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## PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Reading James 5:7-12

### 30. PATIENTLY WAITING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

There have always been those who try to forecast the Lord's return. Every major world event brings a new wave of preachers crying, "*the Lord is coming now.*" The Balfour agreement in 1917, which officially ushered the return of the Jews to Palestine in World War 1, caused many preachers to shout, "*the Lord is coming now.*" During World War 2 preachers all over the Western World were declaring that Hitler was Antichrist.

Panic set in among various people and all the time the Bible continued to say, "*be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord.*" Then came the aftermath of World War 2 and the United Nations vote in May 1948 that startled the world by making Israel a nation again. Seeing that event one author took Christ's words out of context and said, "*this generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled.*" ( Matt 24:34 )

He said that a Biblical generation was 40 years and therefore Jesus Christ would return by 1988. Many preachers proclaimed this fact during the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's and 1980's .... until 1989. Then came 1967 and the famous six day war in Israel. For the first time since Nebuchadnezzar the Jews controlled Jerusalem. They returned in increasing numbers and once again preachers began to cry, "*the Lord is coming now.*" Later in the 1980's Soviet President Gorbachev and the mark on his forehead became the subject of speculation, that he was the Antichrist as he became prominent in the march for world peace. Other preachers were even subtly saying that George Bush senior could possibly be the Antichrist since he was seeking to make peace in the Middle East and was calling for a new world order. In 1991 the Persian Gulf war erupted and again many preachers were crying, "*the Lord is coming now.*" The Parousia, the word most frequently used in the Bible to describe the return of Christ is our blessed hope. We can look expectantly to that great day, but we must not run after every prophet who cries, "*the Lord is coming now.*"

Christ may come today, tomorrow, next month, next year. Indeed do you recall what He Himself said, "*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the*

*angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*” ( Mk 13:32 ) Now these Jewish believers to whom James was writing were living in the midst of most difficult circumstances. I mean they were beset with problems and persecutions. The outlook was very dark, so James invites them to try the uplook. He encourages them with the thought that “ *the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.* ” You see, while we have no time for those would set dates, still we must live as though the Lord’s coming could happen at any moment. And it could. What are we to do until the Lord comes ? First of all we are,

### **(1) TO LOOK UPWARD**

Now some of these first generation Christians to whom James wrote had become so anxious and eager for Christ’s return that they were growing impatient. Some were beginning to crack under persecution. So when James uses the word “ *patient,* ” he was calling on these believers “ *to face even the most adverse circumstances with courage and calm.* ” James was saying, “ *Don’t let momentary stumbles beset you, look up and be calm.* ”

“ *Be patient .... unto the coming of the Lord.* ” Now in verses ( 5:7, 8, 9 ) we have a reference to the Lord’s Coming and each of these three verses tell us some thing about the Lord’s return !

#### **(a) IT IS CERTAIN:**

“ *Be patient therefore brethren, unto the coming of the Lord,* ” ( 5:7 ) Now this is James’s first reference to the Coming again of the Lord Jesus, and its interesting to notice how simple, concise, and straightforward it is. He simply speaks “ *of the coming of the Lord.* ” The reason is obvious. This was a familiar truth in the New Testament church. Now there are three Greek words used in the N.T. to describe the coming again of Jesus Christ. But the word that is most frequently used is “ *parousia,* ” and that is the word that is used here. It describes the arrival of an emperor or a king. Paul uses the same word in ( 1 Thes 4:16 ) when he says, “ *the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,* ”

( 1 Thes 4:16 ) This word stresses the coming bodily presence of Christ for His people. Now remember it was a body not a spirit that was buried in Joseph’s tomb. It was a body that was “ *received up,* ” ( Mk 16:19 )

“ *carried up,* ” ( Lk 24:51 ) “ *taken up.* ” ( Acts 1:9 ) And it is the same body that shall descend from heaven.

***“ Some golden daybreak Jesus will come  
Some golden daybreak battles all won***

*He'll shout the victor break through the blue  
Some golden daybreak for me for you."*

**(b) IT IS COMFORTING:**

Look if you will at ( 5:8 ) Now remember the context. James is writing to believers who knew what it was to suffer. He is writing to Christian Jews scattered outside Palestine. He is relating to those who had to leave their homes, their jobs, their property. ( Acts 8:1 11:19 12:1 )

They must have wondered if there would ever be an end to persecution and opposition. My .... James's answer was to say that the return of Christ was getting closer all the time and in the light of that he says "*stablish, or fortify your hearts.*" Isn't the Second Coming of Christ tremendously comforting ? You see, it will usher in for us,

**1. UNBROKEN FRIENDSHIPS:**

Separation is the order of this day but reunion is the order of that day. "*Friends will be there I have loved long ago.*"

**2. UNRAVELLED MYSTERIES:**

All of our tangled and torturing problems solved and straightened out.

