

## **The Rev. Charlie Holt**

I've often heard people tell me that they don't ever pray and ask God to give them the spiritual fruit of patience, because then the next thing is, the Lord will give them opportunities to be patient. And we don't like to have to be patient and that is very true of our culture. But everything about our day and age, is, wanting to be hurried and rushed and busy and I want I want it now.

And that immediacy is very countercultural to this season that we're in of advent, which is actually all about waiting. It's about waiting on the Lord's timing and waiting for the Lord's provision and being expectant and not rushing things. Every single Sunday we do this symbolic activity of lighting candles around the advent wreath. And, this morning we lit the wrong candle, which was just a crisis.

I mean, I don't know, but we had, you're supposed to light the pink one on the third Sunday. This is called God that Sunday. And so we wait, you know, we wait. We did one this Sunday, and then we two. And now we're up to the pink when we did the third one. And then, we work our way to the fifth one, which is, of course, the Christmas Day and the joyful celebration of Emmanuel, God with us.

And so we read about John, the Baptist and his expectations of the Messiah. And what what, patience he had to have with the Lord and the Lord's timing. James, our our epistle writing says it this way. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth.

Being patient about it until he receives the early and late rains. The example of the farmer is a wonderful example of patience. There was, an author and business guru leader named Stephen Covey. Probably heard of him. The seven Habits of Highly Effective People. He wrote another book that wasn't as famous as that book, called Principles Centered Leadership.

And in this book he talks about the difference between the law of the school and the law of the farm and the law of the school. You actually can get away with being impatient. You can learn

the systems of the school and, and even succeed and make a decent grade and, and so on. At the University of Florida, when I was a student there, that blessed institution.

I wasn't always living the Christian life. And the way that that I was going about things and, and I learned the system of the school that some teachers would teach off their lectures and they would test on the books that you read and, and so on. And, and one of the things that they had at the University of Florida was, they would record the classes so you could skip the class and then you could watch it and the in the viewing lab.

And if you didn't get it over the next three weeks, you could actually go to the bookstore and buy the VCR tapes. Remember VCRs? You could buy the VCR tape of the lectures that you missed, but there was even a even a better system than all of that. There were actual A-plus students that were sitting in the class.

I'll have a lot of parents saying, don't tell this, Charlie, but everybody knows about this. But there were A-plus students sitting in the class, and you could go to A+ notes and buy their notes. So you literally could skip all the classes. And I'm not saying that I ever did that, but I might have with, with some of my classes, and you could still make an A because you had all of the notes from the lectures that you could study before the exam.

That's the law of the school. I want, I want what I want. I don't want to have to do the work, but I, I'll still want the a. I want the outcome.

What Stephen Covey says is and principled, centered leadership is. You can't do that on the farm. There's no there's no cheating or cutting corners or getting the immediate results at the last minute. He says you, the farmer, has to till the soil. You can't you can't get around it. You have to plant the seeds or you're not going to have any crops that grow.

So you got to do that work and you've got to you've got to wait. And this is one of the lessons of the principles of the farmer. Is the farmer can't get around having to wait for the crop. He relies on the provision of the Lord in terms of rain and weather and all of the magic that happens beneath the soil and the growth that takes place.

And the farmer has to learn to trust in the Lord's timing and then the Lord's provision. And this is what James is saying about our lives, is we need to be people of patience like farmers. We need to learn how to trust in the Lord's timing. Let me give you a definition of patience. I wrote it down so I would remember, patience is hope that waits.

And I'll add a little phrase to that. It's hope that waits on the Lord. One of the verses that we that the choir led us in singing in the Psalm was happy. Are they whose hope is in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth? If you want to live a blessed life, a happy life, a joyous life.

Wait on the Lord. Put your hope in him. Now there is false hope. Bible talks a lot about hope. That doesn't wait. And Paul's letter to the Romans. He writes this hope that is seen is not hope. If we hope for what we do not see, that's what is waiting for something patiently. What is hope in what we see?

Well, that's putting your hope in the things of this world. It's the hope of of, of making it happen. Now. And, and this is the, the danger of the culture in which we live in right now because it doesn't wait for anything. It doesn't even wait for advent to happen. We're already playing Christmas carols. And at Thanksgiving, aren't we?

The stores want to get you, in the Christmas mindset. And I remember when I was a kid, my mother would had the worst hiding place for our Christmas presents. And I knew exactly where they were, and I would go and I would find those Christmas presents, and I would secretly unwrap them and look in the bags and that sort of thing.

That's not waiting.

That's putting your hope in and that which is seen and so much of Christian ethics is all wrapped up in patience, actually, one of the, many of the biggest mistakes that we make in life are because we don't wait on the Lord and then his timing and we start to force things to happen. I always encourage the young couples that come to me for marriage and young adults.

And if you're a young adult here, I want to encourage you to wait until you're married to, have sex before marriage. Just wait. Wait on your wife. Wait on your husband. Wait even. Even when you're engaged. Wait. Wait for that moment of your wedding day and allow it to be what the Lord would have it to be.

