

WAITING ON GOD
John 11:1-44
The Gospel of John – Week 42
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. It is rare when we get what we want right away. Most of our lives are spent waiting. When Lydia and I got engaged, we were ready to tie the knot, but her mother made us wait six months to get married. When I was in college I felt a strong and clear calling to start a new church, but I had to wait and endure three years of seminary before we moved to Lafayette to start Church Acadiana. When Lydia and I got married, we dreamed of having a large family; we wanted as many children as we could have. We decided from the day we got married to leave the number and the timing to God. We had to wait almost two years before our first child was born. We started Church Acadiana in 2005, and we had to wait fifteen years before we bought our own property, and we're still waiting for God to give us our own building. Most of our lives are spent waiting on God. They are spent in the time between our need and God's provision.
2. What should we do while we wait? What should we do in the waiting room? The Bible says that we should wait on the Lord.
3. **Psalm 27:14** "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the Lord."
4. What does it mean to wait on the Lord? It means five things.
 - i. Keep the faith while you wait for God to provide. Don't doubt God's existence, God's goodness, God's greatness, God's nearness, as you wait. "Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong (1 Cor 16:13)."
 - ii. Keep praising God while you wait for God to move. Don't despair. Don't sink into a depression. There is a time for sorrow, but don't live in a perpetual pity party for yourself. Rejoice in the Lord always (Phil 4:4). Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18). Say with Job, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21)."
 - iii. Keep praying while you wait for God to answer. Don't give up on prayer just because God doesn't answer right away. Keep praying. Jesus told His disciples "to pray always and not give up (Lk 18:1)."
 - iv. Keep serving while you wait for God's reward. Keep doing the ministry that God has called you to do, even if you don't feel like it, even if you don't see a great harvest, if you don't get any recognition. "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58)."
 - v. Keep obeying while you wait for God's victory. Don't turn to sin for relief or comfort. Don't try to shorten the wait by lying, or stealing, or compromising

in some other way. Don't get out ahead of God. "Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up (Gal 6:9)."

5. This is what it means to wait on the Lord, but it is easier said than done. Where do we get the strength and faith to wait on the Lord like this? Today we're going to look at a story in the Bible about waiting on God. I'm going to point several principles to remember that will help you to wait on God.

II. **STORY: John 11:1-44**

1. The story is in John 11. In John 11 we find Christ's greatest miracle – the raising of Lazarus from the dead. John mentions seven signs – special miracles that point to the identity and divinity of Christ – this is the last one, and the greatest one. In John 11 we also find one of Christ's seven "I am" statements. **John 11:25-26** "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. 26 Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" I'm going to just tell you the story, and then we'll go back and talk about some of the lessons.
2. We are nearing the end of Christ's life on earth. After Jesus healed the blind man in John 10, he had a big confrontation with the Jewish leaders. Then Jesus went across the Jordan River to the region of Perea to minister for a few months before returning to Jerusalem for the final week of His life. While He was in Perea, he received a message from his close friends Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus was sick. They lived in Bethany, which was very close to Jerusalem. Jesus told His disciples, "This sickness will not end in death, but God will use it to glorify me." But instead of immediately rushing to the aid of His friend Lazarus, He stayed where he was two more days. Then He and His disciples made their way to Bethany. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already been dead and in the tomb four days. Mary and Martha both went to meet Jesus as He was walking into town, and they both said the same thing, "If you had been here, Lazarus wouldn't have died." Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again." Jesus said, "Where have you put him?" They took him to the tomb, and Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha said, "Lord, he's been dead four days. It's really going to stink. Are you sure?" Jesus, said, "Yes, remove the stone!" They removed the stone, Jesus prayed aloud for Lazarus' resurrection, and then He shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus came walking out of the tomb still wrapped from head to toe in linen cloths. "Jesus said, "Unwrap him and let him go."
3. Now let's go back and look at several principles about waiting on God.

III. **FINDING THE STRENGTH TO WAIT**

1. **Remember that all God's loved ones will experience suffering.**
 - i. **John 11:3** So the sisters sent a message to him: "Lord, the one you love is sick."
 - ii. Christ clearly loved Lazarus, yet he allowed him to get sick and die.

