

# Waiting for God – Genesis 49:18

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Waiting is an enormously misunderstood and underrated discipline, and as such it is something which most people will go to great lengths to avoid. Waiting seems like such a waste of time. I don't know of anyone who enjoys waiting. As a culture we have come up with all sorts of ways to avoid or eliminate waiting because as a rule we all detest having to wait. Everything from faster computer downloads, to instant messaging, to call ahead seating at a restaurant, all are designed to minimize the amount of time we spend waiting. But what we find so intolerable in our day-to-day life is absolutely essential in our relationship with God. In fact, the reason why many Christians do not enjoy a deep, experiential relationship with Jesus Christ, and why some try to fabricate this relationship by substituting counterfeit, imaginary spiritual experiences for a truly experiential faith is because they have never cultivated the discipline of waiting on God. There is no way to download an app for the Christian life; it must be experimentally learned.

True waiting on God is meant to foster an attitude of complete dependence on God and His word. Waiting on God is hard, as we will see as we explore the biblical passages dealing with this subject, it does not come naturally. The experience of waiting on God is true Christian experience. Waiting on God is a discipline we must cultivate and is only possible through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Truly waiting on God will be the hardest thing you ever do as a Christian. This is why so few people really learn to wait on God, why so few have a truly experiential faith, why so few truly know God as He is, and why many Christians who profess to worship God really worship a god of their own imagination. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the heart of the Christian life and the heart of our relationship to Him are centered in waiting on God, yet how very little of our life is taken up with truly waiting on Him. It sounds so simple, but if it were simple it would not be so rare. For God's people to learn in practice and experience the art of simply waiting *only* on God would have more influence on a watching world than all the ostentatious displays of religious charlatanism, all the man-centered psycho-babble, all the motivational messages, all the mystical experiences and gimmicky, entertainment driven, pragmatic programs ever could. May we, by God's grace, learn what it means to truly wait on God.

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*"For Thy salvation I wait, O LORD" – Genesis 49:18*

Jacob is in the midst of blessing his twelve sons who are to become the twelve tribes of Israel when, after blessing his seventh son Gad, Jacob interjects with this prayer, *"For your salvation I wait, O LORD."* The fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the future hope of Israel is bound up in the destiny of these twelve sons. The salvation for which Jacob awaits is the salvation promised to Abraham and his descendants in the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Gn 12:1-3); the promise of being a great nation, of having a great name, and of being a great blessing to all the earth. It was through the fulfillment of these

promises that God would reconcile sinful man to Himself because the ultimate fulfillment is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word translated “wait” means to “*hope for; eagerly expect.*” Jacob had a confident expectation that God would fulfill His promise, because the promise was from God. He knew the character of the One who had promised; therefore He could eagerly expect the promise’s fulfillment. Jacob could do nothing in regard to the promise but wait. It was God’s salvation he waited for; a salvation to which God had bound Himself by an unconditional promise and that only God could bring about. Salvation always and ever is a work of God as He works out His plan of salvation through the means He has ordained from eternity past. There is no salvation but God’s salvation, and it is something for which we must wait.

But man in his impatience wants to see instant results, so he develops his own methods to generate the results he wants to see. He makes conversion a work of man. He tries to create the right ambiance, set the right mood, use peer pressure, emotional manipulation, and scare tactics. Faith becomes defined as “accepting” Jesus, salvation is described as “inviting” Jesus into our hearts, conversion is reduced to a “decision”, and repentance (if it is mentioned at all) is defined as being “sorry” for our sin. Conversion becomes something that is within one’s own power to effect. Jesus is offered as the panacea for all our temporal troubles, the path to self-improvement, and the key that unlocks the door to health, wealth, and prosperity. The cross is portrayed with sentimental overtures designed to arouse pity and sympathy for Jesus. That fact that none of these ideas and terminology is to be found anywhere in Scripture, and in fact are controverted by Scripture, seems to make little difference. If the goal is to produce results then whatever achieves those results must be valid, even if in the process it means equating salvation with something as subjective, capricious, and frivolous as a human “decision”, and reducing Jesus to a pitiful object of our sympathy and a servant of our lusts and fragile ego.

