

James 5:7–11: ⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

God Loves It When His Plan Comes Together

INTRODUCTION

Does anyone here remember a hit show on NBC in the mid 80s called the A-Team? It was one of my favorite TV shows at the time, during what Candace and I call our “BK” years—before kids. It was an action-adventure series about members of a fictitious former U.S. Army Special Forces unit. The opening narration for each episode went like this: “In 1972, a crack commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn’t commit. These men promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire ... the A-Team. Now, while they were soldiers of fortune, they always acted on the side of good to rescue the innocent and the oppressed.

The show starred one of my favorite actors, George Peppard, as the cigar-smoking team leader, “Hannibal” Smith. Then there was Dirk Benedict, who portrayed Templeman Peck, also know as “Faceman” because of his good looks. Then there was Dwight Schultz, who played “Howling Mad” Murdock, the teams insane but super-competent pilot—he could fly anything.

Every episode the team had to break him out of one psychiatric hospital or another. Then there was Mr. T, who played Bosco “B.A.” (Bad Attitude) Baracus, the team’s muscle.

Virtually every show had the same plot: A person who was in trouble—or knew of someone who was in trouble—would make contact with the A-Team. Hannibal Smith would assemble the team, make a plan, break Murdock out of the hospital—and then implement the plan. But something would also go wrong—and the team would end up captured or in some kind of jeopardy. But they would figure out a way to escape, defeat the bad guys in a flurry of bullets and violent explosions—where only buildings and vehicles would suffer, rescue the good guy—or gal—and then Hannibal Smith would take a puff from his cigar and deliver the show’s signature line, “I love it when a plan comes together.”

For 98 episodes it looked like that plan would fail, but in every episode, the plan always came together in the end!

In our Epistle reading, James writes, “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”

That little word, “PURPOSE,” is full of theological meaning. Volumes could be written about it—endless sermons have been delivered on it—but suffice it to say at its core it means, “When a plan comes together.” In other words, James says: “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the Lord’s plan come together, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”

The only way our just God can have compassion and mercy on sinners is if He has a plan to take away our sin and defeat our death. God’s plan was to pay the debt of sin that we owed God. Since human beings can’t overcome sin or death, God must do it—God must come into this

world to implement His plan to save us.

Now God's didn't reveal His plan in glory and might—as you might expect. His plan was hidden under the human flesh of Jesus. For in order for God's plan to work, God had to become a human being so He could live and die as our substitute—and to rise again as a seal and sign that our rescue from sin, death and the devil was complete. Thus, the incarnation of Jesus is crucial to God's plan of salvation—and why Christmas and Easter are such great times of celebration!

But because God's plan was revealed in the human flesh and blood of Jesus, it doesn't always look like God's plan is coming together. Human beings like to see God work in greatness and glory, not in a little baby or a humble man—but not especially by way of the cross.

It was that way for John the Baptist. Our Gospel reading finds him in one of King Herod's prisons because he was doing his job—calling all of Judea to repent—including Herod and his wife—in preparation for the Messiah. In such a bleak and dark situation, John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one to come, or should we look for another?” “Are you really the one to fulfill God's plan of salvation—or is there another Messiah?”

I think you can understand John's doubt. He's looking for the A-Team to come and rescue him, but Jesus didn't look much like the “Special Forces” Messiah John was expecting. But Jesus pointed John's disciples to His Works: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” In Christ Jesus God's plan is coming together—just as God intended. A broken

creation is being restored and renewed—and only God can do this. Jesus is the promised Messiah—God in human flesh.

At times it can look pretty bleak for Christians in this world, too. All sorts of things and events seem to be working hard to undo God’s plan of salvation for us by creating doubt in us—encouraging fear—and taking away joy and hope. Temptations to sin, the shifting moral landscape, a shrinking church, political unrest, the aging of our bodies, the burden of caring for loved ones, sickness and death are all busy trying to undo God’s plan of salvation.

Like John, we may ask: “Jesus, are you the one to come, or should we look for another, One who will come in glory to rescue us and crush our enemies?”

James speaks to you today just as much as he spoke to your Christian brothers and sisters nearly two thousand years ago: “⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

James calls you to wait for Jesus’ return with patience. Jesus’ return—and your final redemption—is at hand. Each day brings you one day closer to that day! God’s plan of salvation has come together in Christ Jesus right here on the cross for all of humanity. So be patient as you wait for the final element of God’s plan to come together—the return of Christ as King on Judgment Day—then you will see Christ in His power and glory! And it will happen because God is always faithful!

But then James adds, “⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not

be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.”

The problem is, it can be difficult to wait if the wait gets too long. This is a fast-food world, and we want our glory and our rescue now. “Now” seems to be the motto of our day. And when we don’t get it now, we grumble—usually against those who are only trying to help us. You see impatience in waiting rooms where people want to see their doctors now—and how irritated they become with the desk clerks, who actually have no power over the situation. Or in hospitals where patients are irritated with nurses because they don’t come right away—even though they are so busy they don’t have time to use the restroom!

When I was at the Cleveland Clinic, the Clinic did a study of people in their waiting rooms. They found that people were much more willing to wait patiently if they were kept informed about their wait—if they were told how long their wait would be, or if the doctor was delayed due to an emergency. When people were told nothing—that’s when they were the least satisfied with their wait.

Now it’s interesting that God wants to keep you informed while you wait for Jesus to return. He’s given you His Word in which He tells you that you’re waiting while He continues to seek and save the lost. Isn’t that great that God wants to give others the same compassion and mercy he’s given you? After all, others had to wait for God to bring you to repentance and faith, and show you compassion and mercy!

But not only does God keep you informed through His Word—through His Word He gives you the ability to wait patiently. The most important answer that Jesus gave John the Baptist was this: “and the poor have good news preached to them.” This world has a way of making you poor

in spirit—tempting you to sin, wearing you down, robbing you of hope and joy, and filling you with doubt about God’s plan. But into your situation Christ preaches His Good News of sins forgiven and life with God restored—now. Those spiritual blessings you do have now! Every baptized and believing Christian has the gift of eternal life—now—all because of Jesus.

The Word proclaims that the flesh and blood Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s plan to show you compassion and mercy. And through His Word God sustains you as you wait for His final rescue on the Day of Judgment—and takes you home to that place of everlasting gladness and joy.

Conclusion

On the A-Team, the plan always came together in a great flurry of bullets and explosions. But God didn’t bring His plan together with a great flurry of angelic power or devastating might—but in the innocent suffering and death of His Son. The cross is an offense to many, but cross is where God’s plan came together.

And as Jesus was working in John’s day, so He’s working now—His power and glory are hidden under things like Word and Sacrament, Absolution and preaching, love and forgiveness. For many people, this isn’t enough—they want more. But for you who are being saved, Christ crucified is the glory of God. Here is where God’s fulfilled His plan to show you compassion and mercy—and because God loves you, He loves it when His plan comes together!

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.