with inconvenient moments in our fast-paced world, but what about when we are faced

with true suffering? What about when there are famines and persecution, like what the early church faced? What about when we face pandemics and the loss of loved ones? Is there a way to be patient in the midst of that suffering? Is there space for joy, even there?

Well, from this passage let's learn that first, there actually *is* joy, and...

1. ***Joy*** is active ***patience***.

Patience means more than endurance—it means forbearance. We sometimes think of patience as passively waiting for something to happen, or for something to end, but James is using action words to mean that patience is about actively living out faith while waiting for the Lord's return. So until then, there is work to be done, even in the waiting. This is a consistent theme in the book of James, which is focused broadly on faith in action.

The farmer is the analogy James uses to illustrate what he means by patiently waiting for the Lord's return. Farmers are not passive, even when it looks like they are; they prepare compost for soil, which involves a lot of waiting, but at the right times and in the right amounts, elements must be added, and the compost must be turned so it doesn't mold or grow weeds. They prepare the soil, which involves walking through fields looking for rocks, monitoring the levels of nitrogen and various other elements needed to grow specific crops well. They till the soil, adding manure or compost or both as needed. They plant the seeds in the right places. Some seeds need to be spread out, some need to be planted deep, and some need to be planted in mounds. They monitor their seeds. They sometimes have to thin the seedlings so the crop can grow. They wait for the rain to come. James is very specific when he says the farmer waits for the rain. He is specifically referring to the autumn and spring rains that crops in that environment relied on to grow. Between the seasons, there is work to be done. It is a very active waiting.

The word James uses for "wait" is also the word for "expect." The farmer expects a valuable crop to grow.

Earlier in James' letter, James 2:14–26 is dedicated to the idea of deeds (or "works") being *inseparably* connected with faith. James 2:26 says boldly that "faith without deeds is dead." The point is...

2. ***Patience*** is active ***waiting***.

Again, this is not a passive waiting—there is work to be done. In some ways, this builds on the first week of Advent, hope. We live as people who are already part of the kingdom of God as we wait for the return of Christ. We are actively engaged in the work of the kingdom, even as the kingdom hasn't come in fulfillment. This is the already/not yet kingdom of God. The words that have been translated as "stand firm" in the NIV are actually truer to the Greek meaning in the translation found in the NRSV that says, "strengthen your hearts." This is an active statement, an exhortation to dig in our heels and prepare for the long, hard wait. Paul uses this phrase throughout the New Testament in relation to God, who strengthens hearts. Therefore, we actively seek the one who strengthens our hearts. Remember, the Lord's coming is near! As we've talked about, Christ brought the kingdom

already, and the kingdom is also still to be actualized. Therefore, we live in light of the knowledge that Christ has drawn near and continues to draw near. So James says, don't get grumpy and impatient, and by all means don't grumble against your brothers and sisters – don't take your grumpy bad attitude out on the church. Instead keep yourself actively living out your love for God and people.

I once read in article by journalist Alex Stone about how executives at a Houston airport faced and then solved a huge number of passenger complaints about long waits at the baggage claim. You know how if you fly into Yakima, if your luggage takes later than twenty minutes to appear, you get a travel voucher or miles or something. So during that twenty minutes, I'm usually impatient as I wait but watching the time and hoping it takes twenty ONE minutes! I'm both impatient and hoping they're late all at the same time!

Well, at Houston airport, the execs first decided to deal with the complaints by hiring more baggage handlers, reducing wait times to an industry-beating average of eight minutes. But people *still* filed a large number of complaints. This made no sense to the executives until they discovered that, on the average, passengers took just one minute to walk to baggage claim, resulting in a hurry-up-and-wait situation. The walk time was not a problem; the remaining seven empty minutes of staring at the baggage carousel was. So, in a burst of innovation, the executives moved the arrival gates *farther away* from the baggage claim area. Passengers now had to walk much farther but their bags were often waiting for them when they arrived. Problem solved. The complaints dropped.