But God’s salvation is something for which we must wait. Genuine salvation is borne out over time. The seeds which fell on rocky soil and among thorns all sprouted, but only those which fell on good soil bore fruit. Failure to wait has resulted in millions of people being deceived into thinking their false conversion is true salvation and the god of their own imagination is the true God – just so we can tally-up the results. The attempt to change a person’s view regarding the nature of salvation – that is, from a consequence of their own free decision to a sovereign work of God in the heart which always results in a holy life – is bound to meet with much opposition, especially from those whose assurance hinges on their “decision”. This is tantamount to asking such people to renounce the only scheme which human reason has discovered whereby an unconverted person may – at least for a time – remain blissfully and securely unconverted.

The goal of our evangelism is not to elicit a positive response from people. When results become the goal then means are devised that generate the desired results. The results belong to God. I remember once hearing a missionary tell a group of people how he cornered a young boy and spent two hours giving him the gospel until he finally coerced the youngster into praying “the prayer”. Well of course the lad did, the boy wanted to escape the missionary. All that this browbeating accomplished was to instill a false sense of security in this boy so that now he is worse off than he was before. Such strong-arm, decision driven tactics may be done with good intentions and a sincere desire to see others come to salvation, but ultimately they deny in practice what we profess to believe in principle and they confuse a person’s momentary positive response with genuine salvation. True conversion is very rare, and among people who

have been convinced that a profession of faith is true salvation, and have lived under this deception for a period of time, true conversion is even more rare.

If our evangelism is truly motivated by a love for God and love for lost souls we would not stray from God's ways and means. The means which God has established must be the best possible to accomplish His purpose and they do not stand in need of our modification or embellishment. God's means bring about God's salvation, and only salvation produced by God is genuine. The sole instrument through which God saves is the gospel, it is the gospel which *"is the power of God for salvation"* (Rm 1:16); *"God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe...By His doing you are in Christ Jesus..."* (1 Cor 1:21, 30); *"for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God"* (1 Pt 1:23).

When we rely on methods other than God's, or add our own contrivances to God's methods; when we attempt to badger, coerce, scare, or emotionally manipulate an individual or group of people into praying a prayer or making a "decision"; when we repackage the gospel to make it more palatable to the unbelieving mind, ultimately we deny our total dependence on God for salvation, we deem the gospel insufficient in and of itself, and we even elevate our own methods above the gospel itself. We think our own methods can succeed where God's could not. We take the responsibility for salvation out of the hands of God and arrogantly assume it for ourselves

The apostle Paul disavowed any association with this kind of manipulation of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 2:17, *"For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."* The word "peddling" *kapeleuo*, appears only here in the New Testament and is a word borrowed from the market place. It means "to sell deceitfully or by trickery". When applied to teaching it means to falsify by making additions. Paul refused to be compared or associated with anyone who adopted such strategies. He was motivated by a steadfast commitment to God's word, a deep sense of responsibility toward God, and unshakable loyalty to Jesus' commission. He emphatically stated he was *"not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"* (2 Cor 4:2).

Man's crafty and theatrical methods can repackage the gospel in terms that are appealing to unbelievers, they can coerce and manipulate a profession, they can emotionally sway someone into saying a prayer, but they cannot change a heart. A profession and a prayer is not God's salvation, and confusing the two has resulted in millions who are persuaded they are Christians, despite the lack of any visible fruit, to the extent that the church is now dominated by people who have no love for God's word, no desire to do His will, and yet cling to a false hope. They are persuaded that they belong to God because they at one time made a profession of faith. They will never be persuaded to give up this false hope until death rips it from them. Their salvation was not God's salvation, but a product of human methods, and as a result their heart remains unchanged. As J. Gresham Machen observed over eighty-years ago:

The fundamental fault of the modern Church is that she is busily engaged in an absolutely impossible task – she is busily engaged in calling the righteous to repentance. Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin....Such is modern preaching. It is heard every Sunday in thousands of pulpits. But it is entirely futile. Even our Lord did not call the righteous to repentance, and probably we shall be no more successful than He. *Christianity and Liberalism*, 68.