**3. UNCLOUDED VISION:**

A real sight of the Saviour, which the restrictions of our human nature make impossible down here. No wonder Paul speaking about "*the coming of the Lord,*" says

*" wherefore comfort one another with these words. "*

**(c) IT IS CHALLENGING:**

For James says in ( 5:9 ) "*the judge standeth before the door.*" Now to whom is James speaking ? He is speaking to Christians. Did you notice that he uses the word "*brethren,*" time and again in this passage.

( 5:7, 9, 10, 12 ) You see, alongside the certainty and comfort of the Lords Return James now brings the element of challenge. You see, there is a moment in the future when every believer will face the Lord. Paul says that "*we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ.*" ( 2 Cor 5:10 ) Do you know what the

Judgement Seat is all about ? It has nothing to do with the Christians rejection but everything to do with His reward. Its not about retribution but about review. Its not about condemnation but about examination. What a moment that will be when our motives will be reviewed.

( 1 Cor 4:5 ) When our service will be reviewed.

( 1 Cor 3:12-15 ) Think of it, in one sweeping moment of time our entire life of service for Christ will be reviewed, revealed and rewarded. Does that fact colour all that you do, say, think and are ? Martin Luther once said, “ *I preach as though Christ died yesterday, rose from the dead today and was coming back tomorrow.* ” Are you living like that ? Are you living as though Christ died yesterday, as though the cross had not been taken down, and could be still seen there on Calvary as a reminder of His great sacrifice for you ?

Are you living as if Christ had risen from the dead today, as if it was this morning that the women had went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away ? Are you living as if He were coming back tomorrow, as if this was your last day, your last night, your last opportunity to do something for Him ?

Dr. Campbell Morgan said, “ *I never lay my head on my pillow without thinking that, maybe before the morning breaks, the final morning may have dawned. I never begin my work without thinking that perhaps He may interrupt my work and begin His own.* ” (1)

## (2) LOOK INWARD

Isn't it easy when we are in a waiting period to become irritated and frustrated ? Do you know what you are like when the plane is delayed ? When the announcement comes over the amplification system there is a delay of three hours ! How do you respond ? My .... we are “ *waiting for His Son from heaven,* ” ( 1 Thes 1:10 ) and while we are waiting there is the potential within us to become bitter and resentful toward others. That's why James says we are to look in and,

### (a) BE PLACID:

“ *Grudge not one against another brethren,* ” ( 5:9 )

The word could be translated “ *grumble or murmur.* ” Have you ever come across groaning Christians ? Those who are always grouching and grumbling, complaining and muttering ? A middle aged man, known for his constant complaining inherited a large sum of money. However, it was not as much as he thought it would be. He complained for weeks about the amount that he actually got. Finally, one day he

told his wife that he was going to buy a farm for them to enjoy in their retirement. He asked his wife, “ *What do you think I should name It ?*” His wife replied, “ *Why don’t you call it Belly Acres.*” Aren’t there are a lot of belly acres about ? Now here were Christians under severe pressure and they were beginning to fray at the edges. They began to complain and murmur one against another. *Can I gave you a word of advice about murmuring ? Don’t do it !* That is not to say that there are times when you need to speak to the right people at the right time, in the right spirit about something that is causing you concern. I heard about a monk that joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. After the first ten years, his superior called him in and asked him if he had anything to say, but instructed him that he must limit himself to two words.

The monk said, “ *Food bad.*” Ten more years went by and the monk was once again called in before his superior and asked if he had anything to say, once again reminding him that he must limit himself to two words. The monk said, “ *Bed hard.*” Another ten years and again he was called in and asked if he had anything to say. The monk said, “ *I quit.*” His superior looked at him and said, “ *Well it does not surprise me. All you have done since you’ve been here is complain.*”

My .... don’t murmur to others about it. Do you know why ? Because you could do the Devil’s work ! You say,

“ *I would not sow seeds for the Devil.*” Of course you would. For when you and I sow discord we are sowing the seeds in God’s garden. ( Prov 6:16-19 ) (a)

### **(b) BE PRECISE:**

Did you notice ( 5:12 ) ? James was not talking about profanity here but about oaths. Now in the world of the first century people rarely signed contracts. They swore oaths instead. ( Heb 6:13-17 ) But these oaths were used so frequently that they lost their significance. There were binding oaths and non-binding oaths and loopholes abounded. People in that day used oaths just as a child today may say, “ *I cross my heart and hope to die,*” while his fingers are crossed behind his back. Now this is the context in which James brings this word of warning. I don’t think he was forbidding the taking of oaths in a court of law. You see, we live in an imperfect world and in a legal setting we’ve got to guard against perjury and ensure that the truth is spoken. My .... the real lesson is this, that in our everyday dealings we should be so precise, so honest, so straightforward that no oath should ever be necessary.

