

The Reality of God - Part 1

My sermon tonight's going to be on the reality of God. Think about speaking on behalf of God. There are two outcomes that come from it. One is that when I speak about God's character, about who He is, unchanging, His promises for sure, the one that has been born again, the one that is a child of God, would want to hear more and more of His character, would want to hear more and more of His promises, would want that truth that he hears to be lived out in his life. But the other outcome is a reality for the one that does not know God, that does not want to know anything about God. When he hears about God, he disdains what he hears. He not just physically shuts his ears, but he shuts his heart to the things of God. I can't have any control over that. My job is to preach from His Word faithfully, to attend to His Word carefully, and to preach it with boldness.

I desire to see more of the latter come into the group that wants to hear more and more of God and wants to hear more about His attributes, that wants to hear more of His promises, and wants to live in His truth so much more that it's no longer him, but it is Christ. It is Christ that lives in that person, and that's what my desire is to see tonight as you hear about the realities of God because He is faithful, because He is perfectly patient with us, perfectly patient. And this is the theme that I will be preaching from. God brought it to my remembrance from last Sunday, as you recall the text, and there are so many more texts that came out from that text to show God's perfect patience, and the word is called longsuffering, longsuffering.

And you know what? This is what God does. He takes what He is, and He places it into our lives, but it will not be the way that you may seem that it will come because He often, actually more than often, He sends troubles to you. He's the one that sends trials in your life. He's the one that allows you to suffer, not for your sin primarily, because you have been blood-bought, you are now righteous before His eyes, but that you suffer for Christ, that you suffer for Christ, and that you live for Him. And in that life that you live, you are displaying the gospel. What greater privilege is it than to display the gospel in our lives?

So if you would, please turn with me to First Timothy, verse 15. 1 Timothy, beginning with verse 15, it will be chapter 1, chapter 1, verse 15. It reads, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." This word "faithful saying," it literally means to trust in God's promise, to trust in God's promise. So what He says here, what Paul says, is saying it's worthy to be accepted that all that are in Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's the promise. He came to save sinners.

And he says, "but I am chief." This is interesting because what he's saying here is that He saved—Jesus saved me, and I am the chief of all. I mean, what he means is that there is not going to be—you can't go above what Paul is as a sinner. Why is that? He blasphemed God. He blasphemed God, but yet God sovereignly saves him, even though he persecuted God's very people. He saves him. And so he calls himself chief, inspired by God to say that about himself. And what happens is that he no longer—you'll see in his life, he no longer tells people of how wonderful I am, that I'm a Pharisee, a Pharisee, that I live by the law. He doesn't say anything about how wonderful he is. He no longer says all the stuff I accomplished as a person. But you will see that in his life, going forward from the moment that he is saved, he now tells people that he's a sinner, of whom I am chief. And he says that Christ saved me.

And he repeats this theme over and over again: I'm a sinner, I'm a sinner, and Christ saved me. That is all important to Paul. And for every believer here, that is you, that you can say to other people, "My accomplishments, not that great. My life, I can no longer say it's wonderful." You can say with your heart, "I am a sinner, I am a sinner, and the greatest thing that ever happened to me is that Christ saved me, saved me from my sin." That should be your theme over and over and over again because that is what Paul is showing here. And he says this, he says, "I obtained mercy." He was going in a direction that he thought was right, and he was all zealous for it. And what is mercy?

He doesn't end up continuing. God saves him from the path that he was on. He has mercy on him.

So he says, "I obtained that mercy, that in me first Christ Jesus might show forth all longsuffering." He was perfectly patient with Paul, even when he was on the road to greater destruction. What does He do? What does Jesus do? Perfectly patient. The moment that he was going to do all-out—I'm pretty sure it was going to be an all-out war against His church—at that moment, His perfect patience turns him. And then He sets a pattern for everyone to believe in Him to life everlasting. What a great privilege we have to live in this way, where our lives are living for the everlasting, for the everlasting, because we are saved from sin. And what is then God's purpose? It is for us to experience His perfect patience, for us to experience His perfect patience.