From beginning to end salvation is a work of God (cf. Phil 1:6), not a product of man's manipulative methods or his own free choice. Only the salvation that God works will bear any fruit, and we must wait for the tree to bear fruit to see if it is good or bad, "*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness (i.e. the habitual pattern of their life) is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother*" (1 Jn 3:10). Why is something that is supposed to be so *obvious* beset with so much confusion? Because man has redefined God's salvation to conform to his own result-oriented objectives. People do make false professions of faith, and those who do often have their profession of faith affirmed too quickly.

We give the gospel, we pray, and we wait. Our primary duty in evangelism is not to press for a decision or to coerce a response, but to have enough confidence in the power of the gospel to wait for God's salvation, and to realize that every aspect of salvation is a work of God. For God to give us a role in being the propagator of His means is the greatest privilege and mercy He could bestow. God does not ask us to do His work, but He does expect us to do the work He has given us to do – which is sow and wait. In Mark chapter 4 Jesus tells a parable to illustrate this truth, "*The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows – how he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself...*" (Mk 4:26-28). This man sowed the seed, then over a period of time he goes to bed and gets up (the verb tense for both verbs "*goes to bed*" and "*gets up*" is present tense indicating something that occurs over and over), but he has no idea how or when the seed will sprout and grow. The soil produces the crop "by itself", the Greek word is *automatos*, where we get our English word "automatic." All the man did was sow and wait.

If our assumptions are wrong then everything based on those assumptions will be wrong. For decades the majority of evangelistic activity has been based on the assumption that the natural man does not hate the gospel, and that a person has the capacity in and of themselves to respond favorably to the gospel, especially if presented in a persuasive and attractive package. They assume that if an unbeliever can just be convinced of their guilt before God, or persuaded of God's love for them, they would want to give their life to Christ. But such people will only come to Jesus on their own terms and for some promised or perceived temporal and self-serving benefit. And the only reason there is any semblance of continued interest in religion on the part of these people is for fear of losing the same self-serving benefits. Such people will immerse themselves in religious activity to stifle the voice of conscience and preserve their self-deception that their faith is true saving faith, but they will not immerse themselves in Scripture, because Scripture would expose the spuriousness of their faith (cf. Jn 3:20).

Regeneration, the new birth, conversion, and justification are instantaneous, but the proof that they are genuine bears itself out over time. Seed springs up and begins to grow but withers away when exposed to persecution, trials, and temptations, or is choked out by worldliness, materialism, greed, and the desire for a certain lifestyle. How a person responds to divine truth, how they respond to Jesus' demands of discipleship is a key test of genuine saving faith. Most people who make a profession of faith are given assurance of their salvation even before they have their actions and attitudes confronted with God's word. They would rather ignore or reinterpret divine truth than admit their profession was false and they are self-

deceived. They refuse to submit their mind and life to the demands of Jesus. During His earthly ministry many people professed a belief in Jesus (cf. Jn 2:23; 7:31; 8:30), until He started teaching, detailing the demands of discipleship, and what it meant to truly follow Him. Then their professed belief turned into hostility and rejection (Jn 6:66; 7:59). Most of what we sow will either fall on the path and be snatched away by Satan, or fall on stony ground or among thorns and thistles and never bear fruit, but some will fall on hearts prepared by God. We wait for the seed to germinate, grow, and bear fruit.

