

Peace in Persecution.
James 5:7-13

Standing on the promises
Romans 5:1-11
2Corinthians 4:5-18

You are probably looking at this and asking, Didn't we already go through verses 7-13 2 weeks ago? The answer is yes, yes we did. I have been really thinking about this a lot lately, about having patience, and peace during times of persecution. But not only just in persecution but in our every day life. It is so hard to be patient, it is hard to have peace when everything around us is a storm of chaos and confusion!

Peace and patience in every day life is something that I really struggle with, anyone who knows me knows I have a leaning toward pessimism, and negativity. Diana calls me the killer of all hopes and dreams because when she wants to do something, or suggests something 9 times out of 10..or according to her, 10 times out of 10, I inevitably will rain on her parade. It isn't like my intention is malicious, or I do it to be mean, it is just my natural response and I constantly struggle to not be the dreaded killer of hopes and dreams.

I think because of my penchant toward melancholy and pessimism, it is easy for me to become overwhelmed, and discouraged and dwell upon the negative to the point of depression sometimes. And last week, I stood up here preaching what James wrote about being patient in persecution, waiting upon the Lord, or even back in chapter 1 when he says to count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that testing of our faith produces patience. I stand here saying these things, reading these very things and struggle with this myself.

I know what scripture says, I believe what God said, yet if I am to be honest with myself I don't find myself counting my trials as joy, nor do I have patience, or much peace when I am in the thick of it. A lot of times I shut myself down, I become introspective, and I focus on my suffering, or on my plight and tend to wallow in self pity instead of seeking comfort, and wisdom from God right away. Maybe I am alone in this here, but I find having peace, and patience is the furthest thing from my mind when things are not going as I think they should be. And Instead of seeking wisdom from God, instead of asking "what is it Lord that you ask of me", I cry out..Why God, why me! Or Why now! Why does it have to be like this!

I do not presume to know God's will, or why he does what he does, or allows certain things to happen but it seems that God is always asking me to do the very things that go against my nature, against my desire, and against myself or what I want. No one is more surprised then I to be standing here right now doing this! For anyone who knows me, knows that I have always despised reading, I hated school, I hated studying, and yet it seems to be the very thing that God has put before me to do at this time. Sadly he has not given me the drive and desire, or all of a sudden the love of reading but IT seems that is how God works, he takes what we don't want to do, and makes it what we must do. And I think, it is because in the end it isn't about us, or what we want, but it is God working in us to will and to do his desire, and his will. If we are called to suffer, or to do something outside of what we are capable, or able to do, it is God who gives us the ability to live through it, or to do it, he asks us to do what we can not by our own strength, or our own so that he may work in us to will and to do his desire, so that we will cry out to him in our darkest hours and when we are tossed, bruised, beaten and finally broken is when we turn to God which really is where we should have been in the first place.

James is telling us, reminding us that the reason we can count our trials as joy, is because God has overcome our eternal punishment, we are his adopted children and these trials we face here on this earth pale in comparison to the eternal punishment for our sins that we have been freed from.

2 weeks ago we ended with the words of Christ, found in the gospel of John, where he says, in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world. This is our hope, and this should be our battle cry as we fight, as we struggle, and as we live day to day in this sinful fallen world.

I don't know about you, but it seems at least for me, I rarely think upon Christ as having already conquered the world, who has already defeated death, hell and the grave, and tend to dwell upon my own suffering, and introspective melancholy as I trudge through this world of woe. But that is not how we are to be, that is not what we are called to be, we are not to live our lives with our heads held low, as downtrodden and beaten, for we are the children of the almighty, the sovereign, lord of all, who has already overcome the world! In This is how we can have peace, not only in tribulations, but in the mundane, in our own personal day to day struggles of life. This is why James says that we can count our trials joy, and we are to have patience waiting upon the Lord, for he has already overcome the world.