Now, how does He do it? How does He forge this perfect patience upon your life? It's through trials. It's through trials, and through trials, the character of God is formed. So now turn with me to James, chapter 1, verses 3-4. It reads, "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." That word "perfect work," that first part of that, what it means is brought to its completion, brought to its end. So whatever trial you are currently experiencing, Christian, He wants that trial to meet its ultimate end.

So think right now, what are some trials that you're experiencing? And you say, "Oh gosh, how long is this going to last? How long am I going to have to experience this trial?" Don't look at the problem. Look at the faithfulness of God. Turn your eyes from the problem. Turn your eyes to what He's trying to do through that trial because He's trying to create a complete work. For what? What is the purpose? That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. That is the ultimate end, that you are resting so much in God that you know what? This trial, it's nothing. I don't want anything. I just want to experience You in this trial. That's what God is trying to pull you to, to Himself.

And why? And this is the exciting part, because there is a purpose to it. There is an absolute perfect purpose to this because, one, it's going to make you mature in your character. It's going to make you mature.

Why? Because when a trial comes, you're not going to just say, "I'm going to quit on this. I'm not going to just stop halfway." I'm going to allow this trial to go to its completion, but I'm going to hope in God. I'm going to hope in God that He's going to help me through whatever this is, this entirety of this trial. You see there, to where I just want nothing but Him, that I just want Him in this trial. And it turns you away from your selfish desires, your doubt about God, your rebellion against Him. And instead of resisting the process that God has put before you, He wants you to trust in His goodness, to trust in His goodness.

Because any quick fixes in those trials, or you stop too soon, you won't experience His goodness. You won't. And that is the refining work that He does in our lives. Look at Romans 3:4—Romans, chapter 5, verses 3-4. It says this, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope. And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." You see, we see here, it's not so much about intellectual growth. Do you see anywhere there that we're supposed to just be puffed up in knowledge? Do you see anywhere in there? No. Or do you see that we need to just become more moral in our ways? No.

Look at how it works. It works through tribulations. A mature believer, a strong Christian, is someone who can go through tribulations and let that continue on to where you're experiencing patience. And then what is that? It is patience, the end? No, it continues. And then you experience God in that patience, just as I mentioned in James 1:3-4. And then what? You don't just experience God, but now hope. He wants you to be hopeful, Christian. He wants you to see beyond the trials, the tribulations. He wants you to see there's hope at the end. It's not going to be forever. You're not going to have to experience whatever trial you're going through forever. That's hope. That's what hope instills. And don't be ashamed of it. Don't be ashamed of your trials, he says, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.

It's not you sustaining yourself. It's the Holy Spirit. He's sustaining you through all, from the beginning, to tribulation, to all the way to hope.

Will you allow Him to? You yield to Him, and as you are, He's going to go through all of this process to help you to come out with hope. Because what do tribulations immediately do? Oh my goodness, everything's falling apart, right? Isn't that our flesh? Oh, I want to give up. Oh, I'm so frustrated. Oh, I'm so angry about what this person or that thing's happening in my life. Pause for a moment. Pause for a moment. What is this experience leading me to? Or rather, what is God wanting me to experience through this process?

These verses have often helped me many times to see what the complete work of whatever tribulation I'm going through and seeing, is this from God? Because the worst thing to do is shift that from, "It's not God," to, "Oh, it's that person, or it's that thing," right? We don't battle against flesh and blood, do we? So always pause and think about His Word. Let His Word be your strength, and He will prove Himself. His promise is sure. It's a faithful saying. What He says in His Word is true. Let that be your anchor. Let that be what helps you through it. Romans 12, verse 12. So you remember how that process ends with hope. Look at what he says, "Rejoicing in hope." Are you rejoicing right now? Because that should be your end result, from tribulation to patience to experience to hope to rejoice in your hope. What is this word "rejoice"? It means to thrive, to be well. Are you well in your tribulation? That's what rejoicing means, to be well. And it says, "Patient in tribulation." So what does that mean? Don't flee from the tribulation. Don't run away from it. Go into the tribulation and see what God does every moment, every time. And then what does he say? "Continuing instant in prayer." I love that because what tribulation does, the way it's pictured, it's like pressing you from the outside in. Do you ever feel like that when you're in tribulation? It's like every side is pressing in, pressing in, until you relent or you pray. You go into prayer, and he says to be instant, be ready right away when you feel pressure. Don't give in. Don't flee from it. Give into prayer. Give into prayer because the way the word "continuing instant" is to be constantly diligent, constantly diligent. What is diligence? To be careful, to be mindful, to be always ready. This is a promise that He's going to help us through whatever the tribulation is.

