

The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience

John 20:24-29

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Today we are continuing with our sermon series on The Fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23. I don't know if you have found this to be true already, but one of the natural results of learning from passages of the Bible about how God supernaturally produces his character in us is they become like a mirror to us, showing us not how well we are "performing" the Christian life, but how much we are abiding in Christ, walking in step with the Holy Spirit. And that's hard. But the point is not to wither us, but to move us toward greater dependence on Jesus, and richer obedience to Jesus.

Today we're going to be considering the next fruit mentioned in Paul's letter to the Galatians: patience, as described by Jesus in John 20:24-29. So my big idea in talking about the fruit of patience today is this: If we walk in God's Spirit-empowered life, we as a church will bear the fruit of patience. We'll unpack that idea with three points: Impatience plays God, True patience costs God, Our patience displays God.

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is John 20:24-29. If you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs, you can find today's Scripture passage on page 907. Hear the word of the Lord:

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 14:25-29

May the Word preached here today echo among the nations. You may be seated.

Exposition

Occasionally I get the opportunity to teach Americans about American culture. That sounds weird, right? Don't Americans already understand American culture? Umm, no. No we don't. We assume we understand it, and that's the danger. We're like fish who have lived our whole lives in a fishbowl and assume we understand the ocean. That's why experiencing another culture is so eye-opening for us--it's the moment we often realize for the first time, "Wow! The way I see the world isn't the only way to see the world!"

Here's the example I always use. Imagine I'm from another country and I set foot on American soil for the first time. One of the first things I notice immediately is how many cars are everywhere. Cars and roads, and they're moving fast. This is strange to me because in my country people walk everywhere. There aren't a huge network of roads. So I walk up to you and I ask, "Why are there so many cars in America?" Could you answer my question?

"Hmm," you say, "because we are a wealthy country, I guess." Ok, but you see I'm a very intrigued foreigner, so I'm going to dig deeper than that. I continue, "In my country, even if we could afford cars, we would still prefer to walk. So your culture must put some value on everyone driving cars. What's so good about it?" Could you answer? Probably, after thinking about it a moment. You might answer, "Because cars take you wherever you want to go really quickly and conveniently compared to just walking." Ah, fascinating.

"So," I ask, "according to American culture, the world is right when you can do what you want freely and quickly and conveniently?" You ponder it for a moment and agree. Then I throw out one last question: "If all is right with the world when you can do what you want freely and quickly and conveniently, then when does your world fall apart?" Just to humor my foreigner logic you say, "Well, when I can't do whatever I want freely or quickly or conveniently."

Wow. We have just arrived at one of the main arteries of the American heart and worldview just in thinking deeply about our use of cars. We are a people wired from birth to value freedom, instant gratification, and comfort. No wonder we aren't patient people!

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¹ Lloyd Kwast, "Understanding Culture," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*

In this particular culture (whether you're from here or moved here), of all the fruit of the Spirit that Paul mentions in Galatians 5, perhaps patience stands out in most noticeable contrast to societal behavior. Think about a person that goes to the coffee shop--just to drink coffee. No computer. No phone. No headphones. No meetings. No book. Just sits there and sips coffee. Weirdo! Creepo probably!² We don't even have a category for a patient person.

When Paul wrote of patience he used a word that has a range of meanings such as long-suffering, patience, endurance, and so forth.³ When we boil it down, we can give this definition to patience: The ability to take trouble (from life or others) without blowing up.

And when you put it that way, it sure makes me proud that I never drive too fast or honk at people who hesitate for two seconds at a stoplight or sneak a text in while driving. I'm sure glad I don't do any of those impatient things. You too, right? Ok, let's get real in here. The first step in facing addiction is admitting we're addicts. So let me start: Hi, my name is Brad, and I'm addicted to freedom, instant gratification, and comfort. I like to think of myself as a patient person, but I am actually very impatient on the inside.

And my impatience plays God. "Wait," you might say, "I was with you until that last statement: *my impatience plays God?*" Yes, and that brings us to our first point, impatience plays God.

I. Impatience Plays God

This is the first thing we see in today's passage. Jesus has risen from the dead and shown himself to the disciples by appearing to them suddenly in their locked room. As you can imagine, it had to be an unforgettable experience for them all, and that sets up Thomas to be that one guy who for the rest of his life can't live down that he missed it. We read in verse 24,

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." John 20:24-25

² Jared C. Wilson, *The Imperfect Disciple: Grace For People Who Can't Get Their Act Together*, 62

³ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness*, Loc 855-860

Now, there's a lot to speculate about here. And most of the time it's about Thomas--that's why he's forever known to history as *doubting* Thomas. One famous pastor even refers to Thomas as "Eeyore" from Winnie the Pooh because he always seems so down and out.⁴ But maybe he shouldn't get so bad a rap.

