

Waiting On God

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Written and Posted 2-09-06

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"What we need very badly these days is a company of Christians who are prepared to trust God as completely now as they know they must do at the last day. For each of us the time is coming when we shall have nothing but God. Health and wealth and friends and hiding places will be swept away and we shall have only God. To the man of pseudo faith that is a terrifying thought, but to real faith it is one of the most comforting thoughts the heart can entertain." A.W. Tozer, The Root of the Righteous

They Also Serve . . .

He is one of England's greatest poets, second only to William Shakespeare (although some would advocate for a tie with Chaucer). John Milton was born in London in December of 1609. His father, a scrivener (copier of legal documents) was a man of culture and an accomplished musician. He had chosen to follow the Reformed Faith rather than Catholicism, a decision which cost him his family. He eventually sent John to Saint Paul's School and later to Christ's College (Cambridge) where John made his initial mark as a scholar, recognized his own calling as a poet and made a determined commitment to give English literature a work which would rival the great Greek and Latin epics. In 1629, at the age of 20, he penned his first significant poem, "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity." When the English Civil War between the King and Parliament broke out in 1642, Milton sided with the Independents, led by Cromwell, and produced numerous eloquent and widely read political treatises. When the Independents emerged victorious, Milton served as Latin Secretary to the Council of State, the executive committee of Parliament. Eventually relieved of his official duties in 1658, he began work on the great poem which had fired his imagination so many years before. Political upheaval briefly interrupted the work, but finally in 1667 John Milton published his greatest work, Paradise Lost, "bringing all the resources of Renaissance learning and culture to bear on the central theme, the most significant in the religious thought of the century, the Fall of Man."

Writing the epic poem was a challenge. Milton would compose largely at night, committing the verses to memory and later dictating them to his secretary. Why? Oh, did I forget to mention? By this time in his life, John Milton was totally blind. Milton had struggled with failing sight for many years. Finally, in 1651, while serving as Latin Secretary and as a result of the strain of writing a political pamphlet ("Defense of the People of England") his eyesight failed completely. So that when he was finally free to undertake the great task of his literary career, he was completely blind.

Great men handle great challenges like each of us do - each according to his gift, temperament and nature. And it was the nature of John Milton to write. Out of his struggle Milton gave to the English speaking world one of the most eloquent expressions of the suffering, struggling Christian. It is entitled:

On His Blindness

WHEN I consider how my light is spent
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, least He returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,"
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best, his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite.

John Milton had learned the role and importance of waiting on God. Have we? Have we learned that God doesn't want our help, as much as He wants our attention? Miss this lesson, and you may very well miss this coming move of God.

. . . Who Only Stand And Waite

I don't know about you, but I tend to be impatient by nature (my spiritual gift of slothfulness notwithstanding). I hate waiting. I can't understand why God has not yet released a genuine spiritual awakening here in America that flows house to house with rapidly multiplying house churches in which God's Presence is manifest and signs & wonders are common place and where unbelievers are touching and tasting the powers of the Age to Come. What's the problem? Doesn't He see how hard we're working. Doesn't He understand how urgent the hour is? Isn't He in as much of a hurry as I am?

I am, of course, saying this "tongue-in-cheek," but I am reflecting a very real attitude afoot in many quarters of the church today. I believe that many a failed church "program" has been the well-intended product of people who were convinced that activity was the same thing as ministry, and that the church needed to "do something for God" (or as one of my favorite bumper stickers says - "Jesus is coming back. Everybody look busy"). A major ministry in our local area is led by an individual whose mantra is, "God is in a hurry. He's waiting on us to get moving." Really? Wow, I must have missed that memo. But what I didn't miss are the 30 memos from God about the importance and blessing of waiting on Him (O.K., Here they are - all NASB translation: Genesis 49:18; Psalm 25: 3, 5, 21; 27:14; 33:20; 37:34; 39:7; 40:1; 52:9; 69:6; 106:13; 130:5; Proverbs 20:22; Isaiah 8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 30:18; 33:2; 40:31; 49:23; 51:5; 60:9; 64:4; Jeremiah 14:22; Lamentations 3:25; Hosea 12:6; Habakkuk 2:3; Zephaniah 3:8).

