

# James 5:7-11

Advent 3, Supplement Series A, December 11, 2016

Theme: Just a little longer!  
I. Practice patience  
II. Prepare to persevere

INJ Way too many pictures of kittens dangling precariously can be found on the internet. Often the caption is printed: "Hang in there!" I suppose the message is to keep doing your best and don't give up. But it is easier to "hang in there" when help is near, isn't it? If you are dangling from a precipice, and you can see help coming, you can hang in there just a little longer until you are rescued.

James uses a similar phrase: "The Judge is standing at the door." Even if your life involves injustice and wrongdoing that makes you miserable, God sees. He is at the door, to step in and provide relief. You are not on your own. You don't face life alone. The Savior Jesus helps you with your daily struggles, and he promises to deliver you to heaven's glory.

At church we observe the days before Christmas unlike our society. We don't advertise our door buster deals. Our attention is not focused on decorations and lights. We don't run around asking what each person wants for a present. These take a back seat at church to the truth that Jesus, who came once in Bethlehem, is coming again. James reminds us that Jesus is coming soon, "The Judge is standing at the door." We can practice patience and prepare to persevere, for it will be just a little longer until Jesus returns! Advent is time to prepare our hearts for his coming again.

Admittedly, we aren't so patient. Jesus still hasn't come again, and it has been a long time since the manger. Some of us have lived many years, and we have not seen Jesus in glory yet. How much longer will it be? James tells us not to count the seconds, but to consider the certainty of Jesus' coming. "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming." "You, too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." "The Judge is standing at the door!"

What bugs you when you are impatient? Sometimes our problem is that Jesus' enemies seem to prevail. They grab power and they manipulate controls. Bible teaching about creation is laughed at. The obvious definition of marriage is obliterated. Sexual sins are glorified. Babies are killed. How can we wait patiently for Jesus when all this wickedness is rampant?

James urges us to stand firm. You are standing on solid ground when you stand on Christ Jesus. His words are sure. He hasn't changed his

mind about what is sinful. Those who flaunt their wickedness will see his wrath and judgment. The Judge is standing at the door! Practice patience when it seems they are winning the battle. Don't stop avoiding the sin. Don't stop standing up for the truth. The Judge stands at the door. Just a little longer, and he will come to end their illusion. Patiently stand firm!

Unfortunately, our battles against what is wrong aren't always fought against openly unbelieving haters of God. We spend much of our time surrounded by people who say they trust Jesus and who at least sometimes listen to his words. When these friends of ours put us to the test we also find ourselves frustrated and impatient. "Lord, come soon, for these people you have given me are driving me nuts!"

James urges us to stand firm and not grumble against one another. Don't turn on fellow believers and tear apart the body of Christ. We do it so easily, speaking with heated words. Saying hurtful things behind the back. This isn't the love that calls sinners to repentance, but the grumbling and complaining that reveals our own sinful heart. The Judge is at the door, so we ought to repent of our sin rather than pick at brothers and sisters in Christ. Stand firm just a little longer. Practice patience!

What would be taking Jesus so long? Why didn't he come yesterday or last week or last year? Those "sinners" surely deserved punishment! Jesus isn't just tallying all the sins and holding his fire until he can really let go on Judgment Day. He is also like the patient farmer James describes. The farmer has a precious crop to bring in. He doesn't want to lose any of it. He wants it to be thoroughly ripe and fully ready. If Jesus comes too soon, he would miss some precious soul. Practice patience, for Jesus is coming.

Be patient, not scared, because when Jesus comes he will also declare righteous all who trust in him. His judgment will not consume us, for we will be delivered from this world of sorrow. Patiently we cling to Jesus' word of forgiveness given in the Lord's Supper. We practice patience because he has declared us his dear children in baptism. The Judge is at the door, and the full harvest will be brought in, every soul who trusts in him. Better than "hang in there," we get to practice patience. Just a little longer, and Jesus will come to shower us with his mercy forever.

We don't like to wait, even if life is easy as we do it. Shopping lines and red lights make us seethe. It takes forever for the show or the game to come on. Tell a child to wait for a treat, and see how hard waiting is! Yet none of that is really hard compared to enduring trouble. When we are persecuted, when it is dangerous, when it is really hard — patience? Is waiting worth it if we have to suffer for our faith? James tells us not only to practice patience, but to prepare to persevere, for it is just a little longer!