If you really look deeply at the few instances where something he says is actually recorded in the Bible, he appears to be a realist. Know what I mean by "realist"? A realist is a person who will say it like it is, or straight up ask you the question that everybody wants to ask but won't ask. Jesus says,

you know the way to where I am going. John 14:4

--and Thomas the realist says,

Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? John 14:5

Jesus says,

let us go to [Lazarus]. John 11:15

in a place where they were plotting to kill him--and Thomas the realist says,

Let us also go, that we may die with him. John 11:16

The thing with a realist is that you can easily misinterpret them as pessimists, when in fact they're so real because they're so earnest; they're earnest about the heart of the matter. Thomas was earnest about Jesus Christ.⁵ There's no way he would've followed Jesus around for three years if he wasn't. And when the one thing in your life that you're most earnest about--your very heart--gets ripped away from you, you're going to bleed.

We shrug and roll our eyes at a child when they lose their mind because their balloon floated away. Wouldn't it be ironic in that moment if suddenly your wallet, phone, and car keys floated away? You'd lose your mind too! It's easy to wag our finger at dumb ol' doubting Thomas--but the One he had come to love most had just been ripped away and ripped to pieces and nailed down and hung up until he died!

Yeah, there's doubt here, but there's pain here; the kind of pain that hardens the heart. The kind of evil that can't be reconciled with a good God, especially a good God who says he's all powerful. How could he let something like this happen?! Don't look at me like you haven't been there. Maybe you're there right now. And so you get it when

⁴ John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples For Greatness, and What He Wants to Do With You*

⁵ Derek Thomas, "Doubting Thomas, John 20:24-29," 2-3

Thomas says, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Still yet, this is ugly. There’s the obvious lack of faith. There’s the unwillingness to believe the unanimous testimony of nine of his closest friends. But it goes deeper than that. There’s a measure of resentment here, especially reflected in the word Thomas uses for the act of putting his hand into Jesus side, where a spear pierced him. We translate it “*place* my hand,” but it literally means “throw,” as though Thomas is saying, “I won’t believe unless I *thrust* (or in more common language, shove) my hand into his side.”⁶

And Thomas isn’t just doubtful but cynical, which snaps at the faith of others. It’s so deep that he doesn’t just demand any old sign--he wants hard evidence. The scary thing about this is that earlier in John’s Gospel Jesus had denounced the demand for signs, saying,

*Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. John 4:48*⁷

Thomas’ patience was gone. Remember our definition of patience? The ability to take trouble without blowing up. There was a raging inside Thomas that had blown him to bits. And guess who the shockwave of his raging was directed toward? The disciples might have felt its effects, but it wasn’t toward them. It was directed straight at Jesus.

That’s because in our impatient blowing up is a man or woman playing God, rejecting the only good, all-powerful God. The Old Testament reminds us of this constantly, contrasting the wicked who take measures into their own hands with the faithful who wait patiently on the Lord. Isaiah shows this so clearly when he writes,

*10 Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys the voice of his servant?*

*Let him who walks in darkness
and has no light*

*trust in the name of the LORD
and rely on his God.*

*11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire,
who equip yourselves with burning torches!*

*Walk by the light of your fire,
and by the torches that you have kindled!*

*This you have from my hand:
you shall lie down in torment. Isaiah 50:10-11*

⁶ Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, 577

⁷ Kostenberger, 578

Our impatience is more than just American culture. It's little fits of rage inside us that refuse to wait upon the Lord. It's a work of the flesh, a distrusting of God himself that leads to torment in this life and the life to come.

II. True Patience Costs God

But thanks be to God this isn't the end of the sermon! Even as our impatience plays God, it gives him the perfect opportunity to display his character; which brings us to our second point, true patience costs God. Despite every reason for us to expect that Jesus would be furious, and would meet impatience with impatience--"Thomas, I just *died* for you!"--here's his response:

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." John 20:26-27

Don't miss this by saying, "Oh well, that's just Jesus being Jesus. He's super chill." No, Thomas deserved torment! At the very least he deserved a good choke-slam. But the risen Lord of the universe walks into the room and says, "Peace be with you." Then he goes straight after the straying sheep and offers him grace.

And I don't just mean "grace" in the generic way we use it often. Remember, grace isn't just forgiveness, like "It's cool, Thomas, no problem." It's forgiveness plus more. Jesus doesn't just withhold what Thomas deserves (forgiveness); he gives him what he doesn't deserve (grace).⁸ He says, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side," the very thing that Thomas cynically demanded. *This* is true patience. We don't naturally have a category for the patience of Jesus. I think that's why the Old Testament often describes him as

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, Exodus 34:6

And even if this description wasn't given, we could still know something of his patience just by the story itself: he keeps pursuing people like Thomas over seemingly endless centuries and generations.⁹ That doesn't mean he doesn't throw down the judgment that

⁸ David Jeremiah, "Difference Between Mercy and Grace," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l37aG4lUtA>

⁹ Wright, 866-877

people deserve at times. But even when he does, his anger doesn't last forever. The prophet Micah marvels over this, saying,

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. 19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18-19¹⁰

And this isn't Jesus just saying, "Give me some space and I'll get over it." That's what our "patience" often looks like, right? When God is being patient with our sins that must be punished, that punishment doesn't just go away. So where *does* it go? God bears it; he carries it. This is what is happening in every instance of God's patience in the Old Testament. This is why Isaiah writes

