

Getting Ready For The Harvest

Memory Text: “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” (James 5:8)

Illustration/Setting The Stage: Coming from a commonwealth country means that every so often the Queen would visit. The preparations are extensive for a royal visit. Streets and shop windows are cleaned. The town is decorated. Musicians and bands ready themselves to greet the royal pageantry. Security is upped a notch. Massive preparations take place when an earthly monarch is getting ready to arrive. If we are excited to get ready for these types of events, how much more excited we should be and how much more extensive the preparations should be when the King of the universe is about come?

How do we make the preparations when we don’t know the “day or the hour” (Matt. 24:36)? What does it mean to be “patient” and the “establish” our hearts? And how does this relate to the idea of the “early and latter rain”? These questions and more will be answered in this weeks’ lesson.

Sunday – Waiting For “Rain”

James 5:7; Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:23, 28-31

Read James 5:7. “Therefore be patient” - the word “patient” and “patience” are used six times by James. They denote “hopeful endurance,” “bearing long,” and “longsuffering.” Why be patient under provocation and not lose courage? Because Christ’s coming will vindicate the righteous and put the wicked in their place. The perspective of the shortness of earth’s challenges compared with eternal happiness and peace has always been a source of encouragement to the believer.

“Coming of the Lord” is compared to a harvest. Farmers and the population are completely dependent upon the right weather to produce staple foods for living. It can’t be too wet or too dry, or too hot or too cold, or else the produce will be adversely affected.

Those that grow their own gardens know this very well. The former St. Louis Rams center, Jason Brown, who left behind a \$37 million contract to become a farmer in his native NC will also find that out too (he has 1,000 acres to work and he gives away his first fruits to local food pantries). The country knows and looks to CA in the hope we will receive good rainfall and snow packs up in the Sierra’s that will provide enough water for farmers down in the valley.

“Early and latter rain” - In drier countries such as Israel, the margin is even less, and the importance of the right amount of rain falling at the right time of years is greater.

Early rain – this was the autumn rain that fell at the time of planting the winter crops, to sprout the seed, and give it a good start before the cold winter set in. In a land dependent on rain the seed would not sprout until the rain fell in its season (ref. Lev 26:3).

Latter rain – This fell in the spring before the summer harvest, during the months of March and early April, and brought the crop to full maturity. The barley harvest in Palestine begins in the middle or end of April, with wheat coming in the next month, the summer fruits, then grapes and olives in the late summer and fall.

Job 29:23: “They waited for me *as* for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide *as* for the spring rain.” – Job’s counsel, like the latter rain, was of the highest value.

Proverbs 16:15: “In the light of the king’s face *is* life, and his favor *is* like a cloud of the latter rain.” – shows the high regard those of the Middle East had for the rainy seasons

Hosea 6:3: “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.” – God’s promise to bring abundant blessings that would nourish and revive the spiritual life.

Joel 2:23: “Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully [moderately – for righteousness], and He will cause the rain to come down for you - the former rain, and the latter rain in the first *month*.” (cp. Joel 2:28, 31) Here Joel uses rain to symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cp. Isa. 44:3).

Peter applied Joel 2:28-31 to what happened on the day of Pentecost, but we know that the context for Joel 2 is the last days. Was Peter wrong? No. Under inspiration he helped us understand that *historically* the early rain fell at that time (see Acts 2:38, 39). Then in Acts 3:19-21 Peter again refers to the Holy Spirit, but this time he talks about the latter rain, or “times of refreshing,” that will fall prior to the return of Christ.

So the early rain took place on Pentecost, while the latter rain will take place prior to the return of Christ to help God’s people take the 3rd angels message to the world, enable a large number to take their stand on the side of truth, and prepare believers to stand during the time of trouble and the 7 last plagues (see Mark 4:26-29; Rev. 14:14, 15).

Latter Rain Prerequisites (a collection of thoughts from the pen of inspiration) – praying earnestly, humbling hearts in true repentance, experience reformation, putting away envy, strife, and dissension, loving each other, and laboring for the lost.

“We need not worry about the latter rain. All we have to do is to keep the vessel clean and right side up and prepared for the reception of the heavenly rain, and keep praying, ‘Let the latter rain come into my vessel. Let the light of the glorious angel which unites with the third angel shine upon me; give me a part in the work; let me sound the proclamation; let me be a colaborer with Jesus Christ.’ Thus seeking God, let me tell you, He is fitting you up all the time, giving you His grace.” (The Upward Look, p. 283)

Monday – How Near Is “Near”?

James 5:8; Romans 13:11

Read James 5:8. Just as the farmer is patient, we are to be patient too. Don’t fret about the wicked getting away with evil. Don’t be overwhelmed with the challenges you might face. Don’t get impatient with what you perceive to be little spiritual growth in your life. Jesus pointed us to the flowers and how they “neither toil or spin” to grow. They simply receive what God has provided to grow. We are to do the same.

