

Until Then (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] read or hear about someone who has destroyed their credibility and it's no one's fault but their own. Jesse Smollett.

He's the poster child of someone doing that right now. But what he's done is not something new.

People have been doing that, well-known people, obscure people. People have been doing that since the Garden of Eden. You can think of individuals well-known or in your family or among your friends who did some things that it appears they destroyed their credibility.

It happens to Christians. In fact, one of the most well-known Christian leaders of all time, Simon Peter, the leader of Jesus' disciples, he almost destroyed his credibility.

Most of you in here, you know the story. He appeared to have just blown it all when, right after Jesus was arrested, Peter was asked not once, not twice, but three times, do you know him or you are one of his?

[1 : 32] And all three times, Peter said, no. I don't even know the man. Now, that's well-known among Christians.

But do you remember what happened before Peter did that? Before Jesus was arrested, Jesus prayed this for Peter.

Look at it. It's in Luke 22. Jesus said, I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

By God's grace, Peter did not destroy his faith or his credibility. After he denied Jesus, the scripture tells us he went out and he was broken.

He truly repented. He came back as a strong Christian, Christian leader, and pillar of the early church. He did exactly what Jesus prayed he would do.

[2 : 43] He strengthened his brothers. He did that to the very end of his life, as recorded in his last letter, 2 Peter. If you would, turn there with me this morning.

2 Peter, chapter 3, the last letter that this disciple, who appeared to have messed up his life, destroyed his credibility, but he came back.

This is not the focus of the message this morning, but I want you to know this. If you have royally messed up some things in your life, maybe you've done some things just within your family or to a certain friend or where you work or where you did work.

You've done some things that it appears you have lost your credibility. I want you to not give up.

By the grace of God, if Peter could come back from what he did, you can come back as well. Sometimes it takes time.

[4 : 00] Sometimes it requires God working in some other people's lives to forgive you and to show you grace. But God can work in all kinds of situations, and he does, to rescue us when we blow it, as in a case like Peter.

2 Peter, chapter 3, beginning in verse 13. We're going to continue to look at how God expects us, commands us, to live in this world until we see Jesus face to face.

Now that day is going to come for every single one of us in here. One day we're going to see Jesus face to face. It'll be the day that we die. You know, we looked at that a few weeks ago.

We did a series, what happens after we die, what happens after Christians die. And we looked at from several different passages of Scripture, when we close our eyes in death in this world, we're going to open them again immediately in the presence of Jesus.

So one day, we're all going to be face to face with Jesus. Either right after we die, or we could be alive when He returns to this world.

[5 : 25] And we'll see Him when He comes back. But the point that Peter is going to make in this passage is, it matters how we live until that day.

God holds us accountable for how we live our lives day in and day out in this world. Let's read it. 2 Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 13.

But according to His promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these things, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace.

And count the patience of the Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given Him, as He does in all His letters when He speaks in them of these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

[6 : 37] You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. God cares how we live right now. Here's what we looked at last week.

Get serious about your character. As we live life in this world, right up till the day we die or Jesus comes, God wants us to be serious about who we are in terms of our character.

Look at verse 14. He says, Be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace. That was what we looked at last week in a lot of detail.

So let's just hit some highlights here. God calls each one of us to develop and demonstrate Christian character in two ways. A lot of ways really, but two in this passage.

[7 : 48] Number one, live a pure life. That's what He's talking about when He says, without spot or blemish. Purity matters to God. And as I said last week, some people look at that and they just automatically think about sexual purity and it certainly matters to God.

But God cares about how we live in every realm of our lives. God cares about us being morally pure in our own minds and what we think when nobody else knows.

He cares about us being morally pure in our speech. The way we talk to people and about people. And obviously, God cares about our moral purity and just the way we live.

That includes our private lives when nobody else is around, nobody else sees, as well as our public life.

A lot of you know a well-known concept or definition of character. Character is defined by how we are when no one's looking just as much as when everyone is looking.

[9 : 02] God wants us to live pure lives. It matters. God also wants us to live a peaceful life. Look at that word, not just spotless and blameless, but at peace.

It's important that we live at peace with God and other people. But the point here seems to be the character quality of peace. And peace is the character quality.

We've done a study on Wednesday nights on the fruit of the Spirit not too long ago. Paul lists in Galatians chapter 5 a list of character qualities that he calls the fruit of the Spirit and one of them is peace.

Now, one of the best ways for us to develop such peace is to truly trust God that He is both wise and sovereign.

That means we need to learn to trust God that He's wise. He always knows what's best, what's right for us. And because He's sovereign, He always has the ability, the power to bring it about when He wants to and in the way He wants to.