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:4a, 6*

In our impatience we cry out, "I just can't bear it anymore!" But this amazing God says, "I can bear it," and he proves it through his Son who bore it all on the cross. There is the true cost of patience.¹¹ And this is the true picture of patience: Jesus and Thomas. Jesus' patience doesn't stay at a distance. It comes right to where you're brooding, right to where you've gone cynical and stubborn, right to where you're lacking patience; and it confronts you with the patience that died for you. It melts you. Then it commands you, "Do not disbelieve, but believe." No wonder then

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:28

When the true patience of God in the form of a resurrected Savior confronts the impatient hearts of sinners like us, we are led to this conclusion: Jesus is Lord. Now, some will try to suppress that truth, but some will embrace it, like Thomas, who was transformed from an unyielding skeptic to a man that provides one of the greatest confessions of Jesus' deity in the entire Bible.¹² In other words, the eternal testimony of

¹⁰ Wright, 882-889

¹¹ Wright, 923-938

¹² D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 656-659

dumb ol' "doubting Thomas" points to a resurrected Lord Jesus. And in John's Gospel, Thomas becomes this climactic example of what the entire book is about: believing that Jesus is Lord and having life in his name.¹³

III. Our Patience Displays God

And that's where we want to land this morning, and probably what Paul was getting at when he listed patience as a fruit of the Spirit. When impatient people like us, in an impatient culture like ours, believe that Jesus is Lord and receive life in his name, the patience that his Spirit then produces in us points to God like crazy. This brings us to our third and final point: our patience displays God. Jesus affirms this in his response to Thomas:

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 14:29

Now, Jesus isn't putting Thomas down here. He's doing what Jesus does, using a moment of clarity to take things even deeper. He's thinking about all the people throughout the rest of time who will *not* have the opportunity to touch the scars on his hands and side, but will still choose to believe.¹⁴ This is going to require them to get at the heart of patience, not playing God, but entrusting themselves to him, waiting upon him without ever actually seeing him.

And just as true patience costs God, living a fruitful Christian life requires a patience that will cost you. How? I submit to you, exhibit A. Probably the most patient person I know in the whole world is the man in the yellow hat, from Curious George. Yes, George is cute and lovable, but he basically makes a huge mess out of everything. Yet the man in the yellow hat is always so patient; he never seems to get angry or get rid of George. And so I regularly find myself looking at this guy and saying, "What an idiot! He just lets this monkey do anything to him."

And there it is: there's the cost of patience in the middle of an impatient world. You're going to look like an idiot.

When you entrust your soul to a faithful Creator instead of demanding him to prove himself to you, to many you will look like an idiot.¹⁵

¹³ John 20:3-31; Carson, 659

¹⁴ Carson, 660

¹⁵ 1 Peter 4:19

When you patiently endure sorrows while suffering unjustly, whether it's the mistreatment of a family member or a co-worker or a neighbor or a fellow Christian, to many you will look an idiot who just lets people run all over you.¹⁶

When you wait patiently on the Lord to hear your cries for a spouse or a child or a job or a dream instead of forcing open doors or blowing up, to many you will look like an idiot who's too weak to succeed.¹⁷

When you cry "Come Lord Jesus!" with your eyes on the day that depression will end and death won't take anymore, to many you'll be a person with their head in the clouds.

¹⁸ And yet when you let the Spirit empower you to take on the costs of patience, you display the costly patience of our God, which is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.¹⁹ Your life points to the one who

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7*

Now, this does not mean we let anyone do anything they want to us, or that we fake patience with one another without addressing hurts we've made to one another. What we're talking about here is not patience for patience sake, but patience as it fits into all the fruit of the Spirit, which are ultimately expressed in love, a holistic love, a cruciform love; as pastor and counselor Chuck DeGroat admonishes us,

As Christians, our pattern for loving others comes from the cruciform, self-giving love of Jesus. This is not a love that allows evil to trample over us, nor a love that passively accepts it. The self-giving love of Jesus is active, though not reactive. It dies a thousand deaths for the sake of the other. It calls injustice and abuse what they are, but it doesn't live enslaved by the need to get a payback. It sees the big picture, knowing that redemption is a long, slow road.²⁰

¹⁶ 1 Peter 2:19

¹⁷ Psalm 40:1

¹⁸ Revelation 22:20

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:18

²⁰ Chuck DeGroat, *Toughest People to Love: How to Understand, Lead, and Love the Difficult People in Your Life--Including Yourself*, 102

Conclusion

If we walk in the Spirit-empowered life with our eyes on the cruciform love of Jesus, we as a church will bear the fruit of patience. And here is our opportunity, right now, to remember his patience for us. On the night he was betrayed, when he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **We are announcing that Jesus Christ endured us and the punishment for our sins without blowing up.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to my left, your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember what Jesus has done for you. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, let us know so we can help prepare you for baptism and communion. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back and people to pray with you on the sides. Let’s pray.

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