

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

Matthew 25:1-13 The Parable of the Ten Virgins

²⁵ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. ¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ ¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ ¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Revelation 21:1-5 A New Heaven and a New Earth

²¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

When the Vision Tarries. The Theology of Waiting.

It seems that Wayne and I are in a waiting period. It got me to thinking about the theology of waiting and why we might need to wait and what you do while you are waiting? What it brings up and highlights? There's a lot of waiting in the Bible too...starting with advent, I'll finish up at the end with a look at the parable.

ADVENT COMES TO MIND

Traditionally here we have usually thought about Advent as being a waiting period for the coming of the baby Jesus who we celebrate at Christmas. We've celebrated it in terms of this. But actually, Advent is far more than simply marking a 2,000-year-old event in history. The baby has already come, today we wait for the 2nd coming and for the coming establishment of His kingdom here on earth as we read in Revelation 21.

In the Christian calendar today is **Christ the King Sunday the date that celebrates the Coming King**. Isaiah prophetically calls this king:

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And describes His reign like this:
7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness.*

It is between the fulfilled promise of Christ's first coming and the yet-to-be-fulfilled promise of his second coming that Karl Barth [penned](#) these words: "*Unfulfilled and fulfilled promise are related to each other, as are dawn and sunrise. Both are promise and in fact the same promise. Because Christ came our faith is Advent faith, the expectation of future revelation. The promise for Israel and the promise for the church is Jesus Christ; he has come, and he will come again. This is the essence of Advent.*"

The coming climax of the consummation of His reign on earth and the making of all things new, this is what we are waiting for. I simply want to highlight it today. In the meantime we wait and we wrestle with when its coming. Jesus described the kingdom in Mt 13: 33 as like yeast in the dough, it's hidden, mysterious but definitely on the move. ...it's bubbling away underground, hidden but all the time at work influencing the whole dough, waiting to be revealed.

The creation groans as it waits for the revelation of the sons of God. But you can't hurry this, it takes time, a long time.

[Habakkuk 2:3](#) "For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.

Now let's come down a few notches and let us tell you what we are waiting for.

We've recognised a call to serve in Myanmar in a large market town called Kalay and in particular a Presbyterian Theological College in the Tahan area. We hope to spend 3-5 years there.

Wayne has the brief of: establishing a master plan for 17 acres of land around the Theological college and growing food for 100+ people, as well as to make a profit and to teach people some skills and methods of growing food and animals.

Helen is going to: participate in teaching pastoral care and counselling and hopes to be involved in the local community in microfinance and issues like empowering women and family violence.

This is intended to be a 3 way partnership with the PCANZ, the PCM and CWM. As partner churches helping each other, we fit the funding criteria from CWM. All along they have said yes to

funding us and so we have been waiting for that to be put in writing and the partnership agreements signed off. Our original hope was to leave in early November but this was extended in our minds because I have had to deal with breast cancer and Wayne also with an operation. CWM knows nothing of this. Our revised date was to leave in January, but now it is extending to February. All the agreements are in place and we have asked for a certain amount of money, but to date we have not heard any confirmation except for them to admit this has nothing to do with us or our application. So we are waiting. We will keep you posted...

What the waiting brings up and highlights...

- Our need for instant...let's get going already.
- The seeming incompetence of someone else. Judgement
- The temptation to interfere.
- What is God's timing, the big picture around this?
- Self doubt. Did we get it right?
- Passivity. Oh well, it will happen whenever. Temptation to put off preparation. Loss of excitement and passion as the thing drags on.

Discuss: What is something you do not like waiting for? What are you like when you are waiting?

Instant versus Waiting: benefits and issues

INSTANT	WAITING
Saves time which is precious	Introduces doubt, second guessing, emotions: anger, frustration, anxiety, let me outta here, I'm gonna scream.
Offsets preparation, pursuit, persistence	delayed gratification produces resilience. Eg of the marshmallow test- teaches discipline If we know that God is reliable we will wait for His time.
Lacks real flavour...EG instant coffee, packaged food	Let it percolate...cheese is better aged. More satisfying when you eat slowly and cook good food.
Lack of presence. Not much of me is involved or required when something is easily accessed.	Expectation, hope causes searching and then increased confidence and focus and faith. It's the glory of kings to search out a matter

The marshmallow test of the 60's.