[10 : 17] If we'll learn to trust God like this instead of worrying, peace will be the result. I want you to look at what Paul says in Philippians chapter 4 along this line.

He says, Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.

and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. We can develop this character quality of peace, of wellness, rightness when we learn to trust God, take things to Him in prayer instead of worrying about it because He has the power and the ability to actually do things that will work out in the way that's best for us.

Trust Him. Now, we also saw last week that God calls us to put forth our best effort to develop such character. Look at the first words again. Be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemishing at peace.

God's actually commanding us to try hard to live like the Christian that He has already made us. This doesn't mean try hard to make yourself right with God.

[11 : 50] I emphasized that last week. We are saved by God's grace, His undeserved favor through faith in Jesus and what He's done not what we've done.

When God saves us He puts His Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit works in us from the time we're saved. He works in us throughout our lives and He's the one who gives us desires to please God.

You know, sometimes when you think right and you know you think better than other people, you have better desires than a lot of people maybe that you work with, some of your classmates. Don't pat yourself on the back.

If you're a Christian that's the Spirit of God working in you, giving you those kind of desires and He'll not only give you those desires but Scripture tells us He will work in us to enable us to act on them, to do them.

Again, from last week, Philippians 2.13, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Peter's telling us here in verse 14, in effect, put forth your best effort to cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that you can be pure and peaceful, a pure and peaceful Christian.

[13 : 14] Now, let's move on. The next way to get ready to meet Jesus face to face whenever that will be is this, make the most of God's patience. Have you ever thought about how patient God is and why?

Well, let's look at it. This is going to be in verses 15 and the first part of verse 16. He says, and count the patience of our Lord as salvation. God's giving us time to be saved.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation. Just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him as he does in all of his letters when he speaks in them about these matters.

Peter is describing God as being patient and that's his way of explaining why Jesus has not come back into this world. We'll look at it later on next week.

Peter is combating false teachers. People in the church, people who came into the church and caused all kinds of problems because they were teaching things that were wrong, that were leading people astray.

[14 : 22] And one of the things they were teaching is this. These New Testament leaders like Peter, Paul, they've been saying for years that Jesus was coming back.

Well, he hasn't. And the reason he hasn't is he's not going to. And so Peter's responding, they don't know what they're talking about. The reason that Jesus has not returned to this world yet is because God is being patient with people, giving them time to be saved.

I want you to look back at verse 9. We didn't read it, but we're in 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 9. It's going to be on the screen. Peter explains this in more detail. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Now think about what He's saying. People are saying, Lord's never coming back. It's been this long, He never will. But Peter is saying, no.

The reason that Jesus has not yet returned is because God is patiently waiting, working in people's lives, giving them time to repent.

[15 : 47] And Peter points out that Paul taught the same thing in His letters. Now, we don't know which letters.

It could have been, for example, Romans. Here's why I say that. Paul emphasized not only God's patience, but also His kindness in this statement.

Look at it. He says, do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Now, I want us to just pause here for a few minutes and think about that God is patient. He's patient with us. He's patient with people who do not believe.

God's patience reveals His love, His mercy, and His grace. I don't know what everyone's concept of God is.

[16 : 55] Some people have a warped view that God's in heaven looking down on us, waiting for us to get out of line so He can inflict some kind of pain or punishment on us. That couldn't be further from the truth.

These passages that I'm reading from Romans, here from 2 Peter, God's patience reveals that He's a God of love, of mercy, of grace.

God does not want to destroy people. He wants to save people. Peter's telling us. But when Jesus returns to this world, the truth is the time for salvation will be over.

At the time of death, our time of salvation will be over. Whatever a person's spiritual condition is, at the moment they see Jesus, whether it be through death or His return, at the moment they see Jesus, at the moment we see Jesus, our eternal destiny is determined.

It is fixed. It is permanent. As we saw a few weeks ago in another study, that means it'll either be joy in heaven or torment in hell.

[18 : 19] That's the reality. The fact that Jesus has not yet come back to this world is because God is being patient with people. Right now, God is waiting for more and more people to repent of their sin and trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

I'm going to touch on this a little bit later on, but right now, if you have family members and friends who are not Christians, you need to take this and make it personal. God is being patient, waiting on your loved one, your friend.

And it may be that God is patiently waiting for you to share the gospel with that person. And through your witness, God's going to draw them to faith in Jesus.

Don't discount that reality, that possibility. Now, if you're not a Christian, what Peter is saying, what Paul is saying, this means that God is patiently waiting for you right now.