Now, I love this. Matthew 11:1, you don't have to turn there, but it's Jesus. He says, "It came to pass, it came to pass, it came to pass." That word is something that has struck me many times, and I thought about it some more, and one brother said, "This is my favorite verse," and he puts it this way, that it's not something that's going to stay. It is going to pass. It is not going to stay, but it is going to pass because Jesus began something new whenever He says this word, "It came to pass." And in many ways, in our lives, whatever you're going through, it's not going to be forever, but it has to be waiting for His timing. His timing is always perfect. We know that. And His timing is through these processes. He will never allow one part of this process to not be there in your life.

So it's for us to be diligent and faithfully looking at what He's doing and look at His Word and go, "This is where I'm at right now, Lord. Lord, help me through this process. Lord, help me through this process. Lord, help me through this process until I get to here, until I receive hope, and I rejoice in it." And then, at that moment, you realize, "Oh, now I understand. Now I understand what You're trying to do. Thank You, thank You for cultivating in my life the ability to wait upon You, to wait upon You." That is His desire for us.

And we can see this because the fruit of the Spirit—you don't have to turn there—but what is one of the characteristics? It's patience, right? When we have the Holy Spirit, the fruit of it is, He's going to give you patience. But what's verses 19 to 21? If you look at all of those sins, it's all impatience. It's all impatience, not waiting for God's perfect timing, but instead committing this sin and committing this sin and committing this sin, and so on and so on and so on. And if you're a Christian, you know God has saved you through those kinds of sins, amen? You know what I'm talking about—adultery, fornication, greed, anger, wrath, all these things that are acquainted with impatience. That is a mark of an unbeliever, just can't wait for the Lord. They just always have to go by the flesh.

And so, selfish desires, which is direct opposition of God's will. We are not doing God's will when we do that. So the key contrast is patience flows from a surrendered heart. "Lord, I'm going to wait upon You going through this trial." Otherwise, sin will foster distrust, will foster

resentment, will foster pride, all of which God just resists, doesn't He? But He gives grace to the humble. And you see, all of impatience, what is it doing? It's sabotaging our endurance. It's sabotaging our endurance to live in this life according to God's ways. And so, what sin stirs in all of us is impatience, unrest, which is a stark contrast of the Spirit's fruit.

So we must always be mindful of what's happening in our own lives.

Let Proverbs 16:32 strengthen you. I'm just going to read it for you:

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Notice I emphasized "is" there because in this verse, it speaks about longsuffering. It speaks about what's contrary to sin, which is a mighty person in the world is someone who can speak the loudest, right? Who can be the most vocal about something. But that is actually not true. And you have heard this saying before, "You know, vent out your anger." Have you heard that phrase before? That is against Scripture. You're not supposed to vent out any anger, period.

I'll read it again: "He that is slow to anger," it literally means don't be angry. Don't allow anger to just quickly get out of you. Slow to anger is better than the mighty. So sin deceives us, thinking strength is found in impulsive actions, "just do you," when true power comes through patient endurance. Lamentations 3:25-26 says this: "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." So this is a promise. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him. That's patience, to the soul that seeketh, worships Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait—direct opposite of anger, isn't it? And it says, "for the salvation of the Lord." I looked up that word "of" is very important, not "from." It doesn't say "for the salvation from the Lord," which would be salvation from sin, but it's "of the Lord." He's giving us the ability to be delivered. That's the strength of the verse, delivered from whatever trial that we're experiencing.

Do you want that in your life more? I think all of us can say we want more of that kind of strength, where we can wait out until He delivers us from all sorts of trials and dangers. Because if He has put it upon your life, He'll make sure you can endure it. Now, I've talked about sin

because it is a sin of impatience. But what is, again, one of the worst things is not allowing God's timing to come to its completion. God wants us to wait upon His timing.

