

Our CPC family has been going through a lot together here at the beginning of 2020. Maybe your 2020 is off to a rough start as well. Maybe you are weighed down with grief or sadness. Or maybe discouragement runs deep right now. Perhaps some circumstance is overwhelming you. For us to ask, "Why God?" or "Why this, that, or now?" are natural questions to ask. It's an uncomfortable space because we find we are living in the uncomfortable "In-Between."

You may be thinking, "Living in the uncomfortable in-between of what?" It's living in that space between Christ's first coming and his second coming. The space between him inaugurating his kingdom when he first came to earth, and when he will return in glory in the future when he kingdom is fully consummated.

In this in-between, we get glimpses of God's kingdom, but we are not yet experiencing the fullness of it. We know that Christ has already come. We know that Christ has already suffered, died, and rose again. We know the Word of God and the Holy Spirit has already been given.

And in this in-between, we know things are still broken. We know that sin still brings sorrow, suffering, and separation. In the in-between, we see injustice. In the in-between, we see creation suffering. The Bible says that in this state of in between, we are compelled to cry out at injustice and cry out for things to be made right in our hearts and our culture. We cry out against death because we were created for life, and not to experience death.

So in the uncomfortable in-between, what do we do? We wait. We wait for the church to be made new. We wait for a new heaven and a new earth. And in this in-between time of struggle and trial, we seek to understand, we seek peace, and we seek tools to help us wait, to encourage others who suffer from injustice in the uncomfortable in-between.

Last week, in James chapter 5, verses 1-6, we learned that oppression was rampant in James' world in the in-between. James had strong words of warning for the wealthy who oppressed the poor, who especially oppressed poor Christians in James' audience.

Now in verses 7 through 12, James equips those poor oppressed Christians on how to respond as strong witnesses for Christ in the in-between time. And James equips you and I right here who are called to live smack dab in the uncomfortable in-between.

We are called to do a difficult thing - to wait. I'm not too good at waiting. I don't like to wait. Most people don't like to wait.

So often, waiting on God in the in-between feels like unoccupied time to us. But if our God is sovereign over time and events, there is no unoccupied time in his plan. So it's right to ask, "What does God want to happen in us while we wait?" It's a breakthrough for all of us to realize that God wants to form us, redeem us, and give us a new perspective on what it looks like to wait in the uncomfortable in-between. The first thing James tells us is that while we wait, we are to learn patience.

### **Be Patient in the Uncomfortable In Between**

Is there any important character quality for a believer living in the uncomfortable in-between than expressing patience? *"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming" (James 5:7a).*

Patience is quietness of heart, rest in the soul in the face of some uncomfortable delay. Why don't any of us want to accept delay? Because our sin shrinks our world down to "me" or "mine" or what I want in the here and now. That is why James reminds us of the coming of the Lord.

We can't understand the high calling to show patience unless we view it from the perspective of eternity. Everything happening now is a preparation for the "then." If there is no such thing as forever or eternity, the game plan becomes get whatever pleasure you can get as fast and as much as you can get in the "now." Delayed gratification only makes sense when we embrace that everything that is happening in the moment is God. It is His grace marching us through his plan toward the coming of the Lord. And when we arrive on that glorious day, the wait here will seem like a very short wait.

In verse 7, James has moved from denouncing the oppressors of the poor back to shepherding his fellow Christians. He uses the phrase brothers and sisters four times in these next six verses.

The word "patient" means that while we may wait in the in-between, we must resist the temptation to turn to violence or turn to sin to stop our oppressors. It means that while we wait patiently, we remember that the Lord and his vast armies of angels do hear our cries and see the injustice.

Remember back in verse 5 last week, James had condemned the wicked who exploited the poor when he said to them, *"you have fattened yourself for the day of slaughter"* and today in 7, that same

judgment day that will condemn the wicked will also bring comfort to the believers because believers look forward to the Lord's coming with hope instead of dread.

But in the uncomfortable in-between, James calls us to wait... to wait well. And he uses an example of a first-century farmer to teach us. *"See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains."* (v. 7b).

Farmers are the perfect illustration for waiting because once farmers plant their crops they wait for the results. Farmers illustrate the theology of patience. Why is the farmer good at waiting? He can wait because he understands that the waiting is not useless; it's not meaningless; it's not in vain.

We could say that the farmer can wait because he knows that radical change is taking place even though he can't see it. The seed generates shoots, and those shoots go deeper into the ground and up toward the topsoil. These shoots will eventually be seen, and grow into a plant. That plant blossoms and those blossoms eventually become growing fruit.

The biblical view of patience is not just that the uncomfortable in-between is just meaningless moments while we wait around for good things to happen in the future. There is radical transformation taking place amid the wait. As Paul Tripp, author and pastor, says, "Waiting is not about what you will get at the end of the wait; it's about what you become as you wait."

