

It's hard to wait. As soon as the first present shows up under the tree, or the first lump appears in the stocking, we're reminded that it's hard to wait. Or, when retailers set up Christmas displays in October, we see that it's really hard to wait!

The season of Advent, these four long weeks leading up to Christmas, reminds us of the need to persevere in hope, and to wait with patient endurance. At least, Advent *tries* to remind us. But we usually find it so hard to wait that we rush into Advent as a time of parties and festivity and Christmas songs and celebrations, rather than as a season of anticipation and hope. We're not very good at waiting. And what happens when we fail to wait is that by the time Christmas actually gets here, we're worn out, sugared out and exhausted. We've spent so much of our energy and time and money on the preparation we barely appreciate the main event, or even find ourselves resenting it. Athletes and performers do this when they overpractice and overtrain. Students when they cram for the test into the wee hours of the morning. Cooks and bakers do this when they check the oven one too many times. Christians do this when we get too comfortable or too impatient in between the first and second comings of Christ.

Waiting is hard, and when you mess up on waiting, you run the risk of messing up or missing out on what you're waiting for. Many Christians over the years have expected Christ to come on one sort of timetable or another, and when Jesus doesn't follow their clock, they grow disillusioned and fall asleep, or even fall away