Also, if you are a Christian and you're living in rebellion against God, if you're a Christian and you know just as well as you're sitting there, I'm not right with God and I know why and I'm just not willing to do anything about it.

[19 : 50] I want you to know the fact that you are alive and here and hear that and understand that, that is God being patient. Because you are presuming upon His grace and mercy and love by still being rebellious.

So, think about as we move on here, this applies to both Christians and unbelievers. God is being patient, but Paul says, God's also being kind.

Look at it again. God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. Let's think about how God shows us patience and kindness or patient kindness.

Think about how He does this in your life if you're not a Christian. But also in your life if you are a Christian and especially if you just won't listen to God.

You won't obey Him right now. Maybe God's kindness toward you is in the form of you have good health. Your family life is great.

[21 : 06] You've got good friends who love you, care for you. Maybe God's patience and kindness with you is seen in your athletic ability, your musical talents.

Maybe God's patience and kindness toward you is seen in just the good ways God has just blessed you.

But if you're away from Him as a Christian or as an unbeliever, He's intended, He wants you to see these good things as signs of His kindness and patience, He wants you to come to Him.

Let that goodness bring you to Him. Maybe God is showing His patient kindness by preventing you from reaping the sinful seeds you have sown.

the scripture talks about something that a lot of people refer to as the law of the harvest. We reap what we sow. But maybe you can think right now, I've sown some pretty bad seeds and nothing's happened.

[22 : 25] That's God being patient. That's God's kindness. kindness. But don't presume that just because the crop hasn't come in yet that it won't ever.

We reap what we sow. That's a biblical principle. And I want to encourage you before you have to haul in that harvest, listen to the Lord and obey Him.

Confess that sin. put your trust in Christ. Don't presume upon God's patience. It could be that God's showing you His patient kindness by helping your family and friends to not give up on you even though you've given them reason to do that.

It may be that right now your spouse or your children or your parents they have every reason in the world just to let you go because of the way you've mistreated them, dishonored them.

It may be that you've lost some credibility or maybe all credibility in their eyes but by the grace of God they are being patient with you and waiting for you to wake up.

[23 : 51] Waiting for you to get right with God and then get right with them. maybe God's kindness is in the form of allowing you to have some kind of serious problem to wake you up spiritually before it's too late.

I have a Christian friend who was living in rebellion against God at one point and God put them in the hospital with a sudden physical problem and as it turned out that was an act of God's kindness because that interruption that hospital stay disrupted the plan to carry out some sinful behaviors and when all was said and done they did not act on those sinful plans they had made.

God's kindness intervened but through the hospital. I have another Christian friend who rebelled against God and did not repent until he had lost everything his wife his job and his reputation.

He finally woke up truly repented came back to God but he never got his wife or his job or his reputation back.

He did lose much in that process. If you're not a Christian the fact that you are alive and hearing this message is an expression of God's patience and kindness that also applies to you if you are a willfully disobedient Christian.

[25 : 46] But the day will come God's patience will end. God is truly loving but he is also holy. God loves us but he cannot allow our sin to go unpunished.

The good news of the Bible is that God provided a way to express both his love and his holy justice. He did that by sending Jesus into this world to take the punishment for our sins.

God was dying on the cross. He took our sins upon himself and he experienced God's wrath. He experienced the punishment that we deserved.

Jesus suffered what we could consider the torment of hell as he died on the cross. The pain, the torment of being separated from God. That's why he cried out as he hung on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

God had turned away from him as he was our sin bearer taking our punishment. But there on the cross as he did that, he paid the penalty for our sins in full, which means when he cried out at the end, before he died, it is finished.

[27 : 08] It means everything necessary for us to be right with God has been done. The penalty for our sin has been paid. Jesus died and was buried, but God raised him from the dead, and when he raised him from the dead, that shows us that God has accepted Jesus' sacrifice for us.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God is saying, Jesus has defeated sin and death and the devil. He's won that victory for us.

This is the gospel. This is the good news of God's gracious salvation through faith in Jesus. But this gospel requires our response.

It's not enough just to believe these facts. We've got to respond to what Christ has done for us. We've got to repent of our sin, change our mind about it, own up to it, turn from it.

We've got to put our personal trust, faith, confidence in Jesus as my Savior. and commit my life to Him as my Lord.

[28 : 18] Here's what I want to ask you. Have you made this kind of commitment? Have you made this kind of response to the gospel? Everyone in here, have you made this kind of response?

If not, will you do it now? Will you cry out to God, confessing your sin, turning from it, putting your faith in Jesus, calling upon Him to save you?

If you'll do that right now, the Scripture says, whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But I know that the overwhelming majority of people in this room, you would say, I've done that.