So in 1 Samuel 13, we read about Saul's disobedience, and this is that instead of trusting in God's timing, he takes shortcuts. And it's not good shortcuts, mind you. One of the first things that he does is Jonathan, his son, wins a battle, and he blows the trumpet, signifying that he was the one that was the victor when it was Jonathan that won the victory. He didn't catch that, so timing was off. But the worst timing of Saul was that he took it upon himself to not wait upon Samuel after seven days to take up the burnt offering. Instead, he takes over the priestly duties and does the burnt offering himself. And that causes an eternal consequence, meaning that his kingdom no longer will reign ever again.

And you'll see in 1 Samuel 13:14 that Samuel tells that God's going to choose someone after His own heart. Samuel didn't know who that was, but we know now who that was, that now David's kingdom will now finish the plan that He has set. So why do I bring that up? It's a reminder to show that there are small consequences and there are also big consequences. And as Christians, we are mindful of this, aren't we? And that's why we want to wait on God's timing, don't we? Because it not only hurts us, but it hurts the people that we're trying to witness to. It's so important.

Because sin often distorts our focus. Sin demands instant gratification, losing sight of God's greater plan in our lives. Sin weakens our ability to endure trials, cripples our patience when hardships arise.

Whenever we're waiting on the Lord, sin tempts us to complain, to despair, to abandon our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Fear is now replaced with faith. Rather, resting in God's presence, sin instills worry, panic that we must take control of everything. That's what Saul did. He took the matters into his own hands and realized great consequences upon his life. Sin keeps us from fulfilling our ministry.

Go to Hebrews 12:1. It reads this: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Sin operates like a heavy

burden, weighing us down, preventing us from running the race with endurance. Sin also entangles us into our own selfish desires, opposing God's call and hindering the ministry for each one of us. Now, "beset" means literally surrounding us. That's what the word "beset" means. And it's in direct—so when you're racing, that's where he uses this word "beset" because in a race, you have competitors. So what he's saying is, you are surrounded by other competitors, and they're all competing against you. That's what he's illustrating here. They're all opposing you. And that's what sin does. It puts us in competition with God.

Instead of laying it aside, laying it aside, I'm going to pause here because I still have a lot more to go. I don't want to rush this. But I want us to think about the next verses: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." We learn patience ultimately through Jesus Christ. He was the one that endured the cross. We didn't. He was the one that endured the cross. He's the one that overcame sin. He did not let sin get to Him. Why? Perfect obedience. The perfect Savior, perfectly patient.

And what He does is He went before us so He can restore us to that position, so we can be restored to patience. Because He is the one we're supposed to look at to receive patience. And when we do that, we are reminded—we should remind ourselves—how He was rejected, how He was betrayed, how He suffered with perfect patience on earth. And as we do, as we look to Him, He's the one that perfects our faith, the author and finisher of our faith. He starts it, He ends it for us, amen. Let that faith of our Lord Jesus Christ rest upon you, brothers and sisters in Christ. Let Him be the one that helps you to endure, to be patient, to wait with longsuffering.

Because when He does, when He does do that in your life, you will be able to endure with grace in every possible trial, even in the midst of deepest trials. Some who are experiencing great trials, you'll be able to experience it from beginning to end, and you'll be able to say, "Thank You, Lord Jesus," at the end of that trial. May you do that in every trial that you experience. If you have already not, do it, do it.

Because when you do, you will be a great witness for Jesus Christ, amen.

Let's pray. Father, I thank You so much for our Lord Jesus Christ, who set the perfect example. Father, He went to the cross to save us from our sins. He endured all sorts of suffering, betrayal, all sorts of accusations, but He never went out in anger. He prayed for us, even up to the cross, "Father, they know not what they do," as He prayed. Lord, I pray that we would understand more of Christ in our lives and what He is doing in all parts of our trials and all parts of our suffering, that we first know, is it from You? And if it is, Lord, I pray that we would all acknowledge You more and more in it, and that through all the process, we'll look up to You, who intercedes for us, to help us through all of it, so that You may be glorified in it, so that we can be greater witnesses for Christ.