For the same article Stone interviewed MIT operations researcher Richard Larson, the world's leading expert on waiting in lines to discover the psychology behind our waiting. What happened at the Houston airport makes for a perfect illustration. According to Larson, the length of our wait is not as important as *what we're doing while we wait*. Larson said, "Often the psychology of queuing is more important than the statistics of the wait itself." Essentially, we are willing to tolerate "occupied time" (for example, walking to baggage claim) way better than "unoccupied time" (such as standing at the baggage carousel). Give us something to do while we wait, and the wait becomes endurable.

What James is saying here is that patience is active waiting; that we are to keep busy while we wait, living out our faith as we love God and love and serve people. And as we do that, things come full circle. James says that joy is active patience, and patience is active waiting, and that's when we find that...

3. **Waiting is active joy.**

James concludes this passage by calling us to consider the lives of the prophets, including Job, who was considered a prophet in Jewish literature. These people learned the joy of active patience and waiting, and what they had to endure as they did so was of the most extreme – even being tortured and imprisoned and watching their loved ones die. Keep in mind, these prophets absolutely KNEW the better future that God had in store, and yet they endured so much and often didn't even see it come to pass. If *they* knew this kind of joy, *so can we*.

This brings us back to the beginning of James' letter. Many of you remember that when you are writing a paper, you often start with your thesis statement. Here's James' thesis statement at the beginning of his letter:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4, niv)

When you exercise patience and waiting, and stay busy trusting the Lord and living for the Kingdom – loving God and loving others – you experience joy – and not just *any* joy – PURE joy. There are lots of ways to translate that phrase; “all joy,” “nothing but joy,” or “supreme joy.” James is describing an extended state of well-being, not an immediate feeling of happiness or pleasure.

So let me share with you that I'm trying to learn this. These last three years have been pretty difficult for Shelly and myself. We started out with my mom's sudden diagnosis of terminal brain cancer. Then Shelly's dad died. Then my dad had a stroke. Then we realized how significant my father's dementia was, especially without my mom to cover for him. Then we had to move my parents into assisted living there in Salem, Oregon, moving them out of the house they'd lived in for nearly 60 years. Then my mom died. Then we moved my dad up here to Yakima in assisted living. Then Shelly's mom in Arizona went through major surgery and nearly didn't survive, causing her to be down there to care for her for almost a month. Then my dad had to be life flighted to Seattle after he'd turned septic from a severe internal infection, which resulted in three return trips to Seattle for three further surgeries. Then we had to clear out and clean out my parents' house in Salem so we could get it on the market and get it sold. Then in November while Shelly was in Denver visiting her mom for what was going to be less than two weeks, her mom took a turn and Shelly ended up out there for almost three weeks, only to learn on the day of her return that her mom passed away, which was just last month. And we've had to process all this from a distance from our parents. I'll tell you we are sort of exhausted with grief and stress. Last Monday's Comfort and Joy Service was so helpful for us (you can see it on our YouTube channel if you couldn't join us).

So we haven't felt “happy” for a long time. Sometimes I feel like we are waiting for joy. But I keep coming back to this passage, and in this advent season and Sunday of Joy, and I'm learning that joy actually has very little to do with happiness. Much of what I've been learning is that we've put these two words together, when in fact they have very little in common. I'm learning I need to bisect two words from each other. I think we've morphed those two words together, but that's not biblical. I'm learning that I can have joy even when I don't feel happy. In fact, I can have joy at the same time that I feel sad and I'm grieving, and while I'm facing trials of many kinds. I'm learning that God has been and is faithful and so this exercise of faith Shelly and I are in is producing perseverance and growing our faith and holiness. The joy that I experience is based on God's unrelenting faithfulness and love toward me, not on my feelings or circumstances. I'm learning how important waiting is to God, for me.

Here are a few phrases from the Psalms that have been catching my eye lately. "Wait for the Lord." "Wait patiently for Him." "I wait for you, Oh Lord." "For you I will wait all day." "I wait for the Lord more than the watchmen wait for the morning." "I wait patiently for the Lord." "I wait in silence for God." "Those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land." (Psalms 27, 37, 25, 25, 130, 40, 62, 37 respectively.) And from Isaiah: "Those who wait on the Lord will find new strength" (40:31).

And from James: joy is active patience, which is active waiting, which is active joy – ever present, no matter how we feel or what our circumstances.

Let's pray.

Benediction: (Romans 8:38-39, 15:13)

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)