I've done that a long time ago. Well, here's what I want us to understand. If we are Christians, there will be evidence to show that.

I had a real encouraging conversation this past week with a man, late 30s, early 40s. He's got a real demanding job, wife and children.

[29 : 23] He's got a very busy life. But in the conversation with this guy, I found out he is not only very active in his church, but he is a real student of the Bible.

And he was telling me that he was concerned. There was no pride or arrogance. There was no, you know, look at me and putting people down.

He's talked about how he was so concerned that just around him, among his family members and friends, in his church, there's so many people who claim to be Christians, but there's absolutely no evidence in their lives that the Lord's ever changed them or the Lord has even reeled them now.

Do you understand that? Do you understand that if a person is a Christian, if you're a Christian, you will experience the presence of the Holy Spirit within you.

Romans chapter 8 tells us if the Spirit of God does not live in us, we're not Christians. But Romans 8 also tells us that if the Spirit of God lives within us, he will so work in us to give us this sense notice that God is our Heavenly Father and enable us to truly pray and call Him Father.

[30 : 43] That's the Spirit of God living within us. That's in addition to what we said earlier, how He gives us the desire and the ability to please God. But think of this, if the Holy Spirit's living within us, when we fail to please God, the Spirit will grieve us, inflict guilt on us, and move in us to cause us to want to confess our sin to God and be forgiven and be restored to a right relationship with Him.

That's what the Spirit of God will do. If we're Christians, we, right now, we should understand the Spirit's presence and how He works in our lives in some ways.

He's real. If we're Christians, our family members and friends will see evidence that Jesus has changed my life.

He is changing my life. People will see, people will just see the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, in some way, not in a perfect way, but in some way in your life.

If we're Christians, we understand, we should understand that saving faith is continuing faith. And it will be evident for everyone to see. You know, when Jesus talked about things like this, about how we should live, He talked about how a tree should be known by its fruit.

[32 : 17] People should be known by the kind of character quality fruit their lives put forth.

Paul described such spiritual fruit in terms of character qualities like love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

Paul also talked about in Colossians 3 that a part of Christian living involves killing sin within us, turning from it, dying to things like sexual immorality, impurity, anger, slander, obscene talk, lying.

See, the New Testament is telling us that being a Christian involves far more than just saying, I trust Jesus. Far more than just being baptized, far more than just coming to church.

A Christian is someone who is growing by the grace of God more and more, developing Christ-like character.

[33 : 34] Paul describes it this way, for those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. That's how Paul is describing Christians. Those He foreknew, God predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son.

And God does that through His Spirit who indwells us. Hear this clearly. If your life does not produce any evidence that the Bible says a Christian will show forth, then you shouldn't consider yourself to be a Christian.

See, you don't get to define, I don't get to define what a Christian is. Bible does that. God does that for us. And when we examine our lives in light of what the Scripture says a Christian is and how a Christian lives, that's how we have to evaluate ourselves.

As we think about God being patient and giving people time to be saved, do you have family members and friends who are not Christians? God is patiently waiting for them.

God is giving them time to repent and trust Jesus. Could it be that God is patiently waiting for you to be the one to share the gospel with them?

[35 : 01] The second Sunday of this year, I preached a message about us taking on the responsibility to develop relationships with people who are not Christians who are already in our lives.

I passed out a paper that had concentric circles, people in your family, your immediate family, your extended family, classmates, work associates, neighbors, friends, all these kind of things.

And I asked you to think about just a few people who might fit in that category who's not a Christian and to pray for them and develop a relationship with them and ask God to give you an opportunity to share the gospel with them.

Have you done that? Are you still thinking of them, praying for them, working with them, looking for an opportunity to share the gospel with them?

If you're not, I want to encourage you to start today. Consider that God's being patient with that person that you love and you want to spend eternity with.

[36 : 08] Be thankful that God's being patient, but get involved. Ask God how you should be involved. Share the gospel with them. All of us need to let it sink in this morning that while God is patient with us, his patience is not unlimited.

Time is running out. We all need to listen to the Lord and respond to his patient call. And we need to do it right now.

We need to do it as the writer to the Hebrews warns us. Final thought. This is from Hebrews chapter 3. See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

But encourage one another daily as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the end.

Let's pray. Dear God, show us now how we should respond. Show us, Father, how we should demonstrate our gratitude for your patience and your kindness.

[37 : 39] Help us, Father, not to presume upon it. And help us, Father, not to wait until it's too late. In an attitude of prayer, you just do what God's calling you to do.

I would be happy to pray with you. But you listen to God and obey Him.