As a seed eventually changes into fruit, so God is about radically changing our hearts. He uses the wait in the uncomfortable in-between to transform us into the image of our Lord Jesus so that our lives bear fruit that is eternal. Patiently waiting has meaning and purpose.

The spring and autumn rains were the early and late rains. James readers would have understood that autumn rains in October and November came before the early harvest, and late rains in March and April came before the late harvest. Just as farmers can't make the rain or the harvest happen, so we cannot compel God to return according to any timetable other than God's.

Farmers can keep busy by hoeing, weeding, and fertilizing, so James is saying, "Here is what you can do. Learn from God while you wait." We are not just waiting for God's future grace. While we wait patiently in the uncomfortable in-between, we are obtaining God's grace and learning from God.

We see Pastor James here. He understands that waiting can bring forth conflict in our hearts.

**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! vv. 8-9**

Grumbling includes complaining, whining, criticizing, and when we criticize each other, we are judging each other. So that

explains why James reminds his readers about God's judgment. It's easy to minimize the sin of grumbling. We can pass it off as "Oh, that's a person who cares. He or she is raising a problem." I'm good at raising the problem; my issue is I'm not as good at raising solutions, so I come off as grumbling.

Sometimes we need to recalibrate with some good theology to get right with God. If we truly embrace the theology of the sovereignty of God, that God is in charge, then we would have to say every moment of grumbling is grumbling against God. I don't think there is such a thing as a neutral grumble. Our grumbling is theological. When we grumble, we are expressing our dissatisfaction that we are not in control of our lives, and if we were somehow in charge of our lives, we would be better sovereigns than God. Grumbling is evidence of our dissatisfaction with the sovereignty of God.

I've learned that waiting exposes weaknesses in my heart to doubt. My dad is now at the end of life care. He isn't comfortable. His life is tough. He can't visibly do much. His loved ones are tired. We are weary of seeing him suffer and decline. I find myself questioning the wait - grumbling. "Lord, just take him in his sleep to go be with my mom is in heaven. Isn't my request, and the timing of my request the compassionate thing Lord?"

If you are like me, maybe your context of waiting exposes a weakness in your heart as well - to doubt, to question the goodness of God, to wonder if he is in all of this, faithful to his promises. In moments of waiting, there can be a war in your heart.

There is an enemy who would whisper in your ear, "God is not faithful. God is not near the broken-hearted; God does not listen to your prayers."

Romans 4 is about Abraham. It says that as Abraham waited those long years for the promised son, Isaac, he grew strong in faith. In the wait, in the uncomfortable in-between, resolve to be in God's Word regularly in 2020. Take in God's promises, pray, commit to being in community with other brothers and sisters. And remember the evidence of God's grace in your life in the past.

**For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Titus 2:11-13**

Here is the scary thing. I think we need to own this. It is quite possible to sing a hymn of praise, Great is Thy Faithfulness on Sunday morning and later that day or week sing a hymn of grumble at the way God brings that faithfulness into our lives through the particular circumstances he brings our way. It's about learning to do life in the uncomfortable in-between.

To learn more, James brings us the example of the prophets. These guys knew what it meant to live before God in the uncomfortable in-between. They were called to preach things they didn't fully understand. They were called to proclaim things they couldn't see, and under great distress, in the face of persecution, they trusted the Lord and were faithful to speak his truth.

### **Follow the Examples of the Prophets and Job and Persevere in the Uncomfortable In Between**

*"Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (v. 10).* Biblical patience calls for believers to be actively persevering despite the suffering they endure.

I heard someone say, "Perseverance is patience with legs on it." In the specific case of the prophets, patience looked like perseverance as they unapologetically spoke out, advocated for, and defended the oppressed. They didn't incite violence, but they were not passive. They represented the Lord with conviction to preach light into the darkness. Moses, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Daniel, the list is long. And they suffered for it.

So, if we are to use the prophets as an example of how to persevere, we fight injustice in the uncomfortable in-between with wise speech and the courage to take light in dark places. We share the love and grace of God as we go about life.

Now think about this. As God asks you to wait in the uncomfortable in-between, it may indeed mean that God has chosen for you to experience difficulty. How would we know that? Well, we know that because we know we live in a fallen world.

And in those moments of suffering that we go through, it's easy to go wobbly in our obedience. We get discouraged, and maybe we let go of good habits and wonder if it's worth it to pray. Maybe you find yourself asking in your circumstance, "Is it worth it? Bible, community group, and church is any of it worth it?"

So let me say it plainly. It's in that moment of suffering when it's most important to obey. It's in that time God's grace comes to your heart and soul in some form. Maybe it takes the form of a good word from Scripture, the physical presence of a friend, maybe a song of hope, or an undeniable affirmation of his care and love as you walk the journey. In that moment of suffering, God's grace breaks through and holds you up.