Each child given one marshmallow and the choice, eat this now or wait til I get back and you can have another one. One treat now or two treats later. The real results of this study have come years later as studies showed those children who were able to wait had higher grades, lower stress responses, better social skills, in fact success in whatever capacity being measured. It's the choice of discipline. Instant reward is easy, waiting brings all sorts of other factors into play.

A second study added another element. Two groups began with the marshmallow, but one group was exposed to an unreliable series of experiences. They were promised better stickers but never got them or more crayons and this never happened. Meanwhile the other group were promised those things and got them. Marshmallows for the first group didn't last long because the children had no reason to believe the researchers would bring another one. But the others were learning: waiting is worth it and I can do it. As a result, they waited an average of 4x longer than the first group. Experiences and environment influenced the children's choices.

So if waiting is good for us the question becomes HOW ARE WE WAITING and what does the waiting do for us? In our case

- Rest and recovery
- Opportunity to do research and read, change plans and get better insights. Still envisioning what might be, researching the options and how it will work. Networking, experiences of others. Pushed to upskill.
- Greater sense of rightness and purpose. It's increased our desire to go and deepened our conviction
- As we reflect on it: Rightness of the timing even if we are delayed another 6 months. Our God reigns and has a purpose in our waiting, frustrating though that may be and wearying being in constant uncertainty and flux.
- Some of that is about continuing to build a deeper intimacy with Jesus and a greater reliance on the Spirit as well growing more insight about the nature of the spiritual battle

Functional patterns in body and spirit:

I have often said to the Lord: I will go when you fix my body. I can't do this unless I can physically endure the conditions. Notably... no osteopaths or people who can help me function by managing pain. What has happened in the waiting is that I have had time to take more ownership for my body.

In the waiting, I have begun to retrain my body to move better instead of bracing against pain. I have learnt how to release pain and the overall symptoms of pain have decreased. I feel as though I can go, in some trepidation for sure, with a confidence that what I thought was never going to change has in fact changed and continues to change.

Functional retraining in the Spirit:

What I've become more painfully aware of too is that over the years for various reasons I've learnt to brace against the Holy Spirit. I resonate with what John Piper says of his own journey...

DP We have resisted the Holy Spirit so often when he was calling us to ... that we are unfit for the flow of his power. The channels have become so clogged with fear and self-consciousness and doubt and rationalization and worldly preoccupation that what we allow through is a barely discernible trickle of God's love.

I recognise myself here and I'm relearning to trust the Spirit, not to brace against him for fear of getting it wrong or being embarrassed or just because I don't want to be obedient. The flesh wars against the Spirit. Things have changed here I thought could never have changed too. I have new ways of thinking and believing based in faith and hope and love and intimacy with Jesus, not disappointment, doubt and passivity.

So our testimony is that the waiting is not unproductive. That is not to say it's easy, we feel as though we have been in the limbo of wondering for months now and it impossible to make any concrete plans.

I want to finish with a look at the Parable of the Ten Virgins

The spirit of Advent as a time of waiting is described in the parable of the bridesmaids who are anxiously awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13). This is a parable about the time between the first and second coming.

In the parable, the virgins represent the visible church, that is, they represent those who profess to be Christians. They are going out to meet the Bridegroom who is Jesus the King. They are not those people who want nothing to do with Him. There is profound joy at the Bridegroom's expected coming.

25 *"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish (morai) and five were wise (phronimoi).*

Both are waiting alongside each other, but here's the difference

³ *The foolish ones took their lamps but **did not take any extra oil** with them.*

This is perhaps about presumptive expectation that what they have will get them through; their luck will hold and they won't have to deal with anything out of the ordinary or unexpected. Their job was to provide light, but they had lamps without oil. The outward form of religion and no internal power. The foolishness was to think that the mere form of a religious lamp would be sufficient. Or, perhaps, that the power to light a lamp could simply be borrowed at the last minute. In fact, it can't be borrowed at all.

