

This morning we continue our look at the fruits of the Spirit with the fruit known as patience. And the main passage we are going to look at, although we will look at a few other passages as well, the main one is in Matthew chapter 18, beginning at verse 21.

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” ²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold^[h] was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.^[i] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ ³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

The fruits of the Spirit that we have looked at together so far are love, joy and peace. They all have such a good feeling to them. I remember memorizing the passage about the fruits of the Spirit when I was a child. From Galatians 5 verses 22-23. In case you don’t remember it is goes like this: “²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” That is the passage that I know well and I am betting many of you know well too. And I don’t know about you, but I have always felt a shift when we get to patience. It has always had this affect on me. We have love, joy, peace, patience? Patience does not give me the same feeling as the first three. The first three feel warm and fuzzy. Patience does not. And for someone like me, who is not known for being good at patience, I am wanting to know why does patience have to be a fruit of the Spirit? Why would being Spirit filled result in more patience? What role does patience play in both our relationship with God and our relationships with each other?

I will be honest with you. When Pastor Mike put the preaching schedule together and we figured out who would cover which Sundays, neither of us wanted the week for patience. Why? Because it is not easy for either of us and we have both failed at it before. So why is patience a fruit of the Spirit? Well, this parable by Jesus that we have before us this morning tells us something about patience and why it is a necessary fruit of the Spirit. Starting in verse 23 Jesus says this: “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold^[h] was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be

patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." So the man says be patient with me, or have patience, and I will repay the debt. And the king's response is what? Not "OK repay me when you can." Instead the king actually forgives the debt. So patience has a role in forgiveness. And that is the first point about this fruit. Patience has a role in forgiveness. This whole passage this morning begins with Peter asking Jesus how many times does he has to forgive someone. This passage is about forgiveness. And this is where we find patience. So patience has a role in forgiveness. The question is why?

Well, if you think about forgiveness, forgiveness is being willing to take on the debt of someone else. It is being willing to say you owe me this, but I am going to free you of owing me. That is what happens in this parable right? This guy owes more than he can even pay, so the king forgives the debt. He takes on the cost of not getting paid back. Well, the definition of patience is this: "the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset." The capacity to accept. So both patience and forgiveness are about accepting something. About taking something on. And then the definition of patience includes that you can accept this without getting angry.

Now what role does anger have in this parable? If we look back at this we have the king that takes pity on the servant and forgives his debt. He does not get angry. He is patient, has pity, and he forgives. But then there is the servant who gets angry at the fellow servant that owes him much less. He has anger towards his fellow servant and does he forgive him? No. He has his fellow servant punished. So there is this needed absence of anger in order to truly forgive someone. And this is where patience comes in. Thus patience has a role in forgiveness.

Patience also factors into forgiveness because, as Jesus points out to Peter in this passage, you will be required to forgive over and over again. Peter was hoping he was in good standing when he suggested forgiving someone 7 times was enough. The Jewish tradition was that three times was enough. Jewish law stated that "If a man commits a transgression, the first second and third time he is forgiven. The fourth time he is not." That was the rule. So Peter has gone far beyond that when he asks Jesus if 7 times is enough for a repeat offender. But then Jesus says 77 times...which is not an exact number. It is a high number indicating you will never be done forgiving people. And if we are never done forgiving others, then we are going to need some patience.

Now patience having a role in forgiveness applies mostly to our relationships with one another. We have to be patient with each other. And this appears in other places in the Bible as well. Proverbs 14:29; "Whoever is patient has great understanding." Ephesians 4:2; "Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love." And Paul is consistent about patience in most of his letters. I just quoted Ephesians. It also shows up in Colossians 3:12; "Therefore, and God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Reminders to be patient with each other show up in the letters of Timothy and Peter as well. Why are there so many exhortations to be patient with each other in the early church? Probably because they found it challenging just as we find it challenging.

There is a great example of this in Acts chapter 1. In it Jesus tells the disciples directly "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit." They are clearly told to go back to Jerusalem and wait a few days for the Holy Spirit. Well, they do go back to Jerusalem to wait. But while waiting, Peter gets antsy and gives this long speech, starting in Acts 1 verse 16 about how they need to replace

Judas right away. And they pick two candidates among them and draw lots and Matthias becomes apostle number 12. This is not what Jesus told them to do. He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit. He did not instruct them to replace Judas ASAP. They jumped the gun. So the church since the early church has a long history of not waiting on the Holy Spirit and struggling with patience. And we struggle with being patient with one another as well, don't we. How many of you have been to a church meeting of any kind...Bible study, luncheon, deacon meeting, session meeting, or committee meeting, any of these where you felt tired of listening to someone's opinion and started to lose patience? Come on, be honest (show of hands).

