

Prayer

Almighty and Everlasting God, we praise You for the mystery of Your ways. Within Your plan for the salvation of the world, we are but a tiny breath in a vast expanse of sky; so like the air around us, use us according to Your purposes, whether with delicacy or with thunderous power. As we submit ourselves to Your hands we rejoice to know that we play a part in Your amazing strategy for the world! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Name before the Lord the people you know who have difficult personal issues, and bless them.

On-going prayers

- ***This week, pray about children with special needs.*** Pray for parents who have to fight hard to gain help for their children's educational needs
- *Pray for Afghanistan and the uncertainties facing its future*
- *Give thanks for medical advances that relieve suffering for many*

Meditation

When the spirit is low Christ speaks,
But the soul finds it hard to hear;
For sins have hedged themselves around the bruised heart
As a barrier of our brokenness; a barricade of our distress.

We come this low too often
When life turns wrong, unawares;
The enemy will twist the knife through all we do and love,
To break our faith, our hope, the assurance of eternal life.

We suffer too who love the Lord,
And fail to attain His Providence;
Our best remains inadequate, a witness to our ignorance
Until we yield in heart again to Him and find forgiveness.

Seek Him for effective grace;
He strips the hurting soul to nought,
And when the enemy's exposed and truth laid bare, we find
Our brokenness is but the path by which we find our healing.

Bible Study - James 5:7-9

⁷ Therefore be patient, my friends, until the Lord comes. Look how a farmer waits for the earth to produce its precious fruits; being patient all through the early and late rains. ⁸ You too must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near; ⁹ and dear friends, do not grumble about each other, so that you are not judged yourselves. Look! The Judge is standing ready at the door!

Review

This passage begins the last part of James' letter, and it returns to two important themes which, if we have studied carefully, have characterised the whole letter. The first of these is patience (5:7,8), and the second is the second coming of Christ (5:9). Paying attention to these two things will give us a fresh perspective on many matters of faith, because by waiting patiently for the Lord come again to be our Judge, we live dependent upon Him, not ourselves. The picture of the Lord standing 'at the door' in judgement is imposing, and makes us feel small before the authority of God most High.

In the earlier part of James' letter, he urged patience on his readers (1:2-4) telling them that they must endure trials that would produce the qualities of faith God requires. The theme continues when James encourages his readers to 'endure through temptations' (1:12f.), and be 'slow to anger' (1:19f.). Now,

towards the end of the letter, he picks up the theme again, giving an example of patience from the field of agriculture. It may be that James was speaking from personal experience, because there is a long church tradition that suggests that in Mary and Joseph's home Jesus, as the eldest son, joined his father in the carpenter's workshop, and His brothers either went fishing (because they lived near Lake Galilee) or worked on the land. If James worked on the land, this would explain the predominance of agricultural examples used in this letter (1:10-11,18,21; 3:18).

We can never know if this is true, but it is a reasonable picture to have in mind when reading the letter. In truth, the seasons of rain normally experienced in that part of the world came early, which enabled seeds to germinate, and then later, helping the grain to swell and produce a fruitful crop. As with all agriculture, but especially where people were dependent upon the timing of rains, the farmer had to exercise great patience whilst tending the crop if they were ever to gain maximum yield from a harvest. The picture helps us understand James' connection between patience and the coming of God's Kingdom, for when James spoke of patience in matters of faith, he did so because of his own confident hope in the harvest of God's Kingdom when Christ would come in glory (5:7). It is too easy for us to be distracted by the world and forget the fact that Christ will indeed come again in glory, and James encourages us to be confident as well as patient; saying 'strengthen your hearts...' (5:8)

James believed that patient maturity of faith focussed on both the things of God and His coming again in glory could lift God's people out of grumbling about others; 'do not grumble about each other, so that you are not judged yourselves' (5:9). This is a precious and highly pertinent verse of scripture, for in some parts of the world, complaining about brothers and sisters in Christ has become a deadly disease, and Satan has created unhappiness and division amongst God's people today with considerable success. However, the best defence against this is to be so focussed on Christ just as James says, and this will save us from fostering the harsh judgements that foment these divisions. Satan cannot stand the dedication of those who seek to discern the truth in Christ because this constitutes a threat to his very existence (Rev 20:11-15)!

James' imposing words about the Judge standing ready at the door (5:9) echo those of John in his Revelation; 'Look, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice ...' (Rev 3:20). For some, this picture presents a frightening prospect, but this is because they have not yet been led to a place where they are comfortable with the presence of Christ and the fact of His coming again in glory. Nevertheless, for those who know that their lives are already committed to a God who saves them, this is one of the most exciting things one can read about in the Bible! In our hearts, we all know what these words mean to us.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How can this passage assist us to live a godly life and aspire to higher things, for the sake of our own faith and the good of all God's people?
2. Discuss how we can help each other cultivate patience within our lives.
3. In what ways does grumbling effect the life of your church. Where does it come from and how may it be overcome?

Discipleship

Discipleship issue found in this text

- *The coming of Christ in glory*
- *The justice of God*
- *Patience*

Personal comments from the author:

Patience is a virtue! There are plenty of occasions when I have prayed and asked the Lord to come again more because of my own impatience or my own personal troubles than any sense of spiritual conviction. I also know that like others, I can be very critical, and there does come a point where I must stand back, because all judgements are ultimately the Lord's, not mine. I know I need to hear this.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *What must you do to become more patient? Whatever issues they are, write them down and place them before the Lord in prayer. Do this regularly over a period of time and listen for what the Lord would say to you about these issues.*

- *Spend a day or two in fasting for the church, the people of God. Fast either by abstaining from one meal in any day, or by refraining from food for a defined period of time such as a day or two.*

Final Prayer

May we find our peace in You, Lord Jesus; carpenter of Nazareth, teacher of Israel, servant of all and healer of the sick. Bless our work, teach us the truth, lead us where we should go and help us in our need, we pray; Lord Jesus, Son of God, Saviour of the World: AMEN
