



Waiting on God

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Acts 1:3-12

Sometimes the hardest thing for us to hear is the phrase, “Wait.” We get impatient, anxious. We feel like the waiting is unproductive. We feel we are losing something while waiting for something we anticipate. We truly don’t know how to value and live in the moment. Rather, we live in anticipation. We try to live in the “not yet.” There may yet be much to accomplish during our time of waiting, yet in our anxiety over moving forward, we might find ourselves unprepared for the future we anticipate. What do we do with our time of waiting? Do we trust God with issues of timing?

Jesus had been crucified, was placed in a tomb, and then had risen from the dead. Over the next six weeks, he had appeared to various disciples. Luke records a final encounter with Jesus six weeks out from his death and resurrection. Jesus talked over several issues with them and told them to wait.

The disciples were uncertain and anxious to know what was coming. They went back to some of their old anxieties regarding the future and their expectations. They wanted to know about the age to come. They wanted to understand what was about to happen. They wanted answers to the debate over the messianic reign, the second half of history, Israel’s role in the world scene, the restoration of Israel’s political power, the overthrow of Rome, and so many other issues of the day. Jesus did not answer any of those questions. He simply treated them as unimportant distractions. He tried to redirect them to what really mattered.

We really can’t live in some future. The disciples would have been wasting their time and energy distracted with worries and anxieties about the future. Jesus told them simply that these were not issues of importance to them. They had no bearing on their lives. They did not impact life in the present, nor did they have anything to do with understanding and fulfilling God’s task for their lives. Knowing “the times and the seasons” is just not relevant to living the life God has set before us. We are to live in the present, not the future. We are especially not designed to live some far off future. We are to live now.

It wasn’t just concerns with the future Jesus was directing them from. He was turning their focus and attention from political concerns to God’s concerns. Oh, they thought their political concerns were God’s concerns. They wanted God to use the path of politics to advance God’s aims and purposes, but that was not God’s way. That was not Jesus’ way. While they were worried over how God would imbue Israel with political power on the world scene, Jesus told them rather to wait until they received power from God’s breath, God’s Spirit upon and within themselves. This was the power with which they should be concerned.

In the Old Testament narratives, the prophets were the ones with real power, not the kings. It was in the lives of the prophets that God moved, brought the dead to life, defeated armies, healed lepers, created peace among nations, scattered, gathered, and built nations. Political power was a distraction from God’s actions and purposes. Political power was wielded by men for personal gain. God’s power took the prophet and the people toward paths of God’s blessing for the nations. This is the power they were to await, not the force of political ambition, violence, and dominance. They were to await the coming of God’s blessing and God’s purposes, not their own.

The Spirit would come to empower. The Spirit would come to enact a new reality. The Spirit would come with a charge, a mission to empower the disciples. They would be transformed by God’s

presence and actions. They would become witnesses to a greater purpose. They would become agents of the messianic reign, not for themselves, for their interests, for personal benefit, but as witnesses to God and God's redemption.

They were to wait on God. They were to leave concerns of the future in God's hands. They were to set aside their worries and focus on the tasks at hand. Rather than be concerned over what they did not know, they were to focus on what they did not, trusting God with the unknown, with the timing, with the details.

They did not know how long they would have to wait. Jesus said a few days, but that is not a very definite time period. For a while, they stood around looking up toward heaven. They were reeling from the wonder of Jesus' ascension. They were confused, awed, amazed, and uncertain as to how they should respond. They needed a nudge to bring them back to their present reality and the task at hand.

They didn't need to know when the Spirit would come upon them. It did not matter if they understood how. They needed to know God had a purpose. God had a plan. They were part of that plan and needed to be ready for God to use them as instruments of that higher purpose.

They headed back to Jerusalem to wait. It was not a question of sitting by idly twiddling their thumbs. It was time to get themselves ready for God to do something new. It was time to reflect on the purposes of God as Jesus had been revealing them. It was time to review all Jesus had taught them, to go over their accumulated experiences with Jesus. It was time to process. It was time to organize themselves for the task at hand.

Waiting was not about being idle. Waiting is not about our being idle. It is about our being prepared. It is about focusing on the task at hand in the present. It is about living in the now, even while we anticipate a future reality. Waiting is time to engage ourselves in preparation for what lies ahead. It is about resting. It is about reflection. It is about decision. It is about organizing, reviewing, and recognizing our dependence upon God's direction, purpose, and plan. It is about placing ourselves in a position and attitude that makes us useful in God's reign. It is about redirection.

The disciples had to settle their anxieties over the future and the unknown. They needed to let go of their false conceptions of the future. They needed to step beyond their well-defined expectations to be ready, prepared for God to work the unexpected in their lives and through their lives. They needed to be stilled. They needed to be centered on God, not on themselves.

God's reign in our lives is not about some future reality. It is about the present. We may spend much of our time waiting for some anticipated event in the future. In the meantime, however, life is to be lived. God is interested in transforming us even as we await some other reality. There is a reason they were not to keep standing on the hillside looking into heaven. God's will and plan is present. It is ongoing. There is work to be done in the waiting times.

Perhaps it is the work of becoming prepared. Perhaps it is the work of setting aside our dreams to accept God's. Perhaps it is the work of letting go of control over our lives, actions, and decisions. It may even be recognizing that God does not expect of us what God does not empower us to accomplish.

They were to wait on God's empowering, God's timing, God's initiative. After all, the task that lay before them originated in God's design and purpose. Are we willing to leave the hillside and live with the expectation that God will not leave us hanging as we await the purposes for which God will empower us? In the meantime, we may have a lot of letting go to accomplish.