

Sermon: While You Wait

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Scripture: Acts 1:1-14

Waiting on the Lord may be one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian life. When Jesus promised that he would return, he instructed his followers to wait. That is easier said than done. So what do we do in the meantime? What do we do while we wait? This sermon helps the hearer understand what to do while they wait on Jesus' return.

Outline

I. Waiting on the Lord requires patient trust

- Waiting means that we give God the benefit of the doubt that he knows what he is doing
- Waiting is God's way of seeing if we will trust him before we move forward

II. Waiting on God reminds us that God is in control

- Waiting reminds me that I am not in charge
- Waiting reminds me that I am not God

III. Waiting on the Lord allows God to do his work

- God's timing is best
- God is working

IV. Waiting on God increases my strength

Introduction

No one likes to wait. But we wait in traffic, in car pool lines, in holding patterns, in grocery stores, for the foursome ahead of us, for the doctor, for a spouse, for a baby, for retirement, for sermons to get over, or for Jesus to return.

Waiting is not just something we have to do while we get what we want. Waiting is the process of becoming what God wants us to be. What God does in us while we wait is as important as what it is we are waiting for. Waiting, biblical waiting, is not a passive waiting around for something to happen that will allow us to escape our troubles. Waiting does not mean doing nothing. It is not fatalistic resignation. It is not a way to evade unpleasant reality.

Those who wait are those who work, because they know their work is not in vain. The farmer can wait all summer for his harvest because he has done his work of sowing the seed and watering the plants. Those who wait on God can go about their assigned tasks, confident that

God will provide the meaning and conclusions to their lives and the harvest to their toil. Waiting is the confident, disciplined, expectant, active, and sometimes painful clinging to God. It knows that we will reap a reward.

When Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, he was telling them that that this was a means of experiencing his peace, his prosperity, and his power. In waiting they would catch the wind of God's Spirit. In waiting they would see God move.

I. Waiting on the Lord requires patient trust

We live by the adage: Don't just stand there, do something. While God often says to us: Don't just do something, stand there.

A. Waiting means that we give God the benefit of the doubt that he knows what he is doing

B. Waiting is God's way of seeing if we will trust him before we move forward

That trust is a patient trust. Whether it has to do with our relationships, our finances, our careers, our dreams, or our churches. We have to trust that God knows what he is doing.

II. Waiting on God reminds us that God is in control

Sometimes people ask, "But what do I do while I'm waiting?" Good question. During those waiting times take on the active role of a watchman. "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits," declared the Psalmist, "I wait for Yahweh; I wait and put my hope in His word. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning - more than watchmen for the morning" (Ps. 130:5-6). In biblical times, watchmen vigilantly guarded the city. They watched for enemies who might attack at night, and they waited for the sun to come up. They were alert and obedient, ready to respond when needed. When called upon, they sprang into action. But on the other hand, watchmen didn't make things happen. They didn't control the rising of the sun. They couldn't speed up the process of the dawning of a new day. A watchman knew the difference between his job and God's job.

A. Waiting reminds me that I am not in charge

I'm the patient. I'm in the waiting room. In the real issues of life, I am not just waiting around - I am waiting on God, therefore, I can trust his wisdom and his timing. I've heard it said that the person who waits on God loses no time. I can wait with confidence. Because I am waiting for someone, and that someone is God.

B. Waiting reminds me that I am not God

As a man, I want to fix things. I want to fix my problems, my relationships, my conflicts, my career, and my church. Fixing and controlling situations and people is like trying to expedite the rising of the sun. From time to time I have to be reminded that I am not God (Aren't you glad?).

My job is to be a watchman. I need to have a watchman's attitude: a confident and alert expectation that God will do what he said he will do.

III. Waiting on the Lord allows God to do his work

Not only do I want to do God's work, but also I want to speed up his process. I understand that the father of the modern missionary movement, William Carey, waited seven years before his first convert in India, as did Adoniram Judson in Burma. As a pastor, I want to speed up the growth process of my church and its ministries. I see much that we could do and should be doing. I see many unmet needs. I see the hurts of people. I drive through neighborhoods and am bombarded at the thought of many people spending eternity without Christ. I have a vision from God to reach those people. And I want it to be a reality now. And I question God, "Why not now? Why not bring it to pass today?"

