

**James 23 – Wisdom While Waiting**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC 11-5-2023**

We are continuing our study of James called Wisdom for Everyday Life. Two weeks ago I preached on Wisdom about the Second Coming and I taught on the signs of the end times. In that message we learned about waiting for the Lord's return.

James 5:7-8 says:

*Be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the early and latter rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

James tells us to be patient while we wait for the return of Christ. And Peter tells us why in 2 Peter 3:9:

*The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Peter tells us what God is waiting for – He's waiting for as many people as possible to come to salvation through Jesus before He returns.

Today I want to preach on Wisdom While Waiting. What does the Bible say we should do while waiting on the Lord's return?

**1. Be Patient while Waiting.**

I've already taught this, but James says more about it in James 5:10-11.

*Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.*

You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

James is telling us to be patient in difficult circumstances. Of course, we want out of difficult circumstances as soon as possible. But sometimes we must persevere through them.

James talks of both patience and perseverance. They are similar, but different. Both words include the necessity of waiting, but patience is needed whether you are waiting on something good to happen or something bad to stop happening.

But the word persevere literally means “through the severe.” The word severe means “harsh, something that is difficult, really bad.” To persevere means you go through tough times.

You keep going no matter how difficult, how discouraging or how long it takes. You don’t quit, you don’t turn back, you don’t give up.

One of the New Testament words for perseverance literally means “to remain under.” It means when you are in a tough time, you don’t just seek to escape from it, you seek to learn from it.

James said that the Old Testament prophets are examples of patience. Even though they endured much suffering, hardship and persecution, they endured patiently. Then James speaks of the perseverance of Job. Even though the enemy afflicted Job and took everything he had, Job persevered. He refused to turn on God despite his severe and mysterious suffering.

The Bible also speaks of the perseverance of Jesus. Hebrews 12:1-2 says:

*Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus, our example, endured the sufferings of the cross with perseverance. He did it for the joy set before Him – the salvation of many people. And whatever race God has for you to run will take perseverance.

The means persistence – faithfulness – stick-to-it-tive-ness.

It means to hang on when you feel like letting go.

It means to hang in when you feel like giving in.

It means to hold on when you don’t feel like going on.

To do that requires an eternal perspective that sees the reward of perseverance! We must persevere for the joy set before us – which is to fulfill our destiny of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. I remind you of James 1:2-4:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

This means that we will never reach spiritual maturity without perseverance! And you’ll never develop perseverance without going through trials of many kinds. Some of us never mature because we give up too easily and too soon.

James says be like a farmer who has to patiently wait on the harvest. Some of us have missed out on our harvest because we gave up.

**I wonder how close some of us were to a harvest when we gave up.**

How close were we to a financial miracle when we quit tithing?

How close were we to a healing when we quit praying?

How close were we to a miracle when we quit believing?  
Don't give up before your harvest.

Our harvest will eventually come – some of it in this lifetime and some is stored up in heaven for us. God is telling us to trust His timing.

## **2. Stand Firm while Waiting.**

James 5:8 says:

*You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

The phrase “stand firm” is translated different ways in different translations that give us different shades of meaning.

To stand firm means to establish your hearts: to strengthen or make stable; to have an unwavering confidence; to hold inflexibly to your purpose; to keep your hopes high; to not give up; to be courageous.

So, while we wait, we must be patient and we must strengthen our hearts. Evidently, you can wait in weakness or in strength. With fear or with courage. Waveringly or steadfastly. That's why the Bible tells us to guard our hearts.

## **3. Don't Complain while Waiting**

When we have to wait for something for a long time, we tend to grumble and complain. First, we grumble and complain against God. We treat waiting on God like waiting in line at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles. And then we tend to complain against each other. That's why James says in verse 9

*Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

God takes complaining seriously and will deal with it. That's a strong reason to not complain while you're waiting!

Whether we complain against God or against each other, complaining is always destructive. Here are some reasons why:

### **COMPLAINING IS UNBELIEF:**

Complaining against God is always an expression of unbelief toward God's plan for our life. When we complain, what we are really saying is that we don't like the way God is ordering our life.

We may think our complaints are no big deal but they are really saying that we know better than God. And God hears those complaints!

In Exodus 16 the children of Israel were complaining against Moses and Aaron because of the difficult conditions in the desert. Moses said in verse 8:  
*The Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord.*

Sometimes our complaints against people are veiled complaints against God.

### **COMPLAINING ONLY CAUSES MORE PROBLEMS:**

I used to think people complained because they had a lot of problems. But I came to realize that many have problems because they complain. Complaining doesn't change anything or make situations better. It just causes more frustration and spreads discontent and discord.

### **COMPLAINING STEALS OUR JOY:**

You can't complain and have joy at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive. Complaining is an attitude that if left unchecked will destroy our capacity to experience joy and genuine thankfulness.

Thanksgiving is the expression of gratefulness and is the very opposite of complaining. In fact – **complaining is to Satan what praising is to God!**

Giving thanks expresses appreciation for what God has done, what He has promised. Complaining is an expression of no appreciation or contentment.

If a Christian really believes that the Lord is in control of their life and is working "ALL THINGS together for their good," he will stop complaining and start thanking the Lord for the plan He is working together for us.