- iii. Don't be surprised when life doesn't go your way; when things don't go as planned; when life gets hard; when you experience suffering, loss, disappointment, persecution, sickness, failure, rejection, etc. All of God's loved ones in the Bible experienced intense suffering. Jesus suffered. And anyone who wants to follow Jesus will suffer too.
- iv. Why does God allow us to suffer? To grow us. Suffering is spiritual training. Suffering is the best sermon. Pain is the best preacher. God whispers in our successes but shouts in our failures. It is in times of suffering that we grow the most; that we learn the most about God, and ourselves, and life; that our character is molded according to the image of Christ.
- v. Everybody wants to grow, but nobody wants the growing pains. You can't have one without the other.
- vi. To purify gold, it has to be melted down into a liquid; then the dross, the impurities rise to the top and are scraped off. To purify you God has to put you through the heat of suffering. Your impurities and immaturities rise to the top and become obvious, and God is able to remove them.
- vii. When a blacksmith works with metal, he has to heat it up to extreme temperatures to make it moldable, and then he beats on it with a heavy hammer to get it into the shape that he wants it. People are tougher to mold and shape than steal. We are stubborn and hardheaded. God has to heat us up and then beat on us with His hammer of love in order to shape us into a useful tool.
- viii. God's priority for your life is your relationship with Him. He wants you to be close to Him. And if that means allowing you to suffer, then He will let you suffer. Because being close to Him is what's best for you.

2. Remember that God's timing is not our timing.

- i. When Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick, he was still alive. But Jesus did not come right away. He intentionally stayed in Perea two more days. By the time He made it to Bethany Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Mary and Martha both said, "Lord, if you had been here he wouldn't have died." Their timing and Christ's timing were not the same.
- ii. God is rarely going to move as quickly as you want Him to. He is rarely going to answer your prayers as quickly as you want Him to. You will have to wait on God.
- iii. We see this all through Scripture.
 - 1. The Lord told Noah to build an ark because it was going to rain. It didn't rain for 100 years. Then he and his family had live in the ark and wait for the water to go down for over a year – 378 days.

2. The Lord told Abraham that his descendants were going to become a great nation. Abraham had to wait 25 years before his son, Isaac was born. He was 100, and Sarah was 90.
3. When Rebekkah got married she dreamed of being a mother, but she had to wait twenty years before she got pregnant. She was sixty years old.
4. When Jacob met Rachel, it was love at first sight. But he had to work fourteen years for Laban's daughters, and then four more years for his own flock before he left and returned to Canaan.
5. When Joseph was in prison, he interpreted a dream for the king's cupbearer, that he would be restored to his position. He asked the cupbearer to remember him in prison when he was released. But the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph for two years until he remembered him, and Joseph was released.
6. The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, and cried out to God for deliverance. They had to wait four hundred years for God to send Moses.
7. Moses had to spend forty years in the Midian desert before God called him to lead the Israelites.
8. Caleb and Joshua left Egypt eager to get to the Promised Land. But they had to spend forty years in the wilderness before they could enter the land of milk and honey.
9. God anointed David as the next king of Israel when he was just a teenager, but he had to wait years before he became king. He spent many of those years in hiding and on the run from King Saul.
10. Jesus had to wait thirty years before He began His ministry.

3. Remember that God delays for His glory.

i. Here's what God's delays don't mean:

1. He doesn't love you.
 - a. **John 11:5** "Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus."
 - b. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, first Martha came out to see him, while Mary stayed in the house. Then Martha went back and told Mary that Jesus wanted to see her. When Jesus saw Mary and the others crying, He wept. **John 11:35**, "Jesus wept," is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is important. It shows how much Jesus cares about us.
2. He doesn't hear you. **Matthew 6:8** "... Your Father knows the things you need before you ask him." Jesus knew that Lazarus was on his deathbed. He knew before He received the message.
3. He can't help. Jesus clearly had the ability to help Lazarus. **Matthew 19:26** "With God all things are impossible."

- 4. He isn't going to help. Hindsight is 20/20. Even though Jesus didn't move in their time, it didn't mean that He wasn't going to answer their prayer.
 - ii. Notice what Jesus said when He heard that Lazarus was sick.
 - 1. **John 11:4** When Jesus heard it, he said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."
 - iii. Why does God delay? What is the purpose of His timing? It is always to glorify Himself. It is always to help us grow closer to Him; to make us love Him more.
 - iv. **Proverbs 20:21** "An inheritance gained prematurely will not be blessed ultimately." Often when a person receives a huge inheritance when they are too young, they waste it all away. Young people usually don't have the wisdom to handle a huge inheritance. God knows the perfect timing to give you what you need. The right gift at the wrong time is the wrong gift. It may cause you to sin; to lose the faith; to backslide; to wander from God; to make some serious mistakes; to swell up with pride. He knows not only what you need, but when you need it. Wait.
 - v. God's timing is not arbitrary. There is purpose in the postponement. He is working while you are waiting. The timing is just right for Him to get the most glory. For Him to draw us close to Him.
- 4. Remember that as long as you walk with Christ, you are safe.**
- i. When Jesus told the disciples that they were going to go to Bethany, they didn't like it. Bethany was two miles from Jerusalem, where Jesus' enemies were, and they were hunting for Him to arrest and kill Him. So, they tried to talk Jesus out of it. Notice His response.
 - ii. **John 11:9-10** 9 "Aren't there twelve hours in a day?" Jesus answered. "If anyone walks during the day, he doesn't stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks during the night, he does stumble, because the light is not in him."
 - iii. To walk in the day is to walk in a right relationship with Christ. To walk in the night is to reject Christ. Jesus was saying, "You don't have to worry about your safety in Jerusalem. As long as you are with me, you are safe."
 - iv. As long as you are close to Jesus, you are safe. Nothing can happen to you that is not part of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will for your life.
 - v. A few years ago I went on a short mission trip to Angola prison with a group of Christian men from all around the state to minister to the prisoners.
 - vi. In other words, there is no reason for the Christian to worry. As long as you are with Jesus, you're good. He is going to take care of you.
- 5. Remember that Christ is coming to your aid.**

