

The Waiting Time

Joshua 1:10-18

I've got to be honest with you. The months of January and February are my least favorite of all the months in the year. We've just come through a season when we celebrate Thanksgiving, then Christmas, then the New Year, and each of those days makes the season exciting in its own way. It may not be true for you if your birthday falls in those months, or if you have an anniversary, but it seems, at least to me, that the months of January and February are when we spend our time just waiting for something else. Irish poet Denis Florence McCarthy must have felt the same way, because he once wrote:

*"Ah! my heart is weary waiting,
Waiting for the May."*

Louis XIV, king of France, is said to have ordered that a coach be brought to the front door of his residence one day. When the coach pulled up just in the nick of time, the king is reported to have said, "I almost had to wait." Obviously Louis XIV had the opinion that having to wait would have been the worst possible thing that could happen.

Sometimes we today have that same opinion! Waiting is just not something that we like to do, especially here in our American culture. Think how impatient we become if we have to wait in a line for any length of time. Sometimes the waiting is agony. Adults, do you remember what it was like when you were a child having to wait for Christmas? The more days that went by and the closer we got to Christmas, the further away it actually seemed.

You men who have had to wait in nervous excitement while your wife was in the delivery room can very well remember what it was like to wait then. What parent has not known the anxious pain of waiting up for a child to come home late at night? Another example we could use would be that of applying for a job you really want, and then do nothing but wait, because that's all you can do. Sometimes, waiting is the last thing we want to do.

There are times in our lives when it seems that everything has come to a complete standstill. When we are anxious for God to do something in our lives, and we wait days and weeks and even years, it is very easy for us to grow impatient. We wonder why God is so slow, and why He doesn't move faster. Our opinion is that things would be so much better for us if only God would act in a certain way to do certain things. What could possibly be the reason for allowing us to waste away

while time—and opportunities—march right past us? Why doesn't God *do* something—*now*?

Waiting for God to work in our lives has never been easy. Perhaps that's why the Scriptures encourage us to “*wait upon the Lord*” as much as they do. For example, during a particularly trying time in his life, the psalmist wrote, “*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him....*” (Psalm 37:7a). And again, in the 130th Psalm: “*My soul waits for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning*” (Psalm 130:5-6). We are reminded in the New Testament that we are in a waiting time right now, as we long for the time when Jesus will return. But we also learn that this waiting time should be a useful time as we learn of the Spirit of God: “*For the grace of God...teaches us...while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:11-13).

After Joshua's encounter with the Living God, he turned to tell the people that it was almost time for them to cross over into Canaan. They were right on the brink of entering, but there was one catch: after wandering around in the wilderness for forty years, they had to wait three more days! Imagine what our thoughts would be: “What does Joshua mean, ‘Three days from now you will cross the Jordan’? Why can't we go in NOW? Why do we have to wait? We've been traveling in this desolate desert for years, eating nothing but manna. We're ready for something better than this, and we're ready NOW!”

A little-known English novelist/poet by the name of Sarah Doudney expressed this impatience in one of her works: “*But the waiting time, my brothers/ Is the hardest time of all.*” Yes, the “waiting time” can be the most difficult time in our lives, yet we all have them. The Scriptures, however, reveal to us that while the way of the world is to hurry, or to force things to happen, the way of God for His people is to wait for Him to work in His time. So, since these times of waiting come for all of God's people, doesn't it make sense for us to discover how to *use* those waiting times constructively? These waiting times can be special times as we prepare for what God is going to do next in our lives.

1 The Waiting Time should be a time for readiness, vv. 10-11

When God commanded Joshua to lead the people into Canaan, that is exactly what Joshua set out to do. He instructed the officers of the people to spread this message among the people (v. 11): “*Get your supplies ready.*”

Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.” In other words, we’re not actually going in for three days, but use this waiting time to get ready to go in.

Mark it down and live by it: whenever God is about to do a great work among His people, He always calls them to get ready. When the army of Israel went to battle against the army of Moab, they found themselves in a dry desert with no water. Through Elisha, God said, *“Make this valley full of ditches, and I will fill them with water”* (cf. 2 Kings 3:16-17). When the widow of one of the prophets was about to lose her two sons to slavery because of her debts, God spoke through Elisha again and told her, *“Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. I’m about to work a miracle in your life, but you’ve got to get ready for it”* (cf. 2 Kings 4:3ff). Four days after Lazarus died, Jesus stood before his sealed tomb and told those standing nearby, *“Take away the stone. I’m about to bring Lazarus back to life. You’ve had a waiting time of four days, but before I work this miracle, you must get ready”* (cf. John 11).

This was the principle at work as the Israelites were about to enter Canaan. “God is about to do something marvelous for us, something none of us has ever seen before. This is going to be better than the good old days, but we must be prepared for it. Get ready!”

Is that where you are right now? Are you at a stage where you are waiting for God to do something marvelous and grand in your life? Why does God make us wait for that blessing of Himself in our lives? Because He wants us to use this time to get ourselves ready, so we will be aware that God is working when He begins.

