

Advent 2021 Part 3

You'll Just Have To Wait

Can you believe it's the third Sunday of Advent? With Christmas coming on a Saturday, we will reach the final Sunday of Advent next Sunday and then have almost a full week to wait until Christmas. Waiting. Remember how it was when you were a child? Waiting for Christmas? Wanting to open the presents under the tree. It was so tempting. You can't help but shake the package and mom and dad tell you "You'll have to wait!" Remember Alvin and the Chipmunks? "Christmas, Christmas time is near, time for toys and time for cheer. We've been good but we can't last, hurry Christmas hurry fast. Want a plane that loops the loop, me I want a hula hoop, we can hardly stand the wait please Christmas don't be late." Regardless of how hard you wish, you still have to wait for Christmas. It's that way with the birth of any baby. You wait. Is it time? Not yet. How about now? Nope. You'll just have to wait.

It's not just Christmas or awaiting the birth of a child. Waiting is difficult in every season of life. We don't much like waiting in our spiritual life either. Waiting for an answer to prayer. Waiting for direction. Why the delay? Why so slow? At Advent we wait, like Mary waiting for nine months, like Anna and Simeon in Luke 2, waiting for years to see the consolation of Israel, the promise of Messiah fulfilled, like Israel waiting for light to shine into the darkness, waiting for a sign that God had not forgotten or forsaken his people. Waiting is what Advent is all about, so let's talk this morning about waiting, and God and time.

God stands outside of time. God is eternal. We could say God stands outside of, apart from, or even above time. The bible speaks of God like this: he was and is and ever shall be. He revealed himself to Moses as "I Am." Eternally present, He has no beginning and no end, instead, he is Beginning and End. He is first and last. He stands outside of time and yet is eternally existent in time, in the past, present and the future. Which brings us to the next consideration:

God acts within time. He chooses to interact with us within time, for now. He invented time, created it for our benefit when he put the planets in motion and gave us night and day, the sun and moon to mark time, established seasons and cycles. He set aside special times for his people, a Sabbath for rest, renewal and relationships. He set aside times for feasts, festivals, celebrations. It is interesting that even though God stands outside of time, when he acts within

time he acts in responsible ways, modeling and affirming for us the importance of wise stewardship with regard to our time. Also notice when God acts in human affairs...

God's timing is perfect. Scripture says the birth of Jesus occurred "in the fullness of time." **"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."** **Galatians 4:4** Think of the timing of so many things. The timing of the star over Bethlehem that guided the Magi, the timing of the census that brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in fulfillment of prophecy that Messiah would be born there. Everything about Jesus and his life testified to the fullness of time, even his death at Passover when the perfect lamb was to be slain. Jesus' Advent, his birth in Bethlehem was right on time, but I wonder if it felt that way to Mary and Joseph, to Simeon and Anna, to the Israeli citizens suffering under the oppression of Herod and Caesar and Rome. Would they all agree that Jesus came right on time or were they thinking, "Why has it taken so long? Why the delay?"

From our calendar bound, chronological perspective, God's timing doesn't always seem so perfect. I've often said, He operates from the fullness of time while we operate from the "I want and need it right now" perspective. God's apparent silence, his (in our opinion) unusual timing, what seem to be unexplained delays in his help or intervention, those are the things that trouble us. And I must tell you, as a follower of Christ, if you are expecting everything in your Christian walk to be handed to you quickly, easily, unchallenged and according to your timing, you're going to be greatly disappointed. Repeatedly. You have to decide to trust His timing.

There are all kinds of examples in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah, waited til they were both past 90 before their promised son Isaac was born. They believed but they still had to wait. Moses spent 40 years on the back side of the desert tending his father-in-law's stubborn sheep before being called to lead Israel out of Egypt, and then spent 40 years in the wilderness leading God's even more stubborn people, waiting to enter the promised land. Hannah waited for a child, for Samuel. David was anointed by Samuel to be the king but had to wait for years before that came to pass. He was running for his life from King Saul, hiding in a cave, wondering, "How long do I wait before God's promise comes to pass?" God promised to return his people from exile, but they still had to wait 70 years. All of these were waiting for something God said would happen but it sure looked impossible, improbable from their perspective. Can anyone relate to that? Anyone here know what it's like to have a promise from God but you have to just

keep on waiting and waiting and nothing seems to happen. Nothing changes? Can you wait with David in that cave? Can you wait with Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem? Can you wait just a little while longer? David declared in the last verses of the 27th Psalm, **“I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27:13-14**

Waiting on the Lord doesn't mean do nothing. It isn't some kind of fatalistic resignation. “Que sera, sera, whatever will be will be.” Nor does waiting on the Lord mean forcing the promise of God, making something happen before God says it's time like Abraham did with Sarah's maidservant Hagar, trying to get the heir God promised but not in God's timing and not in God's way. Forcing the promise means trouble, it means Ishmael and not Isaac. It means man's effort rather than God's promise. Waiting involves obedience, a faith-filled response and resting in his peace. David said, **“For God alone my soul waits in silence for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be shaken.” Psalm 62:5** Waiting on God implies an active resting in him. In fact, that's how NIV translates that verse. **“Find rest O my soul in God alone.”** Find your rest in God alone. Keep working, keep trusting, but rest in peace as you wait on the Lord. That's what Mary and Joseph and Abraham and David and all the rest had to do. That's what we must do while we wait on the Lord.

