

Isaiah 30:15-18

15 For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused 16 and said, "No! We will flee upon horses"— therefore you shall flee! and, "We will ride upon swift steeds"— therefore your pursuers shall be swift! 17 A thousand shall flee at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill. 18 Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. Isaiah 30:15-18

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I want to invite you to **open your Bible** to the New Testament book of 2 Peter. Our second reading this morning is from 2 Peter Chapter 3 where, starting in verse 9, the Apostle Peter gave us a great message about the themes of patience and waiting that are so central to this morning’s service.

Here, Peter is going to tell us how we ought to be living as we wait for and work toward the what Peter calls “the day of the Lord” and “the coming of the day of God,” when God’s righteousness in the new heavens and new earth will be eternally established. Listen, if you will, as I read these thoughts on patience, working and waiting. 2 Peter 3:9-15a

**9 The Lord is not slow about his promise**, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. **11 Since all these things are to be dissolved** in this way, *what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God*, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? 13 But, *in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.* **14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.** This is the word of the Lord.

“While you are waiting.” By show of hands, how many of you feel like you spend more time than you want... waiting? (Never mind, no time for answers. I’ve got to get through this sermon.) On any given day, we might wait in line, online, on hold, in traffic, in conversation, in relationships, for decisions or answers. Though it has been said that the only constant is change, I might argue that **one of life’s other constants is... waiting.**

Waiting, as you know, requires patience. And, as it turns out, patience involves waiting. If you’ve ever been desperate enough to pray for patience, you’ve likely discovered that growing in patience requires patience. The prayer, “God, give me patience and give it to me NOW!” usually doesn’t work. And the only way you know you’re becoming more patient is by having God put you in a situation that requires patience. It’s kind of a divinely-designed Catch 22. So, what do we do in our struggles with patience?

Well, as you likely know, we’re in **a sermon series** called “Your New Year Wardrobe.” And we’re spending eight weeks looking at a list of faith-based clothing items commended to us by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament letter to the Colossians. The wardrobe list appears in Colossians 3 between verses 12 and 14, where Paul – our faithful fashion consultant – wrote this:

**“<sup>12</sup> As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”**

What does it mean to clothe ourselves with patience? One source we can look to is the best-dressed of all classical artists – and the inspiration behind one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles – **Leonardo da Vinci.** Of course we want to be able to paint like Leo. But, we should want to dress like him, too. Just look at that sweet hat! Anyway, Leonardo da Vinci made this connection between patience and fashion:

"Patience serves as a protection against wrongs as clothes do against cold. For if you put on more clothes as the cold increases, it will have no power to hurt you. So in like manner you must grow in patience when you meet with great wrongs, and they will then be powerless to vex your mind."

Well, for the sake of following Leo's advice and giving you a visual illustration of the three points of this morning's sermon, I decided to put on the extra layer of this morning's T-shirt while you were here watching. I think there are three biblical steps to clothing ourselves with patience that relate nicely to the steps of actually clothing myself with "Patience" here. So, I hope you're paying attention, 'cause Lord-willing I'm only going to do this once today.

**To clothe ourselves with patience** we:

First, look up and reach up.

Second, extend ourselves on both sides.

And third, bring it down to earth.

What does this all mean biblically? **First, look up and reach up.**

Because God is the source and model of all of our good characteristics, we find patience by looking *to* God and receiving patience *from* God.

The Greek word used for patience in Colossians 3 is the word **μακροθυμία** (**makrothymía**). Sounds to me like a medical condition we'd need patience to overcome. It is a compound of the words 'makros' meaning 'long' and 'thymos' meaning 'suffering' or 'anger.' So literally, it is long-suffering. Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce says that, if in English we had an adjective 'long-tempered' as a counterpart to 'short-tempered,' then *makrothymia* could be the good quality of being 'long-tempered.'

As an example, F.F. Bruce points to God's description of Godself in Exodus 34:6, when he introduces Himself to Moses as "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

It's not that God doesn't ever get angry. We are sinful people and, like any loving parent, our Heavenly Father's patience gets stretched by our sin. But, God is slow to anger. As with last week's word "meekness," God knows just when to become angry in the right way for the right reasons in the right amount and in the right direction. God's reactions aren't stained by sin, so our Lord waits sufficient time before expressing anger. That's patience. God demonstrates divinely-regulated patience, and He has done it throughout His relationship with humanity again and again.

