

## ***“FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: Patience”***

*James 5:7-15 • Matthew 18:21-33*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 18, 2020

Have you ever noticed that some people are always in a hurry? It seems like they are always rushed to get somewhere. They're always behind in their work and always running late. When they're driving they weave in and out of traffic, tailgating the person in front hoping they will go a little faster. It seems like these days the people behind you on the road are always in a bigger hurry than the people in front of you. By the way, if you haven't noticed people rushing like this then chances are YOU are the one who is in a hurry.

Hurrying is actually a big problem today. It's called "hurry sickness." You've probably heard the saying, "haste makes waste." It's true. When you are rushing and behind you make more mistakes and end up having to do things over. For people always in a hurry there's never time to do it right but always time to do it over. But hurrying can actually make you sick. It causes a surge in cortisol and adrenaline in your body, which can make you anxious, irritable, and nauseous. And it can make you impatient, which causes you to hurry more.

The fact is that there are just some things in life that can't be hurried. You can't rush art or love. You can't make Minute Rice in 30 seconds. You can't effectively cook a turkey faster by turning up the heat. The outside burns while the inside is still raw. You can't rush a toddler on the potty and you certainly can't rush the drivers' license office. Plants generally can't be rushed. We have several citrus trees in our yard and they have fruit on them for months before they ripen. I've learned that there's nothing I can do to make them grow and ripen faster. You can't rush the fruit on a lemon tree and you can't God, which is why he says "the fruit of the Spirit is...patience."

Jesus was teaching his disciples what it means to live in the kingdom of heaven. He explains that it's not like the kingdoms of this world that are focused on power and wealth. The kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, is

where God's will is done. The surprising thing is that you can live in that kingdom right now. You don't have to wait until you die. Each of us can live by the value system of God's kingdom.

Jesus explains to his disciples that part of the value system of the kingdom of heaven is forgiveness. To forgive requires patience and Peter asks Jesus, "How often do I have to forgive? How patient do I have to be with someone who has hurt me?" Jesus says, "Let me tell you a story to help you understand." He tells this parable of a king who is looking through his ledger and wants to collect on some outstanding debts. One of his servants is brought in who has kind of a large past due bill. Well, that's a bit of an understatement. When you hear the story you don't think about how much money Jesus is talking about, but it's an absurd amount. A talent was about a year's wages for a laborer. Jesus basically says the servant owes the king more than four billion dollars. That's billion with a "b."

The point Jesus is trying to get across is that this is your relationship to God. You owe. You owe God a lot because of sin and it's impossible for you to pay it. Just as there is no way a laborer could ever earn enough to pay back four billion dollars, you can never earn your way back to God. So the servant falls on his knees begging the king, "Please be patient. I'll pay you everything." We do the same thing. God, I promise I'll get my life together soon. I'll worship you next week. I'll serve next month. Just be patient.

Then comes the first twist in the story. The king is more than patient. He forgives the entire debt. The truth is he has already been patient, otherwise he wouldn't have let the debt get so large. God is patient with you and with me. The fact that you have not been destroyed because of your sin shows you how patient God is with you right now. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any

should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” God is patient while He works in your life to form you to be like Christ. He is patient as he waits for you to repent, to admit your sin and to receive his forgiveness. God is patiently waiting for you to commit your life to Christ and participate in the kingdom of heaven right now.

The second twist in the story comes when the servant leaves forgiven, set free from the mountain of debt. He runs into a fellow servant who owes him some money. It’s not an insignificant amount. The man owes him about \$8,000. That’s a lot but it’s also very little compared to the four billion he’s just been forgiven. The astonishing thing is that he demands to be paid. The second servant then uses the exact same language that the first one did with the king – be patient. But as we heard, the man was not patient and had his fellow servant put in prison for not paying.

Jesus is saying that you and I need to be patient with others because God has been patient with us. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul says, “the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.” Why should we be patient? Because, as Paul says, “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” You need to be patient with others because God is working in them, just as he is working in you.

But knowing you need to have patience is not the same thing as having patience. Have you ever tried harder to be patient? It doesn’t really work, does it? Patience doesn’t come naturally to any of us, especially in our fast-paced, microwave cooking, next-day shipping, instant-gratification world. So how do we get patience? Maybe you’re like me and you pray, “Lord give me patience. And hurry!”

A friend of ours used to wisely say you should never pray for patience. At first that might not seem to make any sense. I mean, if the fruit of the Spirit is patience, if patience is something I get from God working in my life

why wouldn’t I pray for that? The reason is because God doesn’t “give” you patience. You can’t rush patience, it has to be learned. What God will give you are *opportunities* to learn patience. I don’t know about you but I find I already have plenty of opportunities that require patience.

Let me share with you some things you can do that will allow God to grow the fruit of patience in you. The first thing is to understand what God has done for you. When you know how much God has forgiven you, when you realize how patient he is with you, it helps you to become more patient with others. When you are aware of your massive debt God has forgiven, it puts the minor debts of others in clearer focus. Another aspect of this is that you know how the story ends. You can be assured of eternal life with Jesus, which can help you be patient in your struggles right now. Hope, which comes from knowing Jesus, is what allows you to be patient when other people hurt you.

The second thing is that patience, like most worthwhile things, is learned by practice. To help develop patience in your life, look for opportunities to practice waiting. You probably don’t like to wait. Nobody really likes waiting in lines. So sometimes to help learn patience maybe you need to go get in the longest line at the store. When you’re driving try staying in the right lane and letting other people just pass you. It will be okay. I promise. To learn patience, look for opportunities to wait.

The final thing you can do to experience growing patience is to stop hurrying. The only way to do that is to build “margin” into your life. When you write on a piece of paper you don’t generally write all the way to the edge of the paper. You leave a margin. Every now and then you need to write into that margin to make something fit, which is why it’s there. You have the space on the page when you need it. It works the same way in your life. You need to build in margin in your daily life, space not filled with something else, space for waiting. Allow some extra time between meetings or appointments.

Allow extra time to drive across town. Build in some margin so you have something extra in your time to share with someone else. You will find that if you have that extra time you will actually get more done, you will develop the fruit of patience, and you can be a blessing to people.

As our reading from James says, be as patient as a farmer waiting for the crop to be ready to

harvest. Wait patiently because Jesus is coming back. You can't hurry his return. But while you wait keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't complain about each other. Tell the truth. Pray and sing praise. Forgive. And most of all know that you are forgiven.

*Amen.*