We have the promises to God, we have a perfect savior, and a perfect lord who loves and cares for us, who died for us, who provides for us, who gives us grace when we deserve punishment, who showers us with love, when we deserve death. How little are our trials, and our problems on this earth when measured in the vast endlessness of eternity! Our lives here on this earth are just a vapor, or like the flower, or a spark, we bloom for a day and are gone, or we shine bright for a time then fade and are forgotten, how much more fleeting are our trials if we measure them in the timeline within our own fleeting life, or better yet, eternity.

As I have been growing older, one thing I have noticed more than most other things is how quickly time goes by. It seems that the passing of time has become shorter by the day. I have suddenly found myself now with teenagers, feeling that it was just yesterday that I was one myself, and ask where has all that time gone! It is so fleeting, it is here and gone in the blink of an eye and I have begun to understand more and more the emptiness of this world, how quickly our life speeds to the end, and oddly in all of this I find, hope, and an understanding at a new level of what James is saying here to be patient, for before we know it, this time too will be gone, it will pass, for our lives truly are passing by as a spark, which shines bright for a time then is gone. And our hope isn't here, there is nothing in this world that we can build our hope upon, but it is only upon Christ!

As our lives are rushing toward that end, as trials, persecution, and our mundane life passes we have hope that in the end we will be with our Lord, and on that day he will say to us, Well done, my good and faithful servant! This is what we are waiting for, this is what James tells us to be patient for. Verse 7 of chapter 5, he says Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

I have to always be reminding myself of this, that no matter what happens, no matter what is happening, no matter how I feel or what I am going through, really it is all fleeting, it will pass, and God who is unchanging promises that he remains with me, and carries me through it all.

I often think of the song Wayfaring Stranger, for those who may not be familiar with it, I will read the

lyrics...no, I am not going to sing it.

“I'm just a poor, wayfaring stranger. Traveling through, this world of woe, yet there's no sickness, no toil or danger in that bright world to which I go. I am going there, to see my father, I am going there no more to roam. I'm only going over Jordan, I'm only going over home.

I know dark clouds, will gather round me, I know my way is rough and steep, Yet beautiful fields lie just before me where God's redeemed, their vigils keep.”

This is our hope, this is our peace, and this is what we patiently wait for. I want to read some verses of God's promises to us, of our hope in Christ, of things to dwell upon when life seems to be more than we can handle.

Turn with me to Romans chapter 8, starting in verse 31. Through all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. I often don't think of myself as a conqueror, but rather a victim, yet Paul tell us.. we are more than conquerors through Christ! Who can bring a charge against us, We are justified by God! Who can condemn us, it is Christ who died in our place and has risen to the right hand of the father! Who shall separate us from the love of Christ, nothing can, not even death for in death we will be united with Christ.

John 14:1-4. Christ is returning, he will come again to gather to himself his flock and take us to that promised land that he has prepared for us. What a blessed promise is this, to one day be in the presence of our Lord, where there is no longer sickness, or suffering, to be freed from this body and world of sin and basking in the light of our savior!

John 6:35. God will not fail, all that the father gives to his son, will come to him and anyone who comes to him will not be cast out, all who God has given his son, will not be lost, but shall be raised at the last day. Our salvation is secure, there is nothing that can change this fact! Even during our darkest times on this earth, we have the promise that God will return, and he will gather up his people and not a single one will be lost!

This is how we have peace, this is how we have patience..knowing and resting upon God's promises through the ever fleeting, emptiness of this life. Our hope is in Christ, our rest is in him, for we truly are just wayfaring strangers traveling through this world of woe toward our heavenly home. I hope that this has been encouraging to you this week as it has been for me, through everything in our life our eyes and heart should be on Christ and his promises that one day all of this suffering, or even the mundane slog through life end and we will be in the promised land with our Lord! One day, just as Christ looked over to the thief on the cross and said Today, you shall be with me in paradise. We too shall finish the race, and win the prize and this is our hope, and our peace!