

March 2, 2014  
Authentic Christianity

*Authentic Christianity Lasts*  
James 5:7-11

**Opening words:** The great New England preacher Phillips Brooks was noted for his poise and quiet manner. At times, however, even he suffered moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw him feverishly pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What's the trouble, Mr. Brooks?" he asked. "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!" Have you ever grown impatient with God? If you are going to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, then you'd better get comfortable. God is never in a hurry.

This is the last sermon in my seven-part sermon series on the Epistle of James, *Authentic Christianity*. The weeks have moved quickly and the scriptures have been rich. There is a part of me that wants to stay in James. There is so much more in this letter. However, the season of Lent is near. We only have time for one more section in this sacred text. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, James 5:7-11. Let me call this message *Authentic Christianity Lasts*.

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**Psalm 90: 1-4**

- <sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.
- <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- <sup>3</sup> You turn people back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."
- <sup>4</sup> A thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.

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**James 5:7-11** <sup>7</sup> Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup> You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup> Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

<sup>10</sup> Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> As you know, we count as 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.

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William Miller studied his Bible for 14 years and believed he had unlocked the greatest secret in the history of the world. He announced to his followers that Christ would return on April 3, 1843. He must have been a credible man, because so many people believed him. Some of his disciples went to mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others went to graveyards, planning to ascend into heaven with their departed loved ones. In Philadelphia, society ladies clustered together outside of town to avoid entering God's kingdom amid the "common herd". There was only one problem, Christ didn't return. April 3, 1843 came and April 3, 1843 went. The next day, April 4, 1843 came like every other day.

I don't want to sound critical of Mr. Miller. However, in 14 years of Bible study I want to know why he didn't read Mark 13:32 once? What does that verse say? *Jesus had been teaching his disciples about his return and says, "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."* People have been waiting for the return of Christ for a long time. The truth is, you'd better get comfortable. God has never been in a hurry. If you can agree with that last statement, say, "**Amen!**" Let me continue this message in the Old Testament.

If you have ever done any Bible study, then you know there is a section in the Old Testament called the "wisdom literature". These scriptures are considered wise because they teach us about divinity and virtue. Can you name the five books that make up the wisdom literature? There is Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. Each one of these books can be outlined in a certain way. For example, Psalms is naturally broken down into five sections. In other words, there are five books within the one book, Psalms. Our Psalter lesson for today begins the fourth book within Psalms. That book ends with Psalm 106. There is some value in knowing the academic background. However, what is more important to our use is that you know the practical application. What is Psalm 90 trying to teach us about God?

Palm 90 reminds us that God is an everlasting God. In other words, God transcends time. Verse 2 says, "*from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*" That is an incredible verse. It means God never grows old and cranky. God is always open to something fresh and new. Don't just jump over those words. Think about those words. Meditate on those words. God is different from us in many ways. One of the ways God is different is that God is everlasting. In other words, God is immortal. God is not limited by time so God is never in a hurry. That divine truth explains a great deal about God's ways. God can take His time because God is not limited by time. God has been taking His time from the very beginning of time. You see it in both Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, we are told that the world once grew so evil that God decided to destroy it. He was going to start over again. However, he did decide to save one righteous man, Noah. (Genesis 6) God sent Noah building plans for an ark. Once completed, Noah and his family would enter it, along with all the species of animals. Once inside, the rain would come and flood the world.

The world was flooded in forty days. Then, the rain stopped and Noah's family was forced to wait for the water to dry up. In the spring, my backyard is wet. It is so wet that some years it takes weeks to dry up. How long do you think Noah waited for the water to dry up? Who wants to stand next to the snapping turtles waiting for the waters of the flood to dry up? Ask Noah and he will tell you, God has never been in a hurry. If you don't want to listen to Noah, then listen to Abraham.

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis, God makes him a great promise. He is going to be the father of a great nation. That must have been an exciting day for him and his wife, Sarah. They believed the more the children, the greater the blessings. (Now, I am not so sure.) The promise was made to Abraham and Sarah when they were young. The problem is they waited a lifetime to welcome their only son, Isaac, into the world. Genesis 21:6 tells us that Abraham was 100 years old at the time of Isaac's birth. Abraham and Sarah will tell you two things. First, there is a reason only the young have children. Second, they will tell you God has never been in a hurry. It isn't just true in the Old Testament. It is also true in the New Testament.

When the infant Jesus was forty days old, Mary and Joseph went to the temple. It was required by law that they make a sacrifice. When they were in that sacred place, they met two people. The first was a man named Simeon. (Luke 2:25-35) He is described in scriptures as righteous and devout. For years, he had seen babies come and go. However, he knew from the very first glimpse that Jesus was different. The Holy Spirit was upon him. He knew that Jesus was the Messiah! The second person was a woman named Anna. (Luke 2:36-38) She was a prophetess. The scriptures tell us that at the age of 84, she lived in the temple. She too had seen babies come and go. When she saw Jesus, she knew Jesus was no common baby. She too knew Jesus was the Messiah! Simeon and Anna must have talked. They must have wondered why they had to wait so long for God to act. Listen to the next line. Both characters, Simeon and Anna, had waited a lifetime for that single moment because God has never been in a hurry. God is everlasting.