The reason we can wait in peace rather than in impatience is because of whom we are waiting on. We are waiting on the Lord. There are folks you can't wait patiently for because you know them and you know they won't show. They'll mean to, they want to, but they won't be there. But others if they tell you they'll be there, you can wait patiently because you know they'll show up. You know them. We can wait with confidence when we know whom we are waiting for, when we know their nature, their character, their history, their track record. When we're waiting on God, we don't need to pace the floor. Our waiting is wrapped up in hope, in confidence, in peace, in expectation because we are certain of the faithful character of the one for whom we are waiting. If you are waiting on the answer to a prayer, waiting on God's help, don't panic. Rest peacefully in the character of the one for whom you are waiting.

So here we are, like Mary and Joseph and Anna and Simeon and all the others, waiting for God to say something, to do something, to show up. Waiting for the fullness of time. What do we do while we wait? Let me suggest a couple of things.

While you wait, remember what God has done in the past. Consider his timing in your life up to now. It's what Mary did in her song, the one we call the Magnificat in Luke 1. She recalls the faithfulness of God in Israel's history, how he has performed mighty deeds for his people, how he brought down rulers from their thrones but lifted up the humble, how he has filled the hungry with good things, how he has kept his word and his promises. It's as if Mary is singing praises because "God is doing it again!"

While you wait, rejoice in the Lord. This is what Mary did as she sang, "**My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.**" **Luke 1:46** Things hadn't changed. In fact, things were about to get worse. Mary was pregnant but not married. Joseph would have to be told, and her parents and family members. Nine months of waiting had just begun and there were painful days ahead, but Mary chose to rejoice anyhow. This was sung at the beginning, not the birth, but go ahead and rejoice while you wait! Rejoice anyway! Give thanks to God, magnify the Lord, even if you have to wait. Even if the answer is delayed. Even if the situation looks impossible. You know the faithfulness of the one who promised. You can trust him. Mary knew that God and his faithfulness had initiated all of this and he could be trusted, so Mary chose to rejoice.

The apostle Paul said, "**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice!**" **Philippians 4:4.** Paul was in prison when he wrote this, in chains, waiting for God to show up and deliver him. How could he say rejoice while he was waiting day after day, night after lonely night in a prison cell? Because he knew who he was waiting for! He knew God's character and his faithfulness. He tells the church in Philippi "**...because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that ...what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.**" **Philippians 1:18** Paul was waiting in hope, waiting, expecting deliverance because he knew who he was waiting for. Who you are waiting for makes a difference.

If you are waiting to see the dentist, that's different than how you wait standing at the altar for your bride to walk down the aisle. Rejoice while you wait because you know your Redeemer is coming. Rejoice because his help, his answer is on the way. If you are still waiting in silence, in the dark, remember his faithfulness in the past, rejoice because you know the One who has promised, the One you are waiting for, the One who's coming and then...

While you wait, rest in the promises of God. David said, "**But I trust in you O Lord. I say, 'You are my God. My times are in your hands.'**" **Psalm 31:15** I said before, you

don't have to pace the floor or panic. Your times are in his hands. The actual timing of things is not as important as the certainty of it, that God said it and it will happen when he determines.

Your times are in his hands! He will be faithful, so rest in him. Elizabeth said of Mary,

“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.”

Luke 1:45 Rest in him, in his timing and in the certainty of his promise and then...

While you wait, redeem the time. Keep serving, keep praying, keep rejoicing, keep obeying and doing what he has called you to do while you wait. As you remain faithful to the Lord, as you trust him and rest in him, consider not only what you are doing if you have to wait for a long time for God to answer a prayer, but consider what you are becoming through this process of trusting and waiting. God is at work, shaping and molding your life. Choose to trust him as you give him time.

The bible says, **“Be careful then, how you live – not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:15** It's not Christmas yet. Jesus isn't here yet and we are still waiting, but let's make the most of the time. Let's redeem the time as we sanctify our hearts to celebrate his first Advent. Make room in your heart and life for him. And as we wait for his second advent, his second coming, let's make the most of that time. Let's wait in hope, wait in faith, and let's busy ourselves telling others about Jesus, sharing the good news, spreading his light in the darkness of this world. Let's do all we can to redeem the time.

I know some of you feel like you are in a holding pattern, just circling, waiting for God to answer, to give you direction. Don't stop trusting, don't stop relying upon the Lord and resting in his promises. Remember what the prophet Isaiah said, **“They that wait upon 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.” Isaiah 40:31.** When he fulfills his promises, when he delivers you and brings blessings out of the brokenness, abundance out of barrenness, when he finally comes to take us home, trust me, it will be worth the wait! “Lord, we'll just have to wait, but teach us to wait with you, in patience, in hope, in expectation. Renew our strength, keep us from weariness, enable us to walk on in faith and to not faint. Amen.”