Now, I'm going to let you read all of those "memos" for yourself (that'll teach you to miss staff meetings!). But I want to comment on a few of them by asking some questions about waiting on God:

Are you willing to wait for God's deliverance?

"I Waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear, And will trust in the Lord." (Psalm 40:1-3)

This is one of my favorite Psalms. Notice the action here. In response to the Psalmist's waiting God did five things: He inclined, He heard, He brought, He set and He put! The result was that "many will see and fear and . . . trust". Are you or your house church in need of "deliverance"? Do you want people to look at you & God's dealings in your life and "see and fear and trust"? Have you considered waiting on Him?

Several of you expressed your appreciation for the quote from A.W. Tozer in the last e-letter (from the book "Root of the Righteous"). Well, let me throw another quote at you from the same book and chapter, one that relates to our discussion of waiting on God for His deliverance (or for His plan for your house church network, or for His plan to reach your city). Here it is:

"Many of us Christians have become extremely skillful in arranging our lives so as to admit the truth of Christianity without being embarrassed by its implications. We arrange things so that we can get on well enough without Divine aid, while at the same time ostensibly seeking it. We boast in the Lord but watch carefully that we never get caught depending on Him . . . Pseudo faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it. Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes. For true faith, it is either God or total collapse."

Consider this "Maurice's perverted perspective," but I am concerned that those who counsel that God is "in a hurry" are somewhat like Saul waiting on the arrival of a late-running Samuel (1 Samuel 13). They see people potentially slipping away because God has "failed to show" at the appropriate moment in their carefully constructed program and they are now scrambling for a "Plan B" to mask God's "tardiness" and maintain their

position. They had never seriously considered the possibility that God might actually allow “total collapse” in order to refine their faith and mold their character, and they are unwilling to accept such humiliation. So, like Saul, they go to “Plan B” with disastrous consequences. Want to learn to wait upon God for deliverance? Then cancel “Plan B” and see what God does.

Are you willing to wait for His counsel? *“They quickly forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, But craved intensely in the wilderness, And tempted God in the desert. So He gave them their request, But sent a wasting disease among them.”* (Psalm 106:13-25) You and I can’t live in the past. Trying to live off of yesterday’s revivals is like trying to eat yesterday’s manna. Not very satisfying. But there is a benefit to learning the lessons from past moves of God’s Spirit. And one of the things we learn is that outpourings of God’s Spirit do not come to those who “work hard,” but to those who “wait hard.” But like the Israelites, we forget what God has done for those who “wait hard” and we take the next false step of failing to “wait for His counsel,” choosing instead to pursue our own desires (back to “Plan B”). At that point God may actually choose to do “the worst possible thing” - He may choose to give us what we so desperately “crave” (the Hebrew word means to wish, covet or greatly desire, hence, to lust or crave). Oh, yes, did I mention that He may also send along “judgment” in order to teach us both humility and the importance of waiting on His counsel. Think God never does such things to His own, O doubtful one? Well, I have a personal foreclosure, bankruptcy and a life-time “limp” to remind me every day that “those whom He loves He chastens.” Are you willing to wait for His counsel, or would you prefer an educational side-trip into the realm of discovering that what we so earnestly desire is not necessarily what God desires to give us.

Are you willing to wait for the vision God has given you? *“Then the Lord answered me and said, ‘Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. 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.’”* (Habakkuk 2:2-3). Has God given you a vision for where He wants to go and what He wants to do? Has it occurred to you that the vision belonged to God as an expression of His heart’s desire, long before He imparted it to you? Technically speaking, it isn’t even “your vision.” It’s His. He just allowed you to see it. Do you think God has a plan, including perfect timing, for fulfilling that vision? And are you willing to wait, even if its fulfillment seems to tarry. During the Welsh Revival of 1904, Evan Roberts confided that he had been praying for revival for over 10 years (from the time he was 16 years old until the revival broke when he was 26). That’s a fairly long time to pray and wait!