This is the problem. While God is never in a hurry, mankind has always been in a hurry. The second verse of the ninetieth Psalm tells us that God is eternal. *From everlasting to everlasting you are God.* The third verse of that Psalm reminds us that we are mortal. *You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."* In other words, our days are numbered. Can I be honest with you? That fact bothers me. If my days are numbered, then I want to do all I can during my limited time. I am not alone. Our generation is not the first and our generation will not be the last. Mankind has always been in a hurry. We want to do as much as we can, while we can. We want to make every second count. That is why we were taught never to waste time. That is why we were taught to never wish our lives away. That is why we are always finding new ways to do things faster. You see examples of this theme everywhere.

Years ago, I walked into the Golden Arches. I ordered my fast food meal and looked at the cash register. There was a sign on that cash register that read: we will serve you in 90 seconds or less. I took that as a challenge. I looked at my watch and discovered they served me in about 75 seconds. I ate my feast out of the Styrofoam box and had to admit it was fast! However, I don't remember if it was good. Think about this fact. There came a point in our society when fast food wasn't fast enough, so we created the first drive-thru so our fast food could be faster. We are always in a hurry.

One day I was driving toward the mall. I noticed a new billboard. It was promoting a local emergency room. They had one of those electronic digits on the sign that could be changed. It told me the current wait time at the emergency room was only five minutes. That is fast! They tell us they are fast. It didn't say anything about the medical care. We are always in a hurry.

During the Christmas shopping season, many companies promoted their on-line shopping service. You could select and buy your things from home with your computer. They promised you could go to the store and your order would be ready in just 20 minutes. Just walk in and walk out. That is fast! Who wants human interaction during Christmas, anyway? What can I say? The one thing we hate to do is wait. We don't want to wait because our days are numbered. The problem is, God is never in a hurry. God is everlasting. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" Having said all this, let's look at the scripture lesson for today.

We are in the epistle of James. It is important that you remember the background. James was the half-brother of Jesus. They shared a common mother, Mary. James was the son of the Joseph, the carpenter. Jesus was the son of God, creator of the universe. At first, he had trouble believing in Jesus. Can you blame him? He thought his brother had a Messiah complex. However, at some point he believed and grew spiritually. In time, James became the pastor of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem. The congregation was intact until the day that Stephen was stoned. That must have been a dark day in the history of that church. The fear of persecution had become a reality. James's congregation has only one option, to scatter. Only James is left. Everyone else is gone. This letter is James's attempt to reconnect with his lost congregation. He doesn't know if he will ever see them again. He doesn't know if he will be able to communicate them again.

The scripture verses for today are his closing thoughts. He wants each word to count, so the topic he brings up the most important topic of them all, the second coming of Christ. The return of Christ is one of the greatest secrets in the history of the world. No one knows when it is going to happen. Not even Jesus had all the information. The first two words of the scripture reading (Be patient) summarize all five verses. It was difficult for his generation to wait for the return of Christ. It is even more difficult for our generation to wait. The problem is, God is never in a hurry. You might as well get comfortable.

If there are a million ways to say "I love you", waiting patiently must be one. The question is not when Christ will return. The question is, what are we going to do while we wait?

For the past month, I have been on call for the Lockwood United Methodist Church. Their pastor, David Hill, is actually retired. His agreement with them is that he will only work nine months a year. He is no fool. He decided to take the month of February off and spend it in Florida. I was glad to be on call in his absence. I like and respect David. Also, I know many people in that congregation. David returned from the south on Thursday, so I have been relieved of duty.

The truth is, I only visited three different people from Lockwood. I visited a woman by the name of Ruth once, who had her knee replaced. I visited a woman by the name of Dawn once, who had a bad reaction to her chemotherapy. I visited a woman by the name of Lois eleven times. She has a long list of medical problems. She spent most of my tenure in the Intensive Care Unit at Northside Hospital. Last week, she was moved to a long-term care unit at St. Elizabeth. I never heard Lois's voice. She was in some form of a medical coma. Every visit was about the same. Lois lay in her bed hooked up to the various machines. Something was always flashing or beeping. Her husband, Bud, was sitting next to her side. In my eleven visits, there was never a time when Bud wasn't there. He was always there patiently waiting for his wife to show some sign of life. In eleven visits, I got to know a great deal about Bud. I learned his son lived in Connecticut. I learned his daughter lived in southwestern Ohio. I learned about his working career. I learned he was really frustrated with the Cleveland Browns. I learned about his church. However, what I really learned was that Lois was the love of his life. They have been married for 62 years. He was ready to sign up for 62 more. He longed to take her home. In a world filled with many exciting destinations, Bud couldn't leave her side. He just sat there patiently. How could I not respect this man? Each visit ended the same way. Each time he would take Lois' hand and look into Lois' face and say, "Sweetheart, Pastor Russ is going to pray for you." In the face of complete hopelessness, Bud never lost hope. How could you question his love for his wife? Can people question our love for Christ as we wait for his return? Be patient.

Will you pray with me...