There is a traditional Hebrew story that highlights this well, I think.

*According to the story, **Abraham, the patriarch of God's** people in the book of Genesis, was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man, weary from age and journey, coming toward him. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and then invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink.*

*The old man immediately began eating without saying any prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?"*

*The old traveler replied, "I worship fire only and revere no other god."*

*When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out his tent into the cold night air.*

*When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he did not worship you."*

*God answered, "Although he dishonors me, I have suffered that man these eighty years. Could you not endure him one night?"*

Since we're all sinners saved by grace and have all fallen short of the glory of God, any one of us could have played the part of the old traveler in the story. We've all dishonored God at various times and in various ways. But, thanks be to God, our Lord has been long-tempered with us. He has endured us and remained faithful and loving toward us.

We were reminded of that in our New Testament passage from 2 Peter 3. **There in verse 9, Peter wrote**, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is (makrothymay-ee) patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance." Because of God's patience, we are able to look to God in confession and to receive His new mercies every day. God's mercy and patience then are part of our salvation.

Peter completed that thought at **the start of verse 15** when he reminded us to "regard the patience of the Lord as salvation." For thousands of years before Christ, God was patient with humanity. Though we rebelled against God in sin, God made a covenant with our spiritual ancestors, freed us from slavery, sustained us in the wilderness, brought us to the Promised Land, made us a nation, and sent Himself in Christ to be our Messiah.

During Jesus' time on earth, the patience of the Lord made way for our salvation. Though at times he grew impatient and asked his Heavenly Father how long he would have to put up with us, he bore our sin even to the cross and his patience and sacrifice became our salvation. Even now as we wait for his final return and the establishment of new heavens and the new earth, sin corrupts our waiting. But, because Christ has broken the power of sin, and because God's love desires that none should perish but all should come to repentance, patience makes the way for others to be saved still. Thanks be to God for His patience.

And, of course, God has not only set the example of perfect patience but has also empowered each believer with divine patience by sending His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. Part of the fruit of God's Spirit is the power for us to be patient with the kind of patience God has shown us for salvation.

And, **the first place we need to apply that patience is in our relationship with God.** How many of you have ever been impatient with God? Have you ever been in a hurry when God wasn't; so you had to be patient with God?

If you relate to that, the Bible reminds us we're not alone. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for God to bring their promised baby. Jacob waited and worked for Rachel to be his wife for 7 years, and then worked for her another 7 years after their marriage. Joseph waited 13 years for the fulfillment of his God-given dream, that he would someday be a ruler. The Israelites wandered and waited 40 years before entering into the Promised Land. David waited over 10 years from the time God chose him to become Israel's 2<sup>nd</sup> king until he was actually crowned king. Noah waited 120 years from the time God told him to build the ark until the time when the flood actually occurred. God's people are familiar with waiting.

So why does God make us wait on promises He has given us and dreams He has placed inside of us? Well, somebody probably prayed for patience. Our Lord does want us to be more like Him, which means giving us chances to grow in patience. God also wants us to have faith in Him, since faith and patience go hand in hand. And, consider this. Maybe God knows that what He does inside of us while we wait is more important than what we're actually waiting for. So, **what might God be doing inside of you while you wait?** And, do you have faith enough to believe it is for your good?

Because God has been patient with us and given us His patience, let's look up and reach up to God as the first step in clothing ourselves with patience.

Then, just like putting our arms through our sleeves, let's take the second step, which **is extending ourselves on both sides**. Because, there are two balanced sides to patience. One side, as we've talked about, is waiting. The other side of patience is working while we wait. You say, "But, if I'm working, I'm not waiting." Well, as we say in the Serenity Prayer, there are things in our control that we can patiently work on while we patiently wait for the dynamics and results that aren't in our control.

We saw this dynamic of balanced patience a few times in this morning's scripture readings. In our **Old Testament lesson from the Prophet Isaiah**, we hear this in verse 15, "For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." Do the work of trusting me and returning to me, said the Lord. And then wait in resting and quietness while I give you strength. Patience is working and waiting.