- i. When Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, they didn't know for sure that Christ would come. But He did. He always does.
- ii. If you have a need, then Christ will meet it. He will show up. It may not be in your timing, but He will show up. He may not answer your prayer the way you expect, but He will do what is best.
- iii. Whether it is to provide, or to heal, or to rescue, or to prosper, or to give you wisdom, or to comfort you – Christ is on His way. He is coming. Just wait.
- iv. **Psalm 4:3** “Know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him.”
- v. **Psalm 18:30** “He is a shield to all who take refuge in him.”
- vi. **Proverbs 10:3** “The Lord will not let the righteous go hungry.”
- vii. **1 Peter 5:10** “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while.”
- viii. Christ is never early. He is never late. He is always on time. And He always shows up. Just wait.
- ix. One of the things that we see in this story is that it is never too late for God to turn things around. Jesus showed up after Lazarus had been dead for four days. He wasn't just dead; he was dead-dead. His body was already decomposing. Yet Jesus raised him back to life.
- x. Often Christ shows up after everyone has given up hope and has exhausted every other option. The story of the Red Sea is an example. The Israelites were leaving Egypt, being pursued by the Egyptian army. God led them to the shores of the Red Sea. To them there were only two options – drown in the Red Sea, or be cut down by the Egyptians. It was over. The fat lady had sung. Leaving Egypt for the Promised Land was a nice idea, but impossible. But it wasn't impossible. It wasn't too late. There was a third option. God. God told Moses to raise his staff over the sea and divide so the Israelites could pass through on dry ground. As they were crossing, the Egyptians followed them through, but when the Israelites made it out, the Lord caused the sea to collapse on the Egyptians, killing them all.
- xi. The situation is never too desperate for God. It is never too late for God. He will show up. He will fulfill His promises to you.

6. Remember to remove the stone.

- i. When they took Jesus to the tomb, he told them to remove the stone. But Martha objected. “He's been in there for four days. It really stinks.” Notice what Jesus said to her next.
- ii. **John 11:40** Jesus said to her, “Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

- iii. Back in verse 23 Jesus promised Martha that her brother would rise again. She thought He was referring to the final resurrection at the last day, but Jesus was referring to that day.
- iv. But for Jesus to fulfill His promise to Martha, Martha had to do her part. She had to believe. She had to remove the stone.
- v. This is interesting. At first, Mary and Martha were waiting for Jesus. But now, Jesus is ready to show up and do the greatest miracle in the Bible, but He is waiting for them.
- vi. Sometimes when we think we are waiting for God, God is actually waiting for us. The reason for the delay is not God, it is us. God is waiting for us to remove the stone. God is waiting for us to move out in obedience. He is waiting for us to pray; to repent; to step out in faith; to grow; to start tithing; to get out of that sinful relationship; to get back in church; to have that conversation; to write that letter; etc.
- vii. Waiting time is not wasted time. God has an assignment for you while you wait. He wants you to grow closer to Him. To seek Him harder than you ever have before. He wants you to be obedient. To have faith. He wants you to remove the stone.
- viii. It reminds me of the story of Naaman. Naaman had leprosy. He had suffered with it for years. Someone told him about a prophet named Elisha who could heal, so he went to Elisha and asked for help. Elisha told him to go dip himself in the Jordan River seven times and he would be cured. Now at that point, God was ready to heal Naaman. God was just waiting on him. Naaman had to trust and obey. At first he was angry and refused to do it. But then he decided to give it a try and he was healed.
- ix. God may be ready to move right now, and the only reason for the delay is you. God is waiting for you to remove the stone. Make sure that your waiting time is not wasted time. Use this time to remove the stones in your life. Get right with God and do everything God is telling you to do.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. **Adrian Rogers** "You can save a lot of time waiting on God."
2. To wait on God is to keep praising, and praying, and believing, and serving, and obeying while you wait for God's provision.
3. Don't give up on God. Don't get out ahead of God. Don't take matters into your own hands. Wait. God is on His way at just the right time. Just wait.