The only reason we are impatient, why we will not wait, why we devise our own methods, why we want demonstrable results is because ultimately we do not have confidence in the gospel. We want to puff up our own spiritual pride by taking at least partial credit for someone else's salvation and publish the number of "decisions" as proof of the success of our ministry. If we must wait for salvation then the numbers disappear and become meaningless, and we have no results in which to boast and hold up as evidence of our success or use for fund raising purposes. For some reason being faithful is not success enough, people want to see results; results become the measure of success, not faithfulness.

The Pharisees also had their own standard of success. They also defined success in worldly terms, but Jesus had to remind them "*that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God*" (Lk 16:15). God's definition of success is diametrically opposed to how we measure success. The things which are alluring to our fallen nature and human pride, everything on which the world places a premium and "highly esteems" are in fact *detestable*, literally an abomination, in the sight of God. Man values what is visible and tangible; he values the outcome, what he can track and graph and measure and count, and what he can attribute to his own ideas and efforts. He wants to see a cause and effect relationship and results that are proportional to his labors, and if the results are not forthcoming then there must be something wrong with the process. So, alter the ways and means until you alight on one that achieves the desired results.

If nothing else this principle expressed by Jesus should cause us to stop and do some serious self-examination of why we are doing what we do. Why are the numbers so important? Does the church measure its success by biblical or worldly standards? What does the church today "highly esteem"; biblical fidelity or popularity, fun, activities, social life, and commercial success? It is safe to say that what the overwhelming majority of the church today highly prizes is, in the sight of God, an abomination. All of man's artificial methods turn salvation into a work of man. Instead we should realize that one sows, another waters, but it is God who causes the growth (1 Cor 3:5, 6). We sow in complete submission to God, in humble dependence on His means, and we wait with a confident expectation that His means will accomplish His work in His time, and God gets all the glory.

Waiting on God is so much more difficult than concocting our own methods. For the faithful pastor and Christian worker waiting for God's salvation is often an agonizing time, as the apostle Paul describes in Colossian 2:1, 2. John Newton expresses the faithful pastor's anguish in his hymn *Travailing in Birth of Souls*:

What contradictions meet in ministers employ!  
It is a bitter sweet, a sorrow full of joy;  
No other post affords a place, for equal honor or disgrace!

Who can describe the pain which faithful preachers feel,  
Constrained to speak in vain, to hearts as hard as steel?  
Or who can tell the pleasures felt, when stubborn hearts begin to melt?

The Savior's dying love, the soul's amazing worth,  
Their utmost efforts move, and draw their bowels forth;  
They pray, and strive, their rest departs, till Christ is formed in sinners' hearts.

If some small hope appear, they still are not content;  
But with a jealous fear, they watch for the event.  
Too oft they find their hopes deceived, then how their inmost souls are grieved!

But when their pains succeed, and from the tender blade,  
The ripening ears proceed, their toils are overpaid.  
No harvest-joy can equal theirs, to find the fruit of all their cares.

On what has now been sown, Thy blessing, Lord, bestow  
The power is Thine alone, to make it spring and grow.  
Do Thou the gracious harvest raise, and Thou alone shalt have the praise.

Waiting for God's salvation is not done with an apathetic or indifferent spirit. Like Paul, the faithful worker does not content himself with getting someone to pray a prayer. He does not boast in, or measure his success by the number of "decisions" he is able to generate or the size of the crowd he can attract. Rather he grieves over the apathy and indifference to biblical truth among professing Christians, he mourns the self-satisfied shallowness of the professing church, he laments the worldliness and superficial teaching that permeates the church, he is outraged by the trivialization and desecration of God's worship, he agonizes over those entrusted to his care until Christ is formed in sinners' hearts, he entrusts all his efforts to God, and he waits for God's salvation. In this one phrase is combined our complete helplessness and inability, our entire dependence, and our perfect confidence that our God will work all according to His wise plan, His infinite power, and His eternal goodness, "*For Thy salvation I wait, O LORD.*"

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