



11. Don't give up! (James 5:7-12)

Two frogs fell into a deep cream bowl,
One was an optimistic soul;
But the other took the gloomy view,
"We shall drown," he cried, without more ado.
So with a last despairing cry,
He flung up his legs and he said "Goodbye."

Quoth the other frog with merry grin,
"I can't get out, but I won't give in.
I'll just swim round till my strength is spent,
Then will I die the more content."
Bravely he swam till it would seem
His struggles began to churn the cream.
On the top of the butter at last he stopped,
And out of the bowl he gaily hopped.

Sometimes we come to situations in life where everything seems impossible, or at least, what we hope for in life or in the church does not seem likely. We've thought on past conflicts this morning. For many the situation in 1940 looked an impossible one, yet the determination of the nation and the sacrifice of many lives produced a victory. People said *Don't give up!* And they didn't. We can remember again the sacrifice and the way in which evil was triumphed over.

But what happens on a massive human scale from time to time, can also show within the much more mundane experiences of life. Maybe you've felt that over the weeks as we've looked at James that it's pessimistic. We've examined our lives and we find them so wanting before God. It almost seemed to me that everything we do will not please God.

Yet we see that the message here is: *don't give up!* Be patient because God is working His purposes out. *Be patient, then, brothers, 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 autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.* In the cycle of life, the farmer plants the seeds, but he gets not return for all the digging and planting, fertilizers, pesticides or even irrigation until he harvests it.

For James, God's work in Christ has an ultimate end, and that is the harvest when the Lord returns. To James, as to other NT writers, that seemed an imminent thing. I guess that's even more so after 2000 years. If you think that life is tough for you and that throughout your Christian experience that things have been tough then be patient, because the suffering we currently suffer in this life is nothing compared to the glory that is to come. Paul writes in 2 Cor 4: 17 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

God is working His purposes out. *Be patient, then, brothers, 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 autumn and spring rains.* There was a window of opportunity twice in the year and they made good use of the fact by having a barley and a wheat harvest. Blessing was cyclical – the sowed, they reaped.

The Lord intervenes far more in human history far more than just in the end times. As the old chorus puts it *He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me, along life's narrow way.* Not only is He coming again but He's already here, and He entered into each of lives. So not only is He coming again, but He comes to us and we get to see His glory and the outworking of His power.

I say this because we have had a lean few months in the church. It seems that things that once thrived are closed. Other things which we relied on are closed. And it's easy to lose patience and think "what's happening here? Not a lot" and you may feel like going somewhere else because things seem to be falling apart. Sometimes, to see new growth, we must prune the old shoots and be patient for God to bring the new growth.

Perhaps the illustration of Remembrance Sunday I mentioned earlier is a good one. For those of you

who went through the Second World War, you know full well that victory wasn't achieved in 5 minutes – it took 5 years. Many sacrificed their tomorrows so we could have today. During the dark months of 1940 and 41, people were beginning to seriously think of defeat. Yet, through patience and perseverance, victory was archived. We can't trivialise the enormity of that situation, but it does reflect what goes on in the battles that we fight as God's people.

Our desire as a church is to see this fellowship grow, and to do that we must plant anew – do things different as we have been encouraged by our Regional Minister. And to do that, we need to seek God's direction. He's our leader, we follow Him. As I've said before, we may not be accustomed to doing things that way, but if God has called you to this church, then He has made you part of this fellowship and He wants to use each one of us in His work of harvest here. We are all part of the work of God here. We are all ministers in His church, so we all have our part to play. You've seen the "Way Forward" board. We are doing it with a desire to see this fellowship grow and attract other people. Maybe you think it's slow progress. But as God's people we need to walk with God's Spirit and keep in step with Him. I believe the message God is giving is be patient. He is coming in a new way. Just as we had to be patient for our new ceiling, we now need to be patient for our fellowship makeover!

So, we don't see it right now, but it's coming. Let's see what else James says: *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 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.*

There are plenty of examples of OT prophets that had to wait to see what God was promising. Sometimes it was months, sometimes it was years and sometimes it was after their lifetime. But they were faithful to God, they did His will and they hung on to Him faithfully. And we are called like them to be faithful. Take Job. Everything was stripped away from him. Yet he clung to His God and got double-fold of what he had previously. He suffered for a short while, but despite the comments of his three dodgy friends, his faith was in that which was unseen and God blessed him because of it. So when we think that God has let us down or doesn't seem to be working remember as James says *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.* He is working His purposes out. This week, you are going to be asked to participate more actively in the process of moving forward. Take hold of the opportunity and let's see God do new things, greater things.

The problem with patience is that it has two consequences. First of all our patience might wane and we take out our frustrations on others. Look at verse 9 . *9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!* When the going gets tough as a church, it's easy to find fault in others in the church. Maybe it's their problem something isn't working out. Maybe they're not pulling their weight. Maybe there are people who don't seem to do much. Don't grumble. The Lord, the Judge is coming. Leave judgement to Him.

Secondly, God calls us to be people of integrity as we wait patiently. *12 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.* I don't know how many times I have spoken about the need to be people of integrity. It's a major theme in James. If we are to go forward, then we need to be people who are what we say and do what we say. We shouldn't be people that need to swear oaths and sign contracts. Why do we do that in this world? Be cause we need to ensure that whoever we do business with will do what they have agreed to – or else. However, we should be people of a reputation – our yes is yes and our no is no – people of integrity.

Are you ready for what God is going to do here? Then be patient. That said, you don't have to be patient for much longer. We are taking action soon and there will be exciting challenges to face in the new year – and even before that, there are exciting challenges over Christmas. Let's grasp those challenges and move forward.