The Bible gives us many examples of those who persevered in great trial. The prophet Jeremiah was put in the stocks at the courtyard of the palace. He was also thrown into a cistern and left to die. Though the king threatened death in a fiery furnace, the three men in Babylon would not worship an idol. Though Daniel was put into the lion's den, he did not renounce the true God. You might recall many Bible History lessons from Sunday School that show God's people persevering in the faith.

James also could have been pointing his readers to contemporary people of God who persevered. He wrote to Christians in Jerusalem who endured persecution every day. Friends had left town to find safety in different cities and countries. Some had been arrested for their confession. Others had even been put to death for putting their trust in Jesus. Despite the threats and torture, they did not deny their Savior. James says, don't we consider blessed those who died for their faith? They persevered, even in the face of the most severe trial. They teach us to hang on to God's promises, to stand firm in the faith too. Though it is bad and getting worse, it will be just a little longer. Jesus is coming soon. Prepare to persevere.

Martyrs, those who died for their faith, seem strange to us who live in a free country where the expression of what we believe is protected. Do any of us personally know anyone who was put to death because of what they believed about Jesus? Yet our struggles are not insignificant. The pain we suffer is not caused by a sword but by words. We might not bleed for standing firm in the faith, but we feel the scorn from the media and those who act superior for their scientific unbelief. We need to prepare to persevere in the faith, or we may lose our Jesus in all the confusion.

The preparation is just as important as the perseverance, maybe even more so. The only thing that can make you ready to withstand attacks on your faith is to be strong in God's Word. To know his promises thoroughly and to be comfortable repeating them and returning to them. Come to the Lord's Supper often for God himself to strengthen your weak knees and feeble arms. Read God's Word at home and worship here regularly. The Holy Spirit dwells richly in your heart through these means!

The daily and regular regimen of reading and remembering God's Word is what God uses to make you strong. At Baptism, he called you his own and cleansed you of your sin. Now, after baptism, he keeps you in the faith and makes it deeper and stronger and more mature by his gospel. Cherish those words of God. It will be just a little longer before Jesus comes again. The world will become more fierce in its opposition to the truth. You will suffer for your faith, so prepare to persevere, standing firm in the word.

James reminds us of the Old Testament believer Job. He was richly

blessed by God, but then was severely tested. In one day he lost all his possessions, all his family, everything. Then he lost his health and even his wife urged him to curse God. Job persevered. No person was afflicting him, but his circumstances tempted him to throw away his confidence in God, to look for something that would be easier, that would give short term relief, that would answer his question: why? Job cried out to the Lord for answers, but he trusted that though he didn't understand, the Lord God did. Prepared by the promises of God, he persevered. Just a little longer.

Are you ready for such trial? Yours may not be as extreme as Job's, but you can lose your health. Do you wonder, "What good is it to trust Jesus if I am disabled?" You can lose investments and houses and benefits and insurance. Loved ones die. The blast comes from the world to curse God for his insensitivity. To turn your back because he hasn't been nice. Your own sinful heart blames God for the troubles and would resolve never to step foot in church again because of it. Another reaction is to quietly stop coming here, to slowly change your habits, to let faith slip through the fingers of your soul and you are no longer prepared to persevere.

You cannot persevere on your own. The strength to endure does not come from within. It comes from Jesus, from the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy, James reminds us. He gives you everything you need in word and sacrament. Do your sins trouble you? He forgives you completely. Look at his hands and feet, pierced for you. He suffered for all your sins. He even bore the curse from God for you. Does pain of body or mind drag you down? Jesus stands risen from the dead to assure you it is just a little longer and he will take you to glory where there is none of that.

The whirlwind of relationships and emotions and changing circumstances threaten us, yet Jesus is our Rock, our mighty fortress. He invites us to sit and listen, to read, to recall what he has done. In mercy he called us dear children in baptism. In compassion he stands with us in trial. None can overpower him who has defeated death. None can make worthless his proclamation of peace. Jesus has given himself for you! In just a little while he will return. Stand firm! Persevere.

James says that the judge is at the door. Jesus is ready for action. Do not give up, for your redemption is drawing near. It is only two weeks until Christmas. Will you make it? I am sure you will do what needs to be done with presents and food and travel. But will you be ready for Jesus? What if he comes to judge all things before December 25? Are you ready? Whether your life comes to an end suddenly or after many years, will you still be ready? Stand firm in the faith. Practice patience. Prepare to persevere. Just a little longer. Jesus is coming soon! SDG Amen.