

Patience¹

Richard F. Melka

Imagine walking along, surrounded by powerful friends, and someone on the other side of the street starts cursing at you and throwing stones. What would your response be? King David was so accosted by Shimei, one of Saul's relatives.² David patiently accepted the abuse and said, "Perhaps the Lord will notice my *misery and give me some blessings to take the place of this curse.*" Shimei continued to follow, cursing, throwing stones and dirt at them as he went. The wisdom of Proverbs tells us that. "*A patient man is better than a warrior, and he who rules his temper, than he who takes a city.*"³ Certainly King David, a warrior and conqueror of many cities, could have ended the confrontation in a moment. Paul put it this way, "*When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently.*"⁴

This hymn gives nature as an example of patience.⁵

Wait when the seed is planted,
Wait for the rain to fall;
Wait for the restless green sprout,
Wait while the plant grows tall.
Wait for the coming Savior,
Wait through the heart's slows race;
Wait for the kingdom's dawning,
Wait till we see his face!

Nehemiah understood the virtue of patience because of the way God treats his people, and said, "*You were patient with them for many years and warned them by your spirit through your prophets, but they would not listen.*"⁶ Jesus gave the example of the owing servant who pleaded, "*be patient with me*"⁷, was granted mercy, but who in turn had no patience or mercy with his own servant who owed

¹ **Patience** is the ability to endure waiting, delay, or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset, or to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties. (Wikipedia)

² 2 Samuel 16:5-14

³ Proverbs 16:32

⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:12-13

⁵ Magnificat Dec. 2007, pp217-218

⁶ Nehemiah 9:30

⁷ Matthew 18:21-35

much less. He paid dearly for his impatience: *There will be a time when loud-mouthed, incompetent people seem to be getting the best of you. When that happens, you only have to be patient and wait for them to self destruct. It never fails.*⁸ Psalm 37 says:

*Be still before the Lord and wait in patience;
Do no fret at the man who prospers;
A man who makes evil plots
To bring down the needy and the poor.*

*Calm your anger and forget your rage;
Do not fret, it only leads to evil.
For those who do evil shall perish;
The patient shall inherit the land.*

Man's existence on earth is ephemeral and, "That is why the Lord is patient with men and showers upon them his mercy."⁹ "The Lord is not slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is; rather is he being patient with you, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought into repentance."¹⁰ "Think of our Lord's patience as your opportunity to be saved."¹¹

In the Gospel parables Jesus emphasizes ideas about the Kingdom of God which he insists is at hand. In the parable of the weeds the farmer is wise and patient and does not follow the well-intentioned suggestion of his servants who would root out the weeds from among the young wheat. He tells them to let them both grow until harvest time so that the wheat will not be prematurely damaged. The weeds, on the other hand, will be harvested at the same time, allowed to dry, and can then be used for kindling. The enemy, who planned harm, is now outwitted on both accounts; and so it is that wisdom will guide us to recognize that patience can transform what appears to be stumbling blocks into stepping stones. God's power is such that even evil intent and doings will be transformed into something useful for the community of the faithful.

⁸ Richard Rybolt

⁹ Sirach 18:9

¹⁰ 2 Peter 3:9

¹¹ 2 Peter 3:15

St. Isaac of Nineveh says, "*The beginning of the way of life consists in applying the mind to the words of God and exercising patience. For the draught which comes from the words of God help toward the perfection which is in the latter.*"¹² Thomas a Kempis reminds the disciple:

In this life you are always exposed to danger, therefore, "*put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground.*"¹³

You live among many spiritual adversaries and can find yourself surrounded by them at times. Patience is a shield that can defend you from every direction and without it you can be easily wounded.

Set your heart on Jesus and you will have the strength to bear any hardships that befall you and continue to seek the crown of the blessed. The Lord says: "*Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna.*"¹⁴

The procrastinator, on the other hand, will discover constant misery. If you only seek rest and relaxation in this life how will you come to rest in eternity? Therefore, rather than rest, discipline yourself to live with great patience.¹⁵

Truly patient persons are recognized by how they react to being injured and wronged.¹⁶ *The wicked who have power will test the upright person to see if he truly is gentle and patient.*¹⁷ Leonardo da Vinci notes: *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.*

There are seven fruits of the Spirit and they are "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness.*"¹⁸ We also know that, "*Love is patient.*"¹⁹ St. Alphonsus once wrote a book entitled, *Love is Prayer, Prayer is Love*, and if we take his identification literally, we conclude in the context of the Corinthian passage

¹² St. Isaac of Nineveh *On Ascetical Life*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press .New York, 1989.

¹³ Ephesians 6:13-15

¹⁴ Revelation 2:17

¹⁵ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book Three, #12

¹⁶ Ibid, #19

¹⁷ Wisdom 2: 17-20

¹⁸ Galatians 5:22

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:4

that *prayer is patient*. Saint Augustine notes that *patience is the companion of Wisdom*.

Paul urges the Ephesians "to live a life worthy of the vocation to which you were called. With all humility and gentleness and patience, support each other in love."²⁰ There are also times when "we who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves."²¹ "Refute falsehood, correct error, give encouragement - but deal with patience and with care to instruct."²²

There are times when circumstances can be overwhelming as when Job exclaimed. "And why be patient, when doomed to such an end."²³ Job did manage to hang in there, and "the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before."²⁴ "Blessed is the man who has patience and perseveres."²⁵ When life takes that turn into difficult situations, "Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord."²⁶

"A patient man need stand firm for a time, and then contentment comes back to him."²⁷

²⁰ Ephesians 4:2

²¹ Romans 15:1

²² 2 Timothy 4:10

²³ Job 6:11

²⁴ Job 41:10

²⁵ Daniel 12:12

²⁶ James 5:10

²⁷ Sirach 1:20