

December 14, 2025 – Isaiah 35:1-10, James 5:7-11, Matthew 11:2-15

I have some bad news for you: Christmas already came and you missed it. Actually, that's not true. Christmas did already come and you did miss it, but that's actually very good news. That is good news of great joy for all peoples.

You see, while the annual festival of Christ's birth may still be eleven days away, the actual event already occurred. It was two thousand years ago. Long, long, long before any of us were ever born. And while we all know that, I think we also need to keep it in mind.

Because it's pretty common to hear people talk about Advent as the preparation for Christ's birth. I'm guilty of it too. I've probably said those exact words. But we're not really preparing for Christ's birth because Christ's birth already happened a long time ago.

Advent is very much a season of preparation for Christ's coming. But it's not his first coming in Bethlehem. That already happened. No, we're preparing for his second coming.

Which is exactly what James is trying to help us do in our reading this morning. *"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord."* The Christian life between the first coming of Christ in Bethlehem and the second coming of Christ on the last day is marked by patience.

But James doesn't mean patience as a personality trait. He means patience as a fruit of faith. Faith waits. Faith endures. Faith actually believes that Christ is coming again, and therefore faith acts now in a way that reflects that certainty. In this brief passage, James gives us both command and comfort. Law and Gospel. Because Christ is coming, we must be patient. And because Christ is coming, we can be patient.

James begins with an illustration: *"See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains."* The farmer can't hurry the season. He can't accelerate growth. He can't control the rains. The final outcome depends entirely on forces outside of his control.

And yet, the farmer isn't passive. He sows, he tends, he labors. His actions show that he believes the harvest will come. He's immensely patient. And yet also immensely busy with the work of farming, because he has faith that there will be a harvest at the end of it all.

James says that this is what Christian faith looks like. We live in the in-between time. Christ has sown His Word, planted His promises, shed His blood, and risen from the dead. The harvest, which is His return on the last day, is absolutely certain. And we cling to that certainty by faith.

But the timing is His, not ours. So we wait, patiently. But waiting patiently doesn't mean we sit on our hands. We wait like farmers: active, hopeful, working, trusting that what God promised He will surely accomplish.

Yet if patience defines faith, impatience exposes unbelief. And that's why James immediately addresses our tongues and our tempers: *"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged."*

Impatience with God usually shows itself first as impatience with one another. We grow short-tempered. We assume the worst. We complain. We spread rumors and gossip and slander. Advent promises that Christ will come to set everything right. But we act as if everything must be fixed by us, right now. As if God is too slow, so we must grumble our way into control.

And those acts of impatience not only harm our neighbor, but they also reveal our hearts. When we grumble against one another, we're doubting the Judge who stands at the door. A person who truly believes that Christ could return tomorrow doesn't get bogged down by the inconveniences, petty squabbles, or worldly disagreements of this sinful world. If Christ is near, if His return is certain, then we are free to be patient, gentle, and merciful with one another.

And to strengthen this patient faith, James gives us Biblical examples: *"As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets... Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job."*

The prophets waited not days or years, but entire lifetimes for promises they never saw fulfilled. They suffered through persecution and rejection and death at the hands of a corrupt, idolatrous people. Yet they continued to preach faithfully.

Job endured suffering so great that his friends told him to give up on God's love and mercy altogether. Yet Job refused to be persuaded that God had abandoned him. He held fast to the Lord, who restored him in the end.

Their lives testify that waiting is not weakness. Waiting is not inactivity. Waiting is strength. It is an active testimony to the promises of God. The prophets and Job show us that patience and faith are inseparable: what you believe about God's future determines how you live in the present.

And this is where the Old Testament reading from Isaiah 35 becomes a perfect companion to James's exhortation. Isaiah describes the desert blooming, the weak made strong, the fearful encouraged, the blind seeing, and the lame leaping. But Isaiah delivered this message during a time of deep darkness. When Israel's future looked like wasteland and exile. Yet he proclaimed that God would come with vengeance against evil and with salvation for His people.

Isaiah's imagery is exactly what the world will look like when God keeps His promises. It's what faith sees even when life looks bleak. If James teaches us how to wait, Isaiah teaches us what we are waiting for.

The God who can transform wastelands into gardens by His Word will transform all creation at Christ's return. The saints will walk the "*Way of Holiness*." Sorrow and sighing will flee. This is the harvest the farmer waits for. This is the glory we anticipate in Advent.

And Matthew 11 makes this even clearer. John the Baptist, from prison, sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*" We don't know if it was John himself who was wrestling with the slowness of God's timing, or if it was his disciples who needed encouragement. It doesn't really matter. John had proclaimed the nearness of the coming kingdom of God, yet here he sat imprisoned while evil men prospered.

And so Jesus answers with those same words of Isaiah 35: "*The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear... the poor have good news preached to them.*" Jesus is saying, "Look at the signs. The kingdom is already here. You're already seeing it at work. The harvest has already begun. And blessed is the one who is not offended by My timing."

God's work may seem slow, but it's never absent. Christ's first coming already began the restoration Isaiah promised. His second coming will bring it to completion. So we wait, like John, not by withdrawing into doubt but by looking again and again at the works of Christ. At the love of God's Son and the new life he brings.

And that brings us back to James's central message. Patience isn't passive. Patience is faith in action. Patience shows itself in the way Christians live while waiting for Christ's appearing. The impatient world rushes, worries, and complains. Impatience produces anger, bitterness, and selfishness. But patient faith acts differently.

Patience speaks gently because Christ is coming. Patience forgives because Christ has first forgiven us. Patience perseveres in prayer because God always hears. Patience serves because the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Patience shows compassion and mercy because "*the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*"

And that is a profound promise: "*The Lord is compassionate and merciful.*" Christ has already come in compassion, born of the Virgin, walking the "*Way of Holiness*," healing the blind, raising the dead, preaching good news, carrying the cross. Christ has already shown us the mercy Job waited for and the prophets longed to see. And Christ will come again with that same compassion and mercy to redeem all creation.

Patient faith is confidence in the character of God. Trust that the One who came once to save will come again to finish His saving work. Certainty that nothing we do for the Lord is in vain, because the Lord Himself stands at the door. Christ has come and Christ is coming again. This is our Advent hope. Amen.