In our New Testament lesson from 2 Peter, we heard a similar balance. Specifically, **in verse 14, Peter wrote**, "Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish..." While you wait, strive. While you *wait* for God to fulfill His promises of salvation, *work* out your salvation with fear and trembling so that God may find you about His business and prepared for His arrival when the Day of the Lord comes. Patience is working and waiting.

**What's harder for you?** What's the work you can ask God to do in you to help you be more patient? Is it harder to be faithful in doing the work God has called you to do? Or, is it harder to be faithful in waiting on the things only God can do? Both can be challenging. Right? But, once you know that both working and waiting are important in patience, there may be some value for you in knowing where patience starts to fall apart when you struggle.

When an opportunity for patience arises, you may want to consider what you can change. Are there lifestyle or schedule changes you can make that will reduce the situations when you feel impatient? Could you leave earlier so that slow driver doesn't bug you? Could you bring something to do in line so the long wait isn't so maddening? Could you shift your focus to what

you're receiving from God so that you're not as focused on what you're not receiving from that other person in your life? Could you pray that God would help you appreciate what He's doing in you while you wait for that thing you're hoping He'll bring to you? What's the work of patience you can do?

On the other side, what's the waiting you need to do – the resting and quietness of patience? We all know that waiting is hard to do. It may be the first four letter word we're taught as kids – “Wait!” – and we learn to hate having to wait early on. When we have to wait, we have to shift our sense of control – from controlling our circumstances to controlling ourselves. Ooo, that's not nearly as fun or fulfilling for our culture.

But, wisdom says that, once you've done all you can in a situation that's still not going your way, being impatient isn't going to change it. **The cake you're baking won't bake faster** if you set the oven temperature higher than it should be. You'll just turn your bundt cake into a burnt cake and have to start over. And, in the same way, impatience only causes stress, anxiety and frustration.

Sometimes, we simply need to breathe, rest, and remember to trust that **“He's got the whole world in His hands.** He's got you and me, brother, in His hands. He's got you and me, sister, in His hands. He's got the whole world in His hands.”

As our passage from Isaiah reminded us, “...the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.”

Patience is not just waiting, and it's not just working. It's the balance of the two as we extend ourselves on both sides to partner with God and with others in bringing about the right results. That's the second step.

Lastly, **the third step is bringing it down to earth.** This is where the rubber meets the road in our relationships.

**In verse 11 of 2 Peter 3,** we read these words, “what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...?” As we balance waiting and hastening the coming of the day of God, being people who clothe ourselves

with patience is part of leading lives of holiness and godliness. As Christians, we bear the name of the Lord who has been patient, even to the cross and our salvation. So, we will only be consistent in that identity if we live with patience.

A couple of years ago, I shared **the story of a woman** who got caught in an act of impatience that was inconsistent with her public identity. While running late during her morning commute, she found herself tailgating a responsible gentleman on a busy boulevard when suddenly the light turned yellow just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the cross walk even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. Unfortunately, rather than singing, “I will wait for you,” like Jack did in his great song earlier, the tailgating woman hit the roof and the horn. And, as she missed her chance to get through the intersection, she started screaming in frustration.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit the car with her hands up. He took her to the police station, where she was searched, finger printed, photographed and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, an officer approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting for her with her personal affects. He said, “I’m very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cursing a blue streak at him. I noticed the WWJD bumper sticker, the follow me to Sunday school bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car.” Who could blame the officer for his confusion? We need to live in consistency with the way of Christ.

And, Christ is the answer for us. The one who came to earth to show us the way has deposited his Spirit within us so that we can bring his patience down to earth in our lives. **So, let’s look up and reach up** to God as our source and model of patience. Let’s extend outward in the balance of working and waiting for the Lord and for others. And, let’s live in such a way that others will see our patience and know that we are Christians by our love and long-suffering. In that way, the patience of God that has been our salvation may extend into the life of another and become salvation for them. Let’s pray.

**BENEDICTION:** In President Biden's inaugural address on Wednesday, he quoted St. Augustine, who wrote that a people is a multitude defined by the common objects of their love.

So, may we as a nation under God be defined by our common love for the God who has empowered us to clothe ourselves with patience even as His patience leads to salvation. Though sorrow may last for the night, joy comes in the morning. Let's work and wait together in partnership with God to patiently live for His glory.