

The Reward of Waiting

Luke 2:22-32

Good afternoon! I missed you last week and I hope you missed me, too. My family was here anyway. Thanks to Pastor Nonoy for preaching. My wife at first wondered who was going to preach when I said that I had to skip because I had to finish some tasks at work in the morning. She said she was ready to preach. So, she went to church but found out someone else was preaching. Now, that's just a joke. She went because of our Sunday school kids. They were not coming originally because they planned to just come with me to Agape Baptist Church where I preached in the afternoon. But she preferred to be with our Sunday school kids. My loss, your gain.

Last week, we received sad news. First, a friend of ours, Pastor Ariel Tolentino in Texas, went to be with the Lord recently. Many of you know him. I'm sure you've heard of what happened to him through Facebook. Then, another friend of ours passed away. He was from New York and this afternoon, actually, right after my message, we're driving to NY to attend his wake. Sad news. But those are things we don't have control of. Only God is in control.

So, we just entered the Christmas season here in the states. In the Philippines, the people there already entered the Christmas season as early as September. As you know when the months end in 'ber' that's the beginning of the Christmas season in the Philippines.

How many of you have been waiting for Christmas? Children would excitedly 'yes'. But adults would have mixed feelings. Christmas could be overwhelming. You know, thinking of how to decorate your home, what meals to prepare, how to entertain guests, where to go shopping, what to shop for, who to give gifts to, crowded malls, etc.

But Christmas should always be a time for reflection. The problem is that because of the busyness of the season, we don't have much time to reflect.

So, to cut to the chase, I'm starting a sermon series where for at least 30 minutes a week, as you listen to this series of messages, you get to think about the lessons that Christmas teaches us. I have chosen four topics that I'd like our thoughts to dwell on as we approach Christmas day.

Christmas is about Jesus, of course. I'd like to share with you topics that are centered on Jesus. So, in the next few weeks, we'll look at first of all, "The Reward of Waiting", then "The Results of Seeking", then "The Benefits of Sharing", and finally, "The Joy of Giving".

Today, I'd like to talk about "The Reward of Waiting". Please get your Bibles and I'd like us to read together this passage from the Bible, Luke 2:22-32.

So, here we have the story of Simeon. The Bible doesn't tell us much about his background. According to some commentators he must be the officiating priest at the temple because of the fact that he held Jesus in his arms and said a prayer. However, some say that he was just an ordinary man in Jerusalem whom God chose because of his devotion to God to reveal the coming of the Messiah. I agree with this interpretation because Luke, being a careful writer and observer, would have specifically referred to Simeon as a priest rather than a man. If you look at verse 36, Luke specifies who Anna was, a prophet, daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. So, why would he not do the same with Simeon? I'll explain why later. In any case, verse 27 says that the Holy Spirit one day moved him to go to the Temple in order to dedicate Jesus which is our model for dedicating our children to the Lord.

We don't know how old he was but apparently he was very old as he said "you may now dismiss your servant in peace" signifying like it's ok for him to die because God's promise was fulfilled already.

In fact, the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition says that he lived long miraculously, maybe up to over 200 years old because they identified him as being one of the 72 translators of the Septuagint, which is a translation of the Old Testament in Greek. But then again, that's just tradition or legend which I consider it to be. The fact is, he may be in the twilight of his years, probably approaching a hundred years.

In any case, Simeon was a man who waited for a long, long time. You see, if you were living during his time, you may have given up. Why? The Jews were under Roman rule and they were at the height of their power. The Romans were abusive and cruel. That's why some Israelites have started to cooperate and work for the Romans like the tax collectors and government leaders. People were getting desperate. Because of this situation, some Jews began to stage revolts and many were executed by crucifixion when caught. Simeon could have asked "Why God? When is your salvation?" But he waited. God promised him something and he trusted God on his promise.

How about us? Do we wait on God's promises? Do we trust him enough to wait long enough? Let me encourage you this morning. Things may be quite difficult for you nowadays. You may be feeling the heat. You are in a hurry but God seems to be so slow.

Friend, let me tell you this. The reward of waiting is this.

Good things come to those who wait. Say to your neighbor, "Good things come to those who wait."

