

I have been on a diet for the last couple of months (although it seems like years!). Both Donna and I have been eating disgustingly healthy meals composed largely of rabbit food. After all of these fruits and vegetables during the week, we concede ourselves one unhealthy meal on the weekend. So, after Church on Sundays, we go to a local burger joint. My order is a double cheeseburger with all the trimmings and fries loaded down with Ketchup. Donna usually orders a cheeseburger and an Oreo milkshake. You have no idea how good those cheeseburgers taste! And, if we go straight from Church to lunch after our Lemonade Fellowship, we can just manage to beat the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians! ☺

Now I've really started looking forward to that meal on Sundays. I wait and wait for it during the week. Sometimes, I even dream about it! But as good as that cheeseburger is, that's really not much of a reward for all the dieting I have to do the other 6 days of the week. Because the real reward for all that waiting and self-discipline is the difference in how I feel. I've lost about 12 pounds, and I find I have more energy. I sleep better. There has been an all-round improvement in my quality of life, because I wait for those six days to eat my one, unhealthy meal. That new well-being is the real reward for my patient waiting.

Why does God make us wait? When I say, "Lord, give me patience," why am I still incredibly impatient? When we pray for God's provision for our church, why does God still leave us in a position where we have to struggle in order to make ends meet? Why does God make us wait for His blessings?

As a child, Christmas was always a big deal in our house. I used to wait for months, wondering what my Christmas present would be that year; maybe a new bike, snow-skis, or something equally magnificent. But, have you ever wondered what our children would be like if Christmas came not on December 25, but only when a child was really ready for it? What if Christmas morning with its tree and presents magically appeared in that moment when a child was truly prepared for it in his or her mind and heart.

What if Christmas came only when a child was really ready to receive its magic, and joy, and mystery? Why, you know, if we were all obliged in childhood to wait for the Christmas miracle – if Christmas came to us only through patient waiting, and arrived only when we were finally prepared to receive its full blessing as children of the living God, well we would probably be very different people today, wouldn't we?



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So, what would we be like if blessings came only when we were really ready for them? Well, guess what? They do! In Luke 12, note the connection between waiting and blessing. We can read the following: "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds [waiting] when he comes" (Lk.12:35-37a). Evidently, true blessing comes to those who are prepared to receive that blessing through waiting on the Lord.

"**Waiting** on the Lord." Luke uses this same Greek word again in Chapter 15 when he says the Pharisees and Scribes were all bent-out-of-shape because Jesus "waited" on sinners and ate with them. (See Lk.15:2) So Jesus received these sinful people, welcomed them into his company and broke bread with them. Paul uses this same word at the end of Romans when he encourages the Church to welcome and receive Phoebe, the first Deaconess mentioned in the Bible (See Rom.16:2). He uses this same word again when Paul asks the believers in Philippi to receive and welcome his messenger and brother in the Lord Epaphroditus. (See Phil.2:25-30) So here's that concept again of "waiting" as being ready to receive and welcome. But probably the most poignant use of this word is at the end of both Mark's and Luke's Gospel when, after the Crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea goes to beg Pilate for the body of Our Lord. And the Gospels describe Joseph as one who was "waiting expectantly to receive the Kingdom of God." (See Mk.15:43; Lk.23:51) One gets the image of this member of the Ruling Council of Jerusalem who has recognized the face of his Messiah in the beautiful visage of Our Lord – you can almost see Joseph standing there with his arms outstretched in prayer to heaven, waiting with joy to receive and welcome the Kingdom of God.

For me that vision of Joseph is the startling image of what waiting on the Lord is all about: to be there night and day, with arms outstretched and hands free, being ready to welcome and receive the blessed grace of God right here, right now. The Kingdom of God isn't something to be postponed as an eventual blessing at some distant unknown moment in the next life. No, it's already at hand, right here, ready for all of those who are truly prepared to receive it, available to everyone who is willing to wait on the Lord.

This is perhaps Isaiah's main frustration at the opening of his prophecy. God established the temple-sacrifices to instill in his children this sense of patient focus on God, but man has twisted this original form of focusing on a renewal of their faith, into empty rites of just going through the motions. And Isaiah warns Israel that God has had it with their hypocrisy. (See Is.1:10-15) The Psalmist this morning affirms the need to get back to the original, heart-felt nature of sincere worship when he hears God saying, "Whoever offers me a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me..." (Ps.50:23a) Surely, Jesus alludes to this sincere form of communion with God when he encourages us to store up for ourselves treasure in heaven. (See Lk.12:33)

A critical part of this blessing of living in the Kingdom of God which is here for us to take hold of right now is the absence of worry. Jesus points out that if God is concerned about such details of his creation as the grasses of the fields, then He will certainly take tender care of his prize creation man. (See Lk.12:27-28) Here, Jesus has reached the zenith of his earthly exposure. We read that thousands were coming now to hear him preach. (Lk.12:1) And one of the key components of the blessing that Jesus wants to communicate to this throng of people is that God longs for his children to be free from worry. This freedom is a central blessing of living in the Kingdom of God.

Hebrews 11 is often given the whimsical title, "The Hall of Faith," since it traces the faith of the Saints down through the ages. Waiting on the Lord, placing and keeping yourself ready to joyously welcome and receive the full measure of God's grace through regular conversation with God in prayer, and marinating yourself in His Word – this is the blessed state that produces an intimate companionship with the Holy Spirit. And that union with none other than the Spirit of God yields an unshakable faith that truly ends up accomplishing miracles, yes MIRACLES, even in this present age.

Brothers and sisters, if you are still postponing the journey toward the peace and joyous freedom of the Kingdom, you need postpone that trip not a second longer. All you have to do for the immensity of this grace to enfold you is to close your eyes and set your mind on Jesus. And by rendering yourself ready to welcome Him through the daily giving up of yourself to the staggeringly beautiful plan He has already laid out for you, you will begin to know the majesty of God's blessing. And you will be changed from glory to glory (see 2Cor.3:18).

But, good people, be warned. This waiting on and blessing from The Lord is highly addictive. In the 4th book in the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the Pevensie children with their guide Prince Caspian finally come to the great sea at the very end of the world. There they discover that the water of that sea has turned to drinkable light. And it is so sweet and so very strong. The more they drink the more they want, and bathed inside and out in this glorious water, they become brighter and brighter until they can actually stare straight at the sun in its rising.¹ You see, they have tasted the water of true blessing and now nothing else will satisfy their thirst, and nothing at all will ever be the same ... Oh yes, it's addictive this waiting on the Lord. David discovered this in the heart-wrenching beauty of Psalm 139. I will close with verses from that Psalm this morning:

My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! With him there is plenteous redemption; with the LORD there is steadfast love. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. Lord, If you, should mark [our] sins, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, O Lord. My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. (Ps. 130, various verses and translations) JWB+ 07/26/2016

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, pp. 198-199 (New York, Collier, 1973 – 10th printing).