It is glorious. If you will wait, wait, wait until you have a job and you have saved up your money to buy that super expensive house. Because when you rush life and you try to make something that should wait and the timing move ahead, you can overleveraged yourself. And so many of the ethical errors that we make in life and sins are because we become impatient with the timing of the Lord and the way in which life is work.

It's not going fast enough for us. And so we start to force things to happen. We grasp, we get desperate, we manipulate the outcomes, and we pressure the relationships because people aren't operating in the timing that we want them to. And more often than not, we compromise our integrity and our patience. And it fundamentally comes down to putting our timeline in place of God's timeline.

The, the Prophet John the Baptist was in prison, and it's easy to understand why he may have thought this, but he started to have doubts about the veracity of Jesus really being the Messiah. Here he is suffering in a prison, and he had been the one who had prepared the way of the Lord and and been out in the desert promising that that the Messiah was coming in the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

And there he is languishing in a prison, and he starts to wonder, well, maybe he wasn't the Messiah. If I'm God's prophet. And I've spoken about the promise of the immediacy in the coming of the Lord, then then why am I here? Why am I suffering? Why am I having to go through all of this? And later John would actually be beheaded by the Romans.

And so, John sends the word to Jesus. Are you the one to come or should we be looking for another one? And it's an honest question, but it reveals the impatience of John with the timing and the planning of the Lord and Jesus's response was to reassure John that everything is going

according to my plan. He says, tell John that the blind are receiving their sight, and the deaf are hearing, and the lame are walking, and the lepers are being cleansed.

God is doing exactly what God is intending to do, even though it may not fit what you were expecting, or your timing, or the way that you would make it happen. One of the things that impatience does is destroys our relationships and our grumbling. The way James puts it is, be patient. Do not grumble against one another.

Brothers. And he gives a warning about this because it's a very serious thing, actually, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door. Why? Why is grumbling so, so bad? I thought it was okay to complain about things. I don't think he's talking about merely lamenting or complaining. There is a whole tradition within the scriptures about godly lament where you where you raise the questions that you have in your heart to the Lord in prayer.

Even Jesus did this from the cross when he said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Job is a great example in the Bible of somebody and his suffering was crying out with honest prayers and honest questions to the Lord. All the Psalms or half of the Psalms or laments. There is even a book called Lamentations which is all about it.

So there isn't an honest complaining or crying or whining to the Lord. But there's a there's a point at which it crosses the line and becomes the grumbling that James is talking about. And where does it cross the line? It's when we stop taking those questions and wrestling to the Lord, and we put ourselves in the position of being the Lord.

That's the difference when it starts to become your thwarting, my will.

And I'm upset about these circumstances because it's not happening the way I want it to happen or the way I expect it to, or the way I want these things to work out.

And then we begin, in our impatience with other people, to sin against the relationships. Why? Because we have stepped into the role of being their judge. And God is the judge. And it's a very

dangerous thing to do to a relationship. But, James says we have to be very careful about our tongues. They are the rudder of our ships.

They are the bridle of our horse. And that that that rudder, that bridle steers the whole deal. And when it becomes unloose, it, it is like a wildfire can take off and it can set up a whole vast, swath of destruction. So be careful about being impatient and allowing that to manifest in a judgmental grumbling.

The Lord, it's, it's, individual idolatry. Lord, you're not moving as I would have you move. The Lord encourages us here to hope and trust in him, and we'll finish with this. But James says, strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is near. And how do we do that? Well, James gives us a very practical thing.

He actually says, look to the prophets of the Bible. Look to a guy like John the Baptist, who, yes, he had a moment of weakness when he was in prison. And it's a little understandable. I have a little more grace with John because of his suffering and what he was facing, that he faltered in his faith in Jesus in that moment, just for a little bit.

But even Jesus has grace with John, and he says, you know, there's no one as great as John. John the Baptist is the greatest prophet that has ever walked the face of this planet because he was committed to following the will of the Lord and to putting forth that will of God and the promises of the Word of God in front of not only himself, but in front of everyone else.

And John, he says, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John. He waited faithfully. He prepared the way of the Lord. He endured suffering, and he trusted the Lord. Even when the Lord's timing wasn't working out in his favor and was perplexing. And this is how you establish your heart is taking your hope and placing your hope not in the things that are seen, but in the God who is controlling all the things that are seen, trusting in his providential will for your life.

Advent teaches us to trust and to hope, to be patient when to end with the prayer and invite us to just reflect on the Lord's timing. Heavenly father, we're so grateful for the gift of the

prophecies and the announcements of your presence in our life. You are the one who helps us and heals and restores and brings justice.

And so often we take all of those things and we try to manipulate and control and bring them into our own power and bring them about by our own tongues. But it's your word that establishes the future. And so we ask that you would establish in our hearts and strengthen them in your patience, and help us to hope not in things that are seen, but in you, Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Amen.