A. God's timing is best

In the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, the prophet was asking similar questions. Using the watchtower motif, hear the dialogue between the prophet and God:

"I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the lookout tower. I will watch to see what He will say to me and what I should reply about my complaint. The LORD answered me: Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it on tablets so one may easily read it. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it testifies about the end and will not lie. Though it delays, wait for it, since it will certainly come and not be late" (Hab. 2:1-3).

B. God is working

During those times, we wait patiently on the Lord. We know that deep down he is working - while it may be underneath, hidden deep in our character. In due time, God will reveal everything he's grown in us. Those who wait will never be put to shame. We will never be disappointed.

IV. Waiting on God increases my strength

Sometimes I struggle to remember that it's good to wait for the Lord. It isn't easy. It goes against the grain of our quick-fix society. But, there's a hidden benefit in waiting. In times of waiting my soul is revived and spirit is renewed. Isaiah wrote, "but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint" (Is. 40:31)

The time will come when those who wait on the Lord will soar.

You and I, and the church, will catch a gust of the Spirit. It was this gust of the Spirit that the disciples in Jerusalem were instructed to wait on. It is that same gust of the Spirit that we need to wait on. And when it comes, hold on. We will be soaring.

Conclusion

God is the great mover. We are to push, to work. And if we wait, in patient trust, remembering that God is in control doing his work increasing our strength, we will experience the move of God on our lives and in our church.

Illustrations

We are not patient: A woman's car stalled in traffic. She looked in vain under the hood to identify the cause, while the driver behind her leaned relentlessly on his horn. Finally she had enough. She walked back to his car and offered sweetly, "I don't know what the matter is with my car. But if you want to go look under the hood, I'll be glad to stay here and honk for you."

God's idea of waiting: The apostle Peter wrote, "that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years." An economist once read those words and got very excited.

"Lord - is it true that a thousand years for us is just like a minute to you?"

"Yes."

"Then a million dollars to us must just be a penny to you."

"Yes."

"Lord, would you give me one of those pennies?"

"All right. Wait here a minute."

Unseen growth: The Chinese bamboo tree is one of the most remarkable plants on earth. Once the gardener plants the seed, he will see nothing but a single shoot coming out of the bulb - for five full years! That tiny shoot, however, must have daily food and water. During all the time the gardener is caring for the plant, the exterior shoot will grow less than an inch.

At the end of five years, however, the Chinese bamboo will perform an incredible feat. It will grow an amazing ninety feet tall in only ninety days! Now ask yourself this: When did the tree actually grow? During the first five years, or during those last ninety days?

The answer lies in the unseen part of the tree, the underground root system. During the first five years, the fibrous root structure spreads deep and wide in the earth, preparing to support the incredible heights the tree will eventually reach.

An oak or a mushroom? It's been said that when God wants to grow mushrooms, he can do it overnight, but when he wants to grow a mighty oak, it takes a few years. What do we want to be, a mushroom or an oak? If we want to be an oak, it is well worth the wait.

Three methods of flight: Ornithologists say birds have three methods of flight. Flapping is keeping their wings in constant motion, like a hummingbird, to counteract gravity. Flapping keeps them in the air, but it is a lot of work.

Second is gliding. Here the bird builds up enough speed, then coasts downward a while. It is much more graceful than flapping, but unfortunately it does not get the bird very far. Reality in the form of gravity sets in quickly. Gliding is nice, but it does not last.

The third way is soaring. Only a few birds, such eagles, are capable of soaring. Eagles's wings are so strong that they are capable of catching rising currents of warm air - thermal winds that go straight up from the earth - and without moving a feather can soar up to great heights. Eagles have been clocked at up to 80 m.p.h. without flapping at all. They just soar on invisible columns of air.

God's wise in God's ways: In a dream, God told a man to go outside and push against a huge boulder in his front yard. So every morning for the next few weeks, the man went outside and strained against the rock. He pushed and groaned and prodded and shoved, but the rock never budged.

Finally, in a fit of exasperation the man fell to his knees and lifted his eyes to heaven. "What were you thinking, Lord? he cried, wiping sweat from his brow. "You told me to push this rock, and I've been pushing it for weeks, yet it has not moved an inch!"

A voice from heaven rumbled among the clouds, then whispered in the man's ear. "I told you to push the stone," God said, "I didn't tell you to move it. I'm the only one who can move it, and when you're ready, I will. By the way, look at your hands."

The man looked at his hands. They had grown callused and tough with the work, and his arms bulged with muscles. Though his efforts seemed fruitless, he had grown strong; and now he was beginning to grow wise.