You've heard of this before, right? That is a modern saying. Do you know where it came from? **It's actually an advertising slogan in the 90's used by a company in TV, cinema, and print advertising campaigns promoting a beer brand in the United Kingdom called "Guinness".** Their purpose was to turn around the negative consumer opinion of the length of time required to correctly pour a pint of

Guinness from the tap, usually quoted as 119.5 seconds, as well as to encourage bartenders to take the time to do so.

Good things come to those who wait. Do you believe that? I do. I waited so many years before I got married. And I got a good deal.

Simeon waited lots and lots of years and he never wavered because he knew God can be trusted. Being a devoted believer in God, he must be well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures which we call the Old Testament. The Old Testament contains encouragements on waiting such as,

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14)

“The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.” (Lamentations 3:25)

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.” (Psalm 37:7-9)

That last verse must truly have encouraged his heart considering the situation Israel was in at the time.

There are so many verses about waiting on the Lord and why we should wait on the Lord. But I know it’s hard to wait. I myself don’t like to wait especially when I’m driving. Just ask my wife.

But let me tell you, good things will come when you wait. What are these things? There are several but let me share with you just three of them for the sake of time. **Good things that come.**

a. **It develops your character.**

Look at Simeon, the Bible says he was righteous and devout. I think he was already righteous and devout when God chose him to have the privilege of seeing the Messiah when he came.

But at the same time, I think that righteousness and devotion to God must have been cultivated some more in his life during his waiting time.

You see, waiting can either make you bitter or better. It can either make or break you. Children have a hard time waiting. Do you notice that? When a baby is crying because she's hungry and you say, "Wait, honey, I'll get your bottle" will you expect that baby to stop crying and smile at you like saying, "Thank you, mommy"? They don't understand you. They just want what they want at the moment they want it.

An experiment was made about children's inability to wait. Watch this clip.
VIDEO: THE MARSHMALLOW TEST

How many of you are like those children? Ok, don't point to your spouse. I think all of us are like children from time to time. We want things to happen right away. We can't just wait. But waiting develops our character.

You see, sometimes, God intentionally makes us wait in order to mold us, to shape us, that we may be more ready for the answer that he is giving us. While we wait, he allows us to see things in a different perspective. While we wait, he points to us things in our lives that he is not pleased with. While we wait, he helps us to see the improvements we ought to do in our lives. Perhaps, there's an unconfessed sin. Maybe, we need to be more loving and kind. Maybe we need to be less critical of others. There's a purpose in everything that God does. We cannot see the picture right now. But it becomes clear afterwards.

Another good thing that comes when you wait is
b. You learn to depend on God.

One thing about human beings is that when you let them control their lives, they make a mess of themselves. In the beginning, it may not be so, but when pressures and stresses come, they give in and do things that they regret later on.

Abraham is a case in point. God chose him to be the father of many nations and promised that the Messiah will come from him. When many years passed and Sarah his wife hadn't given him a son yet, he took matters into his own hands upon the prodding of his own wife Sarah. She pressured him into having a son through Hagar, her maidservant. That son was Ishmael. Eventually, God gave him Isaac when Sarah became pregnant miraculously. However, the mess he made was big-time. And we're feeling its consequences up to the present time. Ishmael became the father of the Arab nations and Isaac of Israel. That's what happens when we don't wait. We make a mess.

Good thing Abraham learned his lesson. Through the years, he learned to trust in the goodness and faithfulness of God. He learned to depend on God with respect to the many decisions he made in his life. He learned to wait and leave the results to God. This culminated in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain when God asked him to. He was willing to wait for God to bring his son back to life after he sacrificed him. But as we know, God just tested him. And because he learned to depend on God, we have benefitted from it because God blessed him when he became the father of the nation of Israel from which Jesus the Messiah came.

Are you feeling the pressures of life? Perhaps, you can't wait to be promoted in your job or your job situation is now untenable. Maybe your children are misbehaving. Or your spouse himself or herself is misbehaving. Perhaps, you're feeling sick and tired of it all. You want to give up. Perhaps, your bills are mounting. You're financially hard-up. Whatever stressful situation you're in, don't take matters in your own hands. Don't try to control your situation.

Learn to depend on God and wait for his deliverance. The Bible says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

And let me tell you one truth. God’s timing is perfect. Always.