What are you doing to get ready? Are you striving to draw closer to Him, even closer than you are now? Are you daily turning your eyes and hearts toward Him who has redeemed us from sin? Are you striving to lean on Him with full and complete trust? This is a time for readiness.

2 The Waiting Time should be a time for remembrance, vv. 12-15

While they were still in the wilderness, and while Moses was still with them, some of the Israelites had made a strange request of Moses. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, had come to Moses with the request that they be given the land east of the Jordan River as their inheritance. It was a fertile soil, they reasoned, and good enough for them. Moses had told them

they could have it as their inheritance *after* they had marched into Canaan to help their fellow Israelites in conquering Canaan for themselves. They were not only to help the other Israelites fight, but they were to be at the head of the attacking force. After that, they could return to that land east of the Jordan.

So Joshua's next words were to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. In verse thirteen, he reminded them that they had made an agreement with Moses: "*Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you.*" Joshua reminded them of the terms of the agreement. Their wives, children and livestock could stay in the land that Moses had given them east of the Jordan, but all their fighting men had to cross the Jordan River ahead of everyone else. After the land had been conquered, these men could return to their families and establish their homes.

What was the purpose of this arrangement? The tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh already had what they wanted from this land. That portion of the country had already been conquered. But that was not to be an excuse for them to stay home and rest while the rest of the Israelites continued to fight. They had to be faithful to their brothers; they had to fulfill their responsibilities.

Joshua's words to them were, in effect, "In three days we will cross over to Canaan to begin the conquest of this land God has given us. Use this waiting time during the next three days as a time of remembrance, to remind yourselves of the blessings *you* have, and of the responsibilities you have toward your brothers."

This waiting time which comes to all of us sooner or later should be a time when we remember the ways that God has blessed us so richly in the past. It should be a time when we remember the responsibilities we have as children of God. Remembering our blessings and responsibilities is something we are all to do, from the youngest to the oldest.

In our waiting for what God is going to do in our lives, let us use it constructively to pause and remember our blessings and our responsibilities.

3 The Waiting Time should also be a time for re-examination and recommitment, vv. 16-18

The response of the people of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh was quick in coming. They had already begun *their* waiting time! They had been waiting since the time Moses had promised them they could settle down east

of the Jordan River. And I believe they had used this time well. So when Joshua reminded them of their promise to Moses, they were ready with an answer.

Their response had two parts to it, which together express their recommitment to the Lord and to Joshua. It is found in verse sixteen: (1) We will do what you command; and (2) We will go where you send us. They had used their waiting time constructively in re-examination of their loyalties and vows. Now they were ready to recommit themselves to the task of leading the Israelites into the conquest of Canaan.

Pay attention to this! Joshua did not send the spies into Jericho until he had received the full and unreserved cooperation and commitment from these people. God was giving them the land, yes; but they were going to have to fight for it! Fighting for it would require *all* of them, not just some of them. This waiting time was a time for them to re-examine their willingness to obey the Lord, and a time to re-examine just how far they were willing to go.

The waiting times in our lives are times in which we should get ourselves ready, and in which we should remember our responsibilities—but the waiting times are worthless if they do not lead us to re-examine our willingness to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. They are worthless if they do not compel us to re-examine just how far we are willing to go in this matter of following Christ in discipleship. The waiting times are worthless if they do not direct us to recommit ourselves to Jesus as the absolute and complete Lord of our lives.

Oh, that we would say to Christ what these people said to Joshua in verse sixteen! “*Whatever you have commanded we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.*” In your waiting time, when you wonder why God doesn’t act on your behalf, or pour out His blessings on you or your church, use that time as a time for readiness, a time for remembrance, and a time for re-examination and recommitment. Paul told us in Romans 13:11 that “*the present time is of the highest importance.*” If that is true, then let us use it as wisely as possible. If God is allowing you to wait, then He is doing it to allow you to get ready for what He is about to do in your life. He is doing it to allow you time to remember your blessings and responsibilities to the kingdom of God. And He is doing it to give you time to re-examine and recommit yourself to Him.

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, when the resurrected Jesus was about to ascend to the Heavenly Father, He told His disciples, “*Do not leave Jerusalem, but*

wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about” (Acts 1:4). Why did Jesus tell them to wait? What was this waiting time for?

(1) It was so they could get ready for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They readied themselves by gathering together and praying, which is what they were doing when the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost.

(2) It was so they could remember all the things Jesus had told them about His life, death and resurrection. It was so they could remember the commands He had given them, and the responsibilities they had to fulfill those commands.

(3) It was so they could re-examine their willingness to obey Jesus, and just how far they were willing to go, because following Christ would mean death for many of them. And it was so they could recommit themselves to the risen Christ Jesus as Lord of all.

There was a waiting time in the book of Joshua, and there was a waiting time in the book of Acts. There were many others. Perhaps you're in a waiting time right now, waiting for God to show Himself strong and mighty on your behalf. You have a choice: you can waste this time in a business-as-usual approach to life, or you can submit to what the grace of God is teaching you.

So—what are *you* waiting for?