The Bible warns us against complaining, but what do we do when we feel like complaining? **Instead of complaining against God, we should take our complaint to God.** Psalm 142:1-2 says:

*I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before Him; before Him I tell my trouble.*

Not complaining or arguing does not mean we never express our feelings about anything – it just means to be careful what we say. It means to have a thankful heart rather than a complaining spirit – to have a heart to love and accept others rather than judge them and argue with them and complain about them.

How important it is that believers guard the words of their mouth! The scriptures tell us that our words are literally the basis for whether we are justified or condemned. Jesus said in Matthew 12:36-37

*But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*

Realizing this, we should eliminate negative words, griping, or grumbling, and fill our mouths with praise and thanksgiving! Along this line, James 5:12 says:

*Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.*

#### **4. Be Honest while Waiting**

Basically, James is telling us to be people of our word. We should not be people who have to swear in order to be believed. We should not say:

- I swear on my kids' lives
- I swear on my mother's grave
- If I'm lying, may God strike me dead

People say these things to try to add weight to their words. It suggests that under normal circumstances they lie or deceive, but when they swear, we should take them seriously. James said, "Do not do this!" And so did Jesus in Matthew 5:33-37:

*I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*

You should not have to swear for people to believe you! Your word should be your bond! Jesus said that whatever is more than a simple yes or no is from Satan.

Many Jewish people in the time James wrote made distinctions between "binding oaths" and "non-binding oaths." The way an oath was spoken what a way of "crossing your fingers behind your back" when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemned. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for doing this in Matthew 23:16-17.

*Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?*

Jesus taught against oaths that were used in this way. Some people won't even swear to tell the truth in court because of this. But the Bible does not forbid the swearing of all oaths. In fact, holy people in the Bible like Abraham made use of oaths. And Hebrews 6:13-14 says this about God:

*When God made His promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."*

So, God is obviously not against all oaths, only against the swearing of deceptive, unwise, or flippant oaths.

James said to tell the truth lest you fall into judgment. This lack of character will be exposed at the judgment seat of Christ. This should motivate us all the more to prepare for that judgment by our speaking with integrity.

I remind you that in the middle of this passage about perseverance and patience and complaining and telling the truth, James said in verse 11:

*You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

**What enables us to persevere through the tough times is to know that God is full of compassion and mercy.**

Job went through a lot and it's hard to understand it, but in the end God was compassionate and merciful to him. Job received double for everything he lost! And James said we'll receive the same - the early and former rain together! God will restore what we've lost if we don't give up!

In my sermon on the second coming of Jesus, I told you that Matthew 24 and 25 are the main prophecies that Jesus gave about His return. Matthew 24 gives us the signs to look for. Matthew 25 gives us three parables that tell us three things we should do until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

### **5- We Must Watch While Waiting**

There's a difference between waiting and watching. Matthew 25:1-13 tells the parable of the ten virgins. The foolish ones were not ready for the bridegroom, but the wise ones were ready and watching. Jesus said in verse 13:

*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*

We are not just waiting, we are watching. The word watch here literally means "stay awake and alert." It's like a military guard who is standing watch. Jesus says, Don't let My return sneak up on you. Be watching all the time.

In the next two parables, Jesus tells us what to do while we are watching. The second parable of Matthew 25 is the parable of the talents. Some of us are given 1 talent, some 2 and some 5. When Jesus comes back, He will hold up accountable for what we did with what He gave us.

### **6- We must Work While we are Waiting**

We need to be watching – we also need to be working. By working I don't just mean to have a job. I mean doing kingdom work by using the talents He gave us and using them for Him. Don't take this lightly. God is going to hold you accountable for everything He has given to you. We will all give an account to God one day about how we used our money, our time, our talents, our words, and our abilities.

God has graciously given us all these things not just to make a living, but to make a life! A life that works. A life that glorifies Him. What are you doing with the gifts God has given to you? Are you using them for yourself or for Him?

### **7- While we are waiting for the second coming, we must witness**

The third parable of Matthew 25 is the parable of the sheep and goats. The sheep are the ones who witness by feeding the hungry, helping the sick and visiting those in needs. In other words, they witness by meeting needs. And what do the goats do? Nothing. Jesus said in verse 46

*Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*

Don't say you are ready to meet Jesus if you are doing nothing for Him.  
Don't say you are ready to meet Jesus if you are doing nothing for others.  
Don't say you are ready to meet Jesus if you are not watching for Him, working for Him, and witnessing about Him. Jesus said He is coming back and we must be ready. In fact, the Bible ends with these words in Revelation 22:20

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

People think they know what Jesus is like, but when He comes back the second time, it will be very different from the first time.

The first time He was a lamb slain; the second time He will be the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He came the first time to die; He is coming back to raise the dead.

The first time He wore a crown of thorns; the next time He will wear a crown of glory. The first time He died on a cross; He's coming back as a conquering King

The first time He was the Savior of the world; the second time He will be the Judge of the world. The first time He came in meekness; He is coming again in majesty.

The first time He rode a lowly donkey into Jerusalem; when He comes back He be a conquering King riding a white horse leading the armies of heaven. His eyes will be a flame of fire and out of His mouth will go a sharp sword. His name will be written on His thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. When He comes again

every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Are you ready for that great and glorious day? Are you ready to meet your Lord?