There was a gentleman named Frank and he was known for his patience and also not a fan of negative conversation. He liked things brief and positive. One day he got a call from his wife while he was at work. She started talking very slowly, muttering a bit. She also seemed upset. After trying to listen to her Frank got impatient and interrupted her and begged her to be brief and positive. She paused for a moment and then said "I discovered the airbags in the BMW work great!"

We do struggle to be patient with one another, including in the context of this church. Now, you might be thinking to yourself, "I got impatient because that person was going on with an idea I thought was not a good one or a waste of time." That might be true, you may have felt that way. But we have to remember that God has put each person in this church here for a reason. Each one of you sitting there right now is here for a reason. And none of us knows who God might use to bring about a new idea or correction or change. So we have to be patient with each other and listen to each other.

So far I have talked about patience as it pertains to our relationships with one another. But what about our relationships with God? What role does patience play in your relationship with God and my relationship with God? Again, why is patience a fruit of the Spirit? When it comes to our personal relationships with God, patience is needed in order for us to receive grace. It is necessary for us to have the patience to wait for the Holy Spirit to move us towards God. The Bible tells us this in Psalm 37:7 "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him." This passage could just say wait for him, but it says to wait patiently for him. In other words we don't wait anxiously for God, we wait patiently. And then there is the kind of waiting we are doing now, waiting for the coming of the kingdom and for our salvation to be complete. According to the Bible we have to wait patiently for that too. Romans 8:25 "But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

G. Campbell Morgan defined waiting for God this way and I like this: "Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given."

So patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that allows us to forgive one another and to receive God's grace. Going back to this parable, it also reminds us that patience is intentional. God showing patience to us, like the king in the parable to the servant, is intentional on God's part. God has to be intentional about patience with humankind throughout the Bible. We read about one of those places this morning in the responsive reading. Where God is actively saving the Israelite people and what are they doing? Complaining. God is patient with them over thousands of years. So our patience with one another and our patience to wait on God has to be intentional. Don't expect it to just come to you and come easily. Be intentional.

If we know patience is part of forgiveness, both our forgiveness and our ability to forgive others, and we know that patience is part of how we receive grace from God, and we know it needs to be intentional, one question that comes out of this might be “well how to I get more patience?” Well, it is a “fruit” of the Spirit. So you get it from the Holy Spirit. How? Well, one, you need to seek it, you need to ask for it. If you are not actively seeking the Holy Spirit to guide you and bless you, you will miss out. So one, ask for it. Two, spend more time with God. Your ability to be patient with others and forgive will improve the better you know the God that has been patient with you and forgiven you. The Holy Spirit will provide you with this fruit more and more the more and more you draw close to God. And for each person here this could look different. Look at your life with God now. What is on the slim side right now? It could be time in the Bible, it could be prayer time, it could be quiet time, it could be fellowship with other Christians. Each person here is different and has a different path they walk with God. So I can’t tell you exactly what to do. But I can assure you that the better you know the God of patience, the easier it will be to receive the fruit of patience.

One of my favorite examples of needing patience in the Bible is in the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel 13. At this point Saul is king of Israel and they are battling the Philistines. And the prophet Samuel tells Saul to go to Gilgal and wait there seven days and then Samuel will come and make an offering to God and God will liberate them. So Saul goes to Gilgal and waits. And while there the Philistines assemble this huge army with three thousand chariots and the people of Israel get really afraid. And beginning in verse 7 the passage says this: “Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul’s men began to scatter. ⁹So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. ¹¹“What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, ¹²I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” I love that line. In short, everything was going wrong so I felt compelled to not wait for God. Have you ever felt this way? This is why patience is so important. It really effects our relationship with God.

So whether it is our relationship with each other or our relationship with God, patience is a necessary fruit for forgiveness to happen, for God to guide us, and for us to be ready and able to receive God’s grace. Brothers and sisters, do what you need to do to receive patience. As God has been intentionally patient with us, be intentional about seeking and receiving patience. Because just as the servant could never have paid back that 10 thousand bags of gold to the king, the debt was never going to be payable, God has forgiven us for an unpayable debt of sin. And patience was necessary for that to happen. So as God has been patient and forgiven you, so too may we be patient and forgive, for we have been given an immeasurable amount of patience. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.