The Amplified Bible put is like this, “ *Let your yes be a simple yes and your no be a simple no.*” We ought to mean what we say. We are to people of integrity, our

words being consistent with our actions.

**(c) BE PATIENT:**

A man's car stalled in heavy traffic. He tried and tried but could not get the car restarted. To make matters worse, there was a long line of unsympathetic and impatient drivers behind him blowing their horns. He finally got out of his car and walked back to the first driver and said, "*I'm sorry but I can seem to get my car started. If you go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and blow your horn for you.*" Patience ! Now the words

"*patient,*" and "*patience,*" are used five times in this passage. They translate two Greek words, one of which is used four times and the other once. ( 5:11 ) Taken together the meanings embrace patience with people and patience with circumstances, and the latter is sometimes easier than the former. Have you not found it easier to be patient with circumstances than with people ? The Bible says we are to be patient with both. That is, *we are to face the most adverse circumstances with courage and calm, and to restrain our anger and resentment.*

I heard about a little boy called Jack. His mother heard him screaming and ran into the bedroom to find his two year old sister pulling his hair. She got the little girl to let go of his hair and then said to Jack "*I'm sorry. She does not mean it. She does not know that hurts.*" The mother was barely out of the room when she heard the little girl scream. She ran back into the bedroom and said, "*What happened ?*" Jack replied, "*She knows now.*" Patience, longsuffering ! If you are impatient you had better not become a farmer. Farmers throughout the world must wait and be patient. In Israel for example, the early rain came in late autumn and would germinate the seed. The latter rain came in the spring and would lead to the swelling of the grain toward the harvest. Knowing that both were to come in God's good time, the farmer faithfully sowed, carefully cultivated and waited patiently for God to fulfil His promise. My .... does this describe your attitude to the Coming of the Lord ? We cannot hurry Christ's return, but while we wait we can work. Only the Lord can give the harvest, but you wait for His return are you planting the seed, are you cultivating the ground, are you anticipating the harvest ?

What are we to do until the Lord comes ? (1) (2)

**(3) LOOK BACKWARD**

We are to look back to those who have gone before us.

Their example should be a challenge. Fully aware that often in waiting periods we are tempted to give up, James says we are to look back at:

**(a) THE PROPHETS:**

Look if you will at ( 5:10 ) They too were looking for the Lord. What suffering they endured as they waited His first coming. Do you remember the words of Christ ?

*“ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chicken under her wings and ye would not.”* ( Matt 23:37 Acts 7:52 ) My .... if they endured so courageously as they waited for His first coming, are you ready to live calmly as you wait for His second coming ? The Book of Hebrews and ( Ch 11 ) gives us a roll call of persecuted prophets. *Have you got family that seek to pull you down ?* Then look back to Abel. ( 11:4 ) *Are you facing a crisis of faith ?* Then look back to Abraham. ( 11:8-10 ) *Have you been used and abused ?*

Then look back to Joseph. ( 11:22 ) *Are you facing a Herculean task ?* Then look back to Moses. ( 11:24-29 )

*Are you facing obstacles and walls that cannot be scaled or tunnelled under.* Then look back to Joshua.

( 11:30 ) My .... in your present circumstances are you ready to quit ? Are you ready to crack ? To give up ? Would you look back this .... and see how God’s servants suffered greatly, submitted patiently, and sacrificed willingly. (a)

**(b) THE PATRIARCH:**

We still speak to day of the patience of Job. In my lifetime I have been with Christians who have suffered greatly, but tell me have you ever been with anyone who has suffered like this man ? In one day he lost his family, his flocks, his farm, his finance, but through it all his faith in God remained steadfast. My .... everything was against Job. His health and wealth were gone, his friends turned on him. His own wife said, *“ why you don’t just curse God and die.”* Yet from the ashes of affliction he cried, *“ the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away blessed be the name of the Lord.”* ( 1:21 ) Later, when the pressures were ever greater his trust in God was so profound that he could say, *“ though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”* *“ But He knoweth the way that I take, when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.”*

( Job 13:15 23:10 )

***“ Then trust in God through all thy days  
Fear not for He doth hold thy hand***

*Though dark thy way still sing and praise  
Sometime, up there we'll understand."*

Now are you tempted to give up ? Well, look back to Job and be challenged. My .... do we begin to match this kind of faith, this kind of patience in our much smaller difficulties and in the pressures of our every day lives ?

**Patiently Waiting for Christ's Return !** Are you ?

Many world events point to what could possibly signal the soon return of our Lord, but whether the Lord comes soon or not will you heed James's advice ? *Will you look up and be calm ? Will you look in and be clean ? Will you look back and be challenged ?* Maranatha, the Lord is Coming ! Will you be unashamed to meet Him when He appears ?