I remember the time I arrived in the States after coming from a missions trip in Russia. I lived with my sister in California. At the time, I wanted to go back to Australia where I worked for two years prior to becoming a missionary. But the Lord closed the door to Australia because I was denied a visa at the Australian embassy. I wanted to continue what I thought was my lifetime calling in missions and so I did not apply for a job in California. But six months passed and God seemed to be silent where he wanted me to go or what he wanted me to be. It was one of the most challenging six months of my life. I was waiting on God but he seemed to be silent. I prayed and fasted but my future was unclear. I couldn’t go home to the Philippines because I didn’t have money. I was feeling pretty desperate and many times I cried out to the Lord.

Then, one day my parents took me to their friends, a couple who owns a care and board facility. This nice Filipino couple were looking for someone who could help them to look after men who were either mentally challenged or rehabilitating due to an addiction to alcohol or drugs. I really didn’t like the idea. I didn’t think I was meant for that. But the couple said that they were going to teach me to drive and then also sponsor me for a green card. Hmm, that sounds appealing I told myself. And I suddenly realized that this may be God’s calling for me after all. In fact, I told myself that I could start a Bible study with their patients.

So, we were about to ink the deal when they made one stipulation. They wanted me to give each man a cigarette once a day. That stopped me at my tracks. That was against my principle.

I believe the Bible says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. I wouldn't want these guys to introduce something in their bodies that would harm that temple. That's not honoring to God's creation.

I refused to sign the deal and went home. I became frustrated and even angry at God. What was God doing in my life. Has he abandoned me?

I'm back to square one. Without a job, without hope. I remember lying on the sofa at my sister's house and crying.

Then, the phone rang. I hesitated to answer it because I thought it was for my sister. I picked it up anyway and to my surprise, it was Anabel. Just kidding. She was in the Philippines and only in high school at the time. The guy on the other line was Ayo, a friend of mine in Australia who came here and worked in New Jersey the year before I came here. Somehow, he was able to track me down. He said he knew a recruiter who was hiring for a computer programmer position in New Jersey. To cut a long story short, I got to talk with the recruiter and he set me up for an interview. This was at Nabisco Biscuits in Hanover, NJ. I remember renting a suit and my sister paying for my plane ticket. I got the job and the rest is history. It went so quick that there's no doubt in my mind that it was the Lord working. In fact, the recruiter was so surprised when she asked me, "Can I see your driver license?" and I told her, "I don't have one". And she said, "If I had known you didn't have a license, I wouldn't have presented you to our client." The problem was, there were no buses or trains to Nabisco. So, my recruiter arranged for me to have driving lessons while I was working. They paid for the whole thing because they had no choice.

I had no doubt that my friend's call was God's timing. God made me wait in order to teach me to depend on him and to just trust him. In his time, he made things beautiful for me.

The Bible says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time." (Eccl. 3:11)

The third good thing that comes to those who wait is

c. God renews your strength.

Earlier, I mentioned a few things why God make us wait. Let me give you one more reason. God wants to renew your strength.

God knows that we can only take so much physically. We're not Superman or Superwoman. They exist only in the movies. God created us and he knows our capacity. This is the reason he instituted the Sabbath for the Jews in the Old Testament. The Jews were slaves in Egypt for more than 200 years. During that period of time, they worked every day for their Egyptian masters. There was no rest for them. When they escaped from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and they wandered in the wilderness God gave them the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment says to remember the Sabbath. They need to rest every seventh day. God had compassion on his people. He wanted them to realize the value of rest so they can be renewed. On the Sabbath, God did not want them to do any hard labor. He wanted them to take time off to recharge their whole being. He wanted them to wait before facing another day.

If you're waiting, perhaps, God wants you to just relax. Perhaps, he just wants you to be renewed in your body and in your spirit.

If you're waiting, perhaps, God wants you to just focus on him. For you to become closer to him. For you to hear more from him.

So, if you're waiting, take the time to commune with him more often through prayer, Bible reading, and fasting. And then, you'll become more sensitive to him and he will impress in your heart and thoughts the things he wants you to know and understand. His rescue and deliverance will come as you wait.

The Bible says, "...but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

Simeon waited for the coming of the Messiah. It took years but he received his reward. In the end, he was able to hold in his arms the Savior of Israel and the world.

This season, or whatever season in your life, learn to wait. God is not finished with you yet. God is faithful and will not leave you hanging in the lurch. He has something great waiting for you. All you need to do is to wait.