

The Waiting Place

Introduction

The Text

³⁵ “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

⁴¹ Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” ⁴² And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. (Luke 12:35–48)

Waiting for the Return of Jesus

A. This morning we’re going to take up the subject of waiting. I have in mind in particular here, of course, this idea of waiting for the return of Jesus.

1. I want to look at four things with regard to this waiting for the return of Jesus: (1) Its Necessity; (2) Its Yearning; (3) Its Activity; and (4) Its End.

(1) Its Necessity

A. In our text this morning, though Jesus has not yet died, risen, and ascended to His Father at this point, He is, nevertheless, preparing His disciples (and us) for this impending reality and the waiting that it will necessarily entail. Hence, He begins there in vv. 35-36: “³⁵ Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.”

Not Popular

A. I think it is safe to say that waiting is not a very popular activity.

- B. I've yet to meet the person who enjoys waiting in Bay Area rush hour traffic. We try to do anything we can to avoid it, right? I know some of us get up at 5am just so we can get started early and hopefully get out on the roads before the rest of the city converges on them. "A 10 minute drive becomes an hour. I don't want to waste my time waiting."
- C. I think of the book many young graduates from high school or college are handed, a bit in fun, on their graduation day. From the beloved Dr. Seuss: *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* I was given that. It's this book about all the exciting things that you'll experience as you head out into the world.
1. But, in the middle of the book, there's this dreaded place where everyone looks dreary and depressed. And do you know what it's called? The Waiting Place. "You can get so confused / that you'll start in to race / down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace / and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space, / headed, I fear, toward a most useless place. / The Waiting Place." And you flip the page and everyone's just waiting and miserable.
 2. And the character almost gets sucked into this place until at last we turn the page and break free. "NO! / That's not for you! / Somehow you'll escape / all that waiting and staying. / You'll find the bright places / where Boom Bands are playing. / With banner flip-flapping, / once more you'll ride high! / Ready for anything under the sky. / Ready because you're that kind of guy!"
 - a. And, with diploma in hand, we read this and think: "Yes! The Waiting Place is not for me. That's for the indecisive, the incompetent, the unsuccessful. That's not where I belong. I don't want to sit around and wait for things to happen. I want to go out and make it happen. I want to grab life by the horns, bring it down, and make it submit to me."
 - i. And that's the sort of thing our culture feeds on. We see no place for waiting. We have no patience for it. At all.
- D. I remember seeing a comedy bit by Brian Regan where he's talking about Pop-tarts. He said one morning he was indulging in some of that sweet pastry goodness when he noticed that on the side of the box they actually have not just toaster instructions, which seems strange enough, but microwave instructions as well.
1. And here's what's awesome. It tells you to put these things in the microwave and nuke them on high for guess how long? Three seconds. And Regan just says: "Listen, if you need to zap-fry your pop-tarts before you head out the door, you might want to loosen up your schedule. . . . If you're waking, eating, and hauling in three seconds, it's time for a change of lifestyle."
 - a. It's funny, but you see the concerning piece that's starting to present itself in this don't you? We live in a culture that microwaves its pop-tarts because a minute and a half in the toaster is just too long to wait. This is the ethos. This is the air we breathe.

But Certainly Biblical

- A. And it's into this context that Jesus is now speaking. And do you know what He's telling us we must do? Wait. For Him. O I know it's not fun, but it's a necessity.
- B. And when we stop and consider this idea biblically, we realize that it's always been so for the people of God. God's continual injunction to us is to wait for Him. And our continual problem is: We don't want to.
 - 1. His word to us is tested in our circumstances. We get confused, and don't see how it will all play out for good. We are tempted to give up on our waiting for Him, and too often we set out to try to make something happen for ourselves. And in so doing we always make matters worse.
 - a. It is when Abraham and Sarah grow tired of waiting for the child of promise (Isaac) that they produce a child of the flesh (Ishmael).
 - b. It is when Israel grew tired of waiting for Moses up on Mount Sinai that they fashioned for themselves a golden calf to bow down to.
 - c. It is when Israel grew tired of waiting for God's kingdom to come that they pushed for a King Saul.
 - i. In our unwillingness to wait for God, in our impatience, brothers and sisters, we always make matters worse.
- C. If I could sum up this first point, I would say that waiting, in its biblical sense, is a faithful recognition of both who we are and who God is, and a humble acceptance of our current place in His unfolding plan. It is a full admission that we cannot work our own redemption and a full expectation that God, in His time, will. And, hence, it is necessary.