⁴ *The wise ones, however, took **oil in jars along with their lamps.***

They had prepared for the unexpected and probably risked being seen as fussy or fanatical.

⁵ *The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they **all** became drowsy and fell asleep.*

The contretemps is that there is a crisis. The bridegroom is late! Very late. They all slept as any would normally do. His time is not our time, he does not do our bidding and abide by our rules.

- ⁶ ***"At midnight** the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'*
- ⁷ *"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.*
- ⁸ *The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'*

Unprepared for the delay, they didn't have extra oil and they asked for help, but it was too late.

⁹ *"No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, **go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.**'*

Who sells oil at midnight? It's too late at that point to build faith. It's a work of time and relationship not an instant commodity. They ask the impossible. Give us from your oil. The fact that the five wise virgins won't give them any oil is not meant to teach selfishness. It's about the impossibility of borrowing faith, the impossibility of borrowing the power of the Holy Spirit—the impossibility borrowing obedience and faithfulness. It's too late. And relationship isn't instant.

- ¹⁰ *"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And **the door was shut.***
- ¹¹ *"Later the others also came. '**Lord, Lord,**' they said, 'open the door for us!'*
- ¹² *"But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, **I don't know you. . . I do not remember you.***

eidō ("seeing that becomes knowing") in other words I see you but I have no spiritual or mental comprehension of you.

There is a point at which it is said the relationship does not exist. We cannot say *maybe* forever. We close out that door time after time. This is the truth of the condition, Jesus is not saying: I never loved you, or I never drew you to myself but you haven't come near me...

¹³ *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*

Watch means: Be spiritually awake! Be alive and alert to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that he gives now. Be full of expectancy and use all the means God has given you to know him and love him and trust him. Be filled with the oil of faith and joy and hope.

10 virgins were waiting but only 5 were ready.

Only 5 had oil which is a picture of the Holy Spirit and of the intimacy of relationship with Jesus. Is this a picture of today's church, of you, of me? The cry of my heart is that I will get with Jesus and open up to the Spirit.

What does this look like?

We have to wait again for the Spirit. Where we have become sleepy and discouraged, not seeing the power of the Spirit at work in us or in the church...for whatever reason...in waiting for the King to come again and establish His kingdom on this earth, we can be ready by renewing our fellowship in the Spirit, by learning to yield to the Spirit and being led. And by choosing intimacy with Jesus as the No 1 priority. Ask the Lord in what areas He'd have you *die to self*.

And I believe that once we have begun to immerse ourselves in God's Word and battle the unbelief of our hearts and pray and fast for his power, we may have to simply step out with very little power felt in advance and do what we know what we ought to do. And I believe that in this doing, little by little the old clogged channels are cleared and we begin to feel the power flow again. John Piper

Worship Him anew. Wake up the mind and open it up to the spiritual. Be transfigured in your thinking about what is happening in the world, not passive and inert. Wait with expectancy not lulled into sleep. Stay vigilant in the Word and in prayer. Praying in the Spirit. We need to be found in Him more than ever.

Finally, we should get ready for the biggest move of God ever seen because he is going to establish His kingdom here on earth and He does not want anyone to be lost. When He came the first time He took back everything that had been corrupted in the Fall though His death and resurrection. As we wait we are called to be prepared and ready to partner with Him both **now** and then in that bringing down of the kingdom from heaven to earth. That is after all what we are praying in the Lord's prayer: Your Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

This isn't about the instant fix of a rapture where we all leave and go up to heaven, but an assignment to reign with Him as he establishes righteousness on the earth and renews His creation. But that is the subject of another day.

One thing we know is that while we are waiting:

YOU CAN DEPEND ON Jesus FOR THE SECOND MARSHMALLOW.