Maybe you think of Job and say, well, he wasn't that great of an example of someone who waited well. He complained. I complain. He suffered. I'm suffering. He was alone. I feel alone. And maybe the ingenious thing here is that Pastor James gives us the example of Job to demonstrate just how great God's grace and patience is with our struggle.

**As you know, we count as 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. v. 11**

Job's wait was messy. But he never forgot the Lord. He persevered. And it isn't just about God returning wealth to Job. I'm about to read you a historical example of what James is trying to teach us. This is at the end of Job's debate with God, the end of God's very powerful lecture to Job.

**Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'"**

**Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:1-6**

So, where is the blessing for Job? What is the fruit of his patience and perseverance? Here it is. It is a blessing we can't purchase. It's a blessing we could not deserve. It's a blessing only brought to us through God's grace. The greatest blessing of doing life in the uncomfortable in-between is the blessing of a radical heart change. That is what God is after. Through Job's trial, God reformed Job.

Through our trials, God reforms us! And James is telling us that God isn't mean. He is not vengeful. The wait that God has called you to is in some way designed to display God's glorious compassion and mercy, as he said in verse 11.

I know you and I long for the mercy of release in our circumstances. For me, it's for my dad, and it isn't a bad thing, because when we long for release from our uncomfortable in-between, we are longing for eternity. And that is a good thing. I am glad to say that for all of our moments of uncomfortableness there is relief. But we don't just need relief and release; we need the mercy of God refining us to make us more like him.

### **Guard Your Integrity in the Uncomfortable In Between**

**Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned. v. 12**

As I studied this verse this week, it seemed like this was a totally different topic. The idea is that when we invoke God's name, such as, "I swear to God I will do this, or do that," we are bringing God into our promise. If we go back on the promise, we have brought discredit to God's name.

The first-century context is that poor and oppressed Christians might be tempted to fend off creditors or get credit by saying anything even swearing through an oath, even when these poor

Christians might have known that they didn't have any chance of paying off their debt.

But in our 21st-century context, verse 12 is a call to integrity. That no matter what I am facing, no matter how disappointed I am, no matter how discouraged I am, no matter how big my trial, I will be a person of character. I will only ever speak what is clear and true, and I don't need to make an oath because I am committed to the integrity of the heart.

In the uncomfortable in-between, I must be a man of patience, perseverance, and a man of integrity where my word and deed are one.

You know its winter in other parts of the country. My friends in the Northern Midwest have a good three months left of winter weather. I remember my first year I was driving with a friend in the middle of winter. For the miles and miles of farmland, I only saw white snow, dormant trees, and frozen ponds. I was grumbling about the long wait for spring. Every day was more snow, slush, and gray skies. Then one day, I looked out of my car window and out on a field I saw brown. I remember getting so excited. Spring is almost here. Soon it will be green again! I went to a friend, and I said, "Hey, I was on Hwy 52, and I started to see some dirt. The snow is melting. My wait is almost over." Uh, Dan, I hate to disappoint you, that was manure. The farmers cleaned out their barns. That's manure from the dairy cows. You won't see dirt until the snow finally melts in May. I sighed and asked God, "Why am I here, God? We were not created for six months of winter, were we?"

Maybe you feel like this. Your world seems icy cold right now. Your life is not filled with vibrant colors. It's monochrome; it's gloom. It's dormant. Nothing seems to be growing. And then maybe recently you started to see some evidence that winter was receding in your life. You saw dirt; it seemed like new growth was just around the corner. But when you got closer, your heart sank. What was ahead of you was not dirt, it looked like dirt, but it was actually stinking dirty manure in disguise. For those of us in winter, and the hope we had turned out to only be manure, it's right to end today with someone we haven't talked much about yet. It's Jesus.

I grumble. I'm not patient. I like my plans. I want God's grace to bring life to my plans, my timing, and my outcome. But here is grace: We are not alone in the struggle. Jesus entered our uncomfortable in-between.

**Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4: 14-16**

Jesus knew what he would be facing. He knew he would face injustice and rejection. He knew he would face the cross. He knew he would face a tomb, but he also knew there was a blessing on the other side.

And he waited to bless us. He did all this for our salvation, so we could have an eternity with him. Praise him for that today. He did that so that in the here and now we could run to someone who gets it. And who not only understands, but bought our forgiveness, and bought our capacity to be conformed to his image. He bought our way to heaven after the uncomfortable in-between has ended.

Jesus is our hope. He's why we wait. He's how we wait. He understands, and he continues to exercise perfect patience and perseverance until that glorious day when he comes again.

**He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. Revelation 22: 20-21**

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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