“Precious fruit” (v. 7) – “dear” or “valuable”. Why precious? Because we’ve been bought with the “precious blood of Christ.” (1 Pet. 1:19) Don’t ever let the devil tell you aren’t worth anything. In God’s eyes you are precious (Isa. 43:4). Is God precious to you?

“Establish your heart” – “to set fast, “ “to brace, “ or “to make stable.” The matter of living for the Lord has been settled in your heart, like the issue of loving your spouse was settled before and at the wedding altar. So no matter what temptation, trial, challenge, or suffering comes, you’re not going to be moved.

“Coming of Lord” – “Coming” is “parousia” in Greek, which means “presence” or “arrival”. This word appeared frequently in ancient documents when referring to the arrival of an emperor or king. Matthew uses the word in Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39. Paul sometimes used the word to denote “presence” versus “absence”. There is nothing in this word that suggests or hints at a secret arrival (JW’s).

“At hand” – Although Jesus said that no man would know the “day or the hour” of coming He encouraged His people to know the times and that He is “near” (not “here”), even at the door (Matt. 24:36).

*** Romans 13:11:** “And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed.”

How does this correspond with what Jesus told His disciples at another time (see Acts 1:7, 8 – not for you to know times [endless procession of time] or seasons [climactic events to occur at the end of the ages])? Jesus was in essence saying that they weren’t to know the exact date and precise manner that the kingdom was to be

established. No contradiction here. Jesus is looking for individuals who will go to work for the Master and will allow themselves to be guided by the “signs” and the Holy Spirit irrespective of how much they know.

***Question**– “If the disciples thought that Christ’s coming was immediate (when it wasn’t), wouldn’t that make them wrong, or at least, that nothing can be known about the time of Christ’s coming?” So in other words, if here we are, 2,000 years later, and the Lord still hasn’t come, what makes us think Christ will come “soon”?

My simple answer is, “Watch the signs.” The apostles didn’t know that their predictions would span hundreds of years. That fact doesn’t make them wrong anymore than the fact that Daniel not fully understanding the prophecies given to him made him less a prophet.

The “man of sin” needed to be revealed first. Jesus spoke of a tribulation period (the Dark Ages) that would be followed by the darkening of the sun, the moon turning to blood, and the falling of the stars from heaven (Nov. 12, 1833 – 181 years ago) and signs that would increase in frequency and intensity. John wrote that the deadly wound would be healed and “all the world” would wonder after the beast (Rev. 13). According to prophecy, we are near!

Tuesday – Grumbling, Groaning, & Growing

James 5:9; Ephesians 4:32

Read James 5:9. “Groan” – a half-suppressed murmur of impatience or condemnation. To sigh. I would rather be instructed to not grumble than groan. It’s easy to groan...

“One another” – Not only deal patiently with the wrongs of the oppressive rich, but also deal patiently with one another. It’s so much easier to pick faults in the church, but that might be because we expect so much from it.

*** Ephesians 4:32:** “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

“Condemned” – James is insisting that grumbling is as wrong as condemning a person and reveals an unloving, ungracious spirit. Again, this is an issue of the heart.

“Judge standing at the door” – In light of the immediacy of the second coming of Christ we don’t have time to be finding fault with others. Instead we are to search our own hearts (Ps. 139: 23, 24).

Wednesday – Models Of Patient Endurance

James 5:10, 11; Hebrews 11:33-37

Read James 5:10, 11. What did Job and the prophets have in common? They suffered (see Heb. 11:33-37). **Why do you think these examples are highlighted?** So we can have encouragement to press on under our own trials. **What personal lessons can we take away from these stories for ourselves amid our own trials?** Patience, or longsuffering or forbearance. The ability to stand up under any difficult situations, or weather whatever is thrown at us. Endurance on the other hand focuses on the finish line. Job focused on the vindication he expected to receive (Job 14:13-15; 19:23-27).

Thursday – Transparent As The Sunlight

James 5:12; Matthew 5:34-37

Read James 5:12. James comes to the climax of his line of thought.

*** Matthew 5:34-37:** “But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

Christ isn’t prohibiting the judicial oath because He Himself, when placed under oath by the high priest, didn’t refuse to answer, nor did He even condemn the process despite numerous deviations from sound jurisprudence. Both He and James are referring to oaths common among the Jews that they would seek to wiggle out of. The law of God doesn’t forbid oaths but instead perjury, which was common in Jesus day (as is becoming more so in ours).

So why is James making a big deal over swearing solemn oaths (“above all”)? James has been urging throughout his letter the need for Christian’s words to be congruent with his/her deeds. Jesus said, “From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matt. 12:34) James is dealing with matters of the heart. What comes out of the mouth reveals what’s in the heart.

Kids and promises. It used to be that a man’s word was good enough. Then you had handshakes, and now contracts. James is saying that a Christian’s word ought to be enough. A Christian ought to be honest and transparent in all their dealings (from tithe to taxes).

Appeal: As we await the second coming of Christ we are encouraged to be patience, to hang in there, trusting the Lord, and to press on to the end, by God’s grace.