Several evenings ago, during my evening prayer time I found myself part of a “vision”. I was standing before a large pane of glass, like a glass wall. I was on one side of the wall, with my face pressed up against the glass like a child at Christmas time before a department store display window. On the other side of the glass wall I could see Acts 2:42-47 being fulfilled and lived out by a genuine house church movement, but I couldn’t find a way to get through or past the glass! I could see it “all happening” before my eyes. The River of God was flowing and the house church movement was happening, but didn’t know how “to get there”. Ever feel that way with your “vision” of what God wants to do in and through you? Then welcome to the wonderful world of “waiting hard” on God. Though the vision tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.’ That’s God’s promise. Are you willing to “wait hard” for it?

Are you willing to wait for what God has already decided to do? *“‘Therefore, wait for Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘For the day when I rise up to the prey. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms, To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal. For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.’”*O.K., this one is the “fraternal twin” of the previous one (waiting on the vision). Do we fully appreciate that God knows what He is doing, especially when we don’t. God is not contingent or confused like we often are. He plans, He purposes and He performs (unlike many people). As for our part, I like to say that there are two ways for us to do God’s will. We can do God’s will voluntarily (for all you Arminians), or we can do God’s will involuntarily (for all you Calvinists). But at the end of the day, we will do God’s will. The “good news” is that we get to choose which way we would prefer (chalk up one bonus point for the Arminians). So, what is God’s will? That we should wait for Him (voluntarily or involuntarily, your choice!).

Are you willing to wait for God to surprise you? *“Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come*

down, That the mountains might quake at Thy presence — As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil — To make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Thy presence! When Thou didst awesome things which we did not expect, Thou didst come down, the mountains quaked at Thy presence. For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, Neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.” (Isaiah 64:1-4) This is one of the great “revival” passages of Scripture. When R.B. Jones wrote his account of the Welsh Revival of 1904 he entitled it “Rent Heavens” and noted in the introduction that the revival in Wales was, indeed, a season when God fulfilled the cry of Isaiah found here. But note two things, which the history of revival confirms. First, this rending of the heavens comes to those who wait for God. Secondly, during such times God always does things which surprise people and exceed all of their previous expectations. God does not rend the heavens on behalf of those who “work hard,” but on behalf of those who “wait hard”. Which are you?

Do you understand that God is waiting for you . . . to wait for Him? *“Therefore the Lord longs (waits) to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long (wait) for Him.”* (Isaiah 30:18) Unfortunately this is one of those (rare) times when the NASB misses the sense of the Hebrew. The Hebrew word rendered “longs” in the first part of the verse is the same word rendered “long” in the last part. Both instances are the Hebrew word which means “to wait” (with longing or expectation). The force of the verse is this: God is waiting on us . . . to wait on Him.

This verse actually brings us back to the place where we began this discussion, namely, the question: “Is God waiting for us?” The answer is “Yes,” but not the “yes” we might have expected. God is indeed waiting for His people, but not for them to get busy “working hard” for Him. Rather, He is waiting for us to “wait hard” for Him. And it is in this time of “waiting hard” that He will show us His deliverance, give us His counsel, transform our desires into His desires (P.S. We get transformed, He doesn’t!), prepare us for the fulfillment of His visions, reveal what He has already decided to do, and surprise us with “awesome things” which far exceed our childish expectations. He is indeed waiting for us . . . to wait for Him.

I, for one, am prepared to wait (I’m still working on the whole “patiently” thing). I have no interest in any pseudo “movement” that is nothing more than the sum total of man’s best efforts, enthusiasm, positive proclamations and an over-worked PA system. Been there. Done that. Got the T-shirt. Didn’t work. Movin’ on. You have to understand. I’ve seen the vision. It’s a vision of the River of God’s Spirit flowing in breath-taking power through thousands of house churches in a thousand towns and cities, just like in Acts 2 thru 4 where some 25,000 people came to Christ. Assuming 25 people per house church that’s a thousand house churches in just a short time! That’s the kind of house church movement that I want to “wrap my mind around”! Like a kid at Christmas I’ve pressed my nose against the glass window of “not yet . . . wait for it” that separates us from it, and in frustration I’ve turned to the Father and cried out, “How long?!”

And came the reply, *“Not yet, son . . . but soon . . . wait for it.”*

“O.K., but this really is a lot tougher than I thought it would be!” I cried.

“I know son. You’re just going to have to trust me on this . . . just a little longer and you’ll be surprised at what I do . . . wait for it.”