(2) Its Yearning

Like Kids at Christmas

- A. But this really leads to a second thing we need to say with regard to this waiting for the Lord. For the disciple, for the Christian, we need to understand that our waiting is characterized and fueled by a yearning. There's a hope, a longing, a desire in it.
- B. Certainly, I think we can wait for something in dread.
 - 1. It is in this way I think that a woman waits for the hospital to administer her first round of chemo, or a kid waits for the last day of summer and the first day of school. I'm waiting for this or that thing, but not yearning for it.
- C. Quite the opposite is taking place in our text here. This is waiting in hope, waiting with expectancy. It's a waiting that corresponds with longing.

1. It's waiting like the groom waiting at the altar for his bride to come walking down the aisle. It's waiting like my kids wait by the window for grandma and grandpa to arrive. It's waiting like children through the month of December wait for Christmas day.
 - a. My kids do what I remember doing when I was a kid. We make those chains out of paper where you break one off each day. What is this sort of thing communicating? We're waiting. And we're yearning.
 - i. And I think that's the sort of thing Jesus is referring to here. We are yearning for His return!
- D. But now here's the question: Is anyone in this room waiting for the return of Jesus like that? Has anyone made a paper chain so they can count the days down to that? Of course, I know no one knows the day or the hour, but you get what I'm saying. Are you yearning, are you looking, are you waiting for Him?

Expecting the Unexpected

- A. Now I suppose, sadly, many of us would have to say we're not—at least not as much as we would like. So what can we do? I want to yearn. I want to grow in passion for Him. What can I do?
 1. Well, think of it. Why is it that a kid yearns for Christmas day? Is it not because she knows how good that day will be? She knows what awaits her there. The presents under the tree. The happy music. The hot cocoa. The family gathering. She yearns for it and waits for it because she knows something of the goodness of it.
 - a. And I don't think it is all that different for us with regard to this waiting and yearning for Jesus. We don't yearn, because we don't fully get how good it will be.
- B. To help us with this, while there is much we could say about the goodness that awaits us on the day Jesus returns, let us simply read on into the next verses of our text, for there we see what awaits His faithful servants on that day, and it is not what we would ever expect: “³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”
 1. You cannot miss this. In vv. 35-36 we are told to dress ourselves for serving Him, but then here now in v. 37 He arrives and what do we find but that He is now dressing Himself to serve us. It is an astounding thing. Masters don't serve their servants. That's why they're called servants. “You're here to serve Me!” But our God comes and serves us.
 - a. This is why when we flip to the last chapters of Revelation and we see how Jesus' return is going to play out for us, the Bible talks about it like a banquet. God is going to wipe away our tears, heal our brokenness, wash our filth, right our wrongs, and then He's going to throw a party, He's going to play the host, He's going to serve us in love.
- C. Commenting on our text back in Luke, one scholar writes: “Any master who finds his servants in such a state of readiness is pleased. This one is so pleased that he reverses the normal roles and has

them sit at table while he serves them a meal. This unexpected twist cannot be taken from life [meaning: we see no parallel of such a surprising reversal in either the ancient nor modern worlds] . . . [T]he reward of God's people is never commonplace: it is always the unexpected" (TNTC).

- D. Now certainly, in one sense, this is an unexpected twist of things. But, I suppose, on the other hand, when once you start to get familiar with Jesus and the ways of His kingdom, this sort of thing is precisely what you would come to expect from Him. What He here describes Himself doing for us at the end of time is the same sort of thing He's been doing for us from the very beginning.
 - 1. It's why He's come in the first place: "^{42b} You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42b–45).
- E. The idea that Jesus would seat and serve us around His table, as undeserved and unexpected as it is, follows naturally from the kind of life He lived and death He died. It's always been in service of us.
 - 1. What love is this?! When you start to get this and all that it means for you, you start to yearn for Him and His return.

(3) Its Activity

Self-Sacrificing Love for Others

- A. So this waiting for the Lord's return is not only necessary, it is full of yearning. But it's not only full of yearning, it is also full of energy and marked by noticeable activity.
 - 1. When we think of waiting, again, we might think merely of sitting and looking out the window, or, in this case, if Jesus is said to be returning on the clouds of heaven, well let's get our lawn chairs out, crack open a soda or whatever your beverage of choice may be, and sit outside with our eyes up to the sky until He shows up.
- B. But, in the way Jesus describes this waiting back in v. 35, we immediately get a sense that there is something more to it than just sitting around. There's an energy to it. Did you catch it: "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning . . ." This waiting involves doing in some way.
 - 1. But still, Jesus is talking in parable here, and we are left wondering what such things mean for us in the real world. What does this actually look like for me?
- C. Well, I think we get a little closer to the meaning here when we consider the verses that come in a bit later, particularly there in v. 42. Now, admittedly, we're still dealing with parable here, but I think you can see more plainly what this waiting entails.
 - 1. In this verse, Jesus likens us to managers in one way or another whom the Lord has put in His service and our job is to care for those whom He has given us and to "give them their portion of food at the proper time."

- a. The idea here then is that this waiting involves faithful obedience, self-sacrificial service in love for God and neighbor. It is not sitting and looking out the window or up at the sky. Far from it. It is getting down on one's hands and knees with the Savior and washing dirty feet, it is putting food in the mouths of the hungry, it is humbly serving those whom the Lord has put in our path and under our care. It is an energized, an active, waiting.
- D. Here we are really put to the test, are we not? It felt uncomfortable to be asked the earlier question of whether or not we are truly yearning for the Lord's return like a child yearns for Christmas day. But I suppose, even there, we could convince ourselves that truly we are yearning, and, in that sense, waiting for the Lord as we are being instructed to here.
 - 1. But when we come to this third point, we really cannot wiggle out. If it is true that we are yearning for Him and, hence, truly waiting for Him, we will be faithfully, even self-sacrificially, serving Him and others. There will be an outward evidence of our waiting for Him from heaven in the way we are loving other people here on the earth.
- E. Take inventory of your relationships even now? How are you oriented towards them? Are you serving, giving, caring? Or are you turning things towards yourself? Putting them in your service?

Others-Sacrificing Love for Self

- A. This is what we come to see next as Jesus goes on. You know you have given up on waiting and yearning for Jesus when you have turned away from serving your neighbor. Indeed, something even more onerous takes place. Not only do you stop serving them, but you start demanding that they serve you, you become exploitative and abusive, selfish and devouring.
 - 1. And it makes sense, really, when you stop and think about it. If you've given up on the coming of Jesus, and the arrival of a new heavens and new earth, and the hope of life and joy with Him forever, well, all you are left with is to live it up here and now—to get all you can for yourself with what little time you have remaining.
 - a. You make the shift from waiting for the Lord to pursuing immediate gratification. And in that scheme there is no room for self-sacrifice for the sake of others. No, instead you start to sacrifice others for the sake of self.
- B. So Jesus goes on to speak in v. 45 of *“that servant [who] says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and [he] begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk . . .”*
 - 1. There's no accountability. There's no future hope. It is eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. And from that view, who cares about justice for the oppressed, or serving the poor. No! It is about me and my belly.
- C. Interestingly enough, I think we all get this. Al Mohler, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary brought to my attention this last week an interesting statistic.

1. According to the Pew Research Center, 88% of the current US Congress self-identify as Christian. This is actually 17% more than the American average. Which means that the Christian faith is significantly over-represented in our government officials.
 2. But then on the other side we see another surprising contrast. According to this same survey: "By far the largest difference between the U.S. public and Congress is in the share who are unaffiliated with a religious group. In the general public, 23% say they are atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular.' In Congress, just one person . . . says she is religiously unaffiliated, making the share of 'nones' in Congress 0.2%."
 3. So Christians are over-represented by about 20% and those with no faith whatsoever are under-represented by about 20%. These are stunning statistics and there is much to be learned from them.
- D. Now we are smart enough to know, I hope, that not everyone who self-designates as Christian truly is a Christian. But, nonetheless, and Mohler brings this out, it is still important for their political careers that they call themselves such.
1. The American people, as secular as we are becoming, still seem to want our representatives, those ruling over us, to have faith in a God ruling over them. We are reluctant to vote people into authority who have no concern for God or His authority, I think, because of the sort of thing we see happening here in our text.
 - a. When you don't think the master of the house is coming, if there's no one and nothing over me, all bets are off. It's unbridled selfishness at that point. And we get that. We get the evil that man is capable of. And even though Americans may be discarding their personal faith in this God, they're still uneasy about putting people into power that have done the same.
- E. So we get it. When you stop waiting for Jesus, you start living, in many ways, like a monster. May that never be the case for us.

(4) Its End

A Happy Master or Hostile Thief?

- A. It is quite interesting to note that Jesus' coming on the last day is described with extreme polarity and juxtaposition.
1. On the one hand, for those who have been waiting, yearning, and living for Him, His coming is likened to that of a happy master who turns host and throws a party and serves His servants with love and joy and gives them more responsibility and reward.
 2. But on the other hand, for those who have in fact given up on His return, and begun panting after other, lesser things, and living with concern for self alone, well, His coming will be likened to that of a thief—what little they had been living for will be taken from them.
 - a. The brightest day for some will be the darkest day for others.

- B. We've spent enough time I think on the positive side of things. It is important that we do see what Jesus says here about those who give up waiting on Him and reject Him.
1. The language is shocking. These are the sorts of verses that in our weaker moments we wish we could strike out of the Bible. God sounds sort of masochistic or something sinister. Look at vv. 45-46: " ⁴⁵ But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful."
- C. With this we move from some of the most wonderful expressions of God's love for us in all the Bible to some of the fiercest and most trembling, even disturbing, expressions of His wrath: "cut him in pieces."
1. In the original Greek, the word here literally means "to cut in two." We gather from this that Jesus is probably referring to the way Israel would make covenants back in the day. Covenant-ratification ceremonies often included cutting a sacrifice in two and having the parties walk between the halves. Presumably the cutting of the sacrifice was intended to warn the parties of the consequences of breaking the covenant.
 - a. This is why God in Jer 34:18 says to Israel: "And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts." In other words: "I will cut them in two for their covenant unfaithfulness."
 - i. And Jesus is saying here in our text, that is what awaits those who know God, who have His law written on their hearts, who sense that their life is to be lived for Him, and yet reject Him.

The Cutting of the Cross

- A. Now, it cannot go unmentioned, brothers and sisters, that this penalty is precisely what Jesus is taking for us on the cross. What is He experiencing there but the penalty for covenant unfaithfulness, this being cut-in-two described here?
1. God is not quick to judge, but reluctant. The reason why His return is stretching into the second and third watches of the night is not because He is slow or lazy, but because He is gracious and wants for no man to perish but for all to come repentance. Jesus is there on the cross, stalling the day of judgment for us, holding back the firestorm of God's wrath, as it were. And He's calling to us.
- B. If you find your conscience stirred this morning, if you come to realize that you have not been waiting for Him or yearning for Him or actively living for Him at all, the place to begin is not to resolve to do better, but to receive Him and what He has done for you. He took the penalty for our covenant failure, so that we who repent and place our faith in Him might be given His righteousness standing and His Holy Spirit that we might learn how to wait and yearn and love.

- C. There's this wonderful text at the beginning of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he reassures the Corinthians that Jesus is at work and able to keep them. I want you hear this now as we close. These words are not intended to undermine or minimize the warnings Jesus gives us in our text. But they do provide assurance that Jesus is able to keep you waiting, yearning, and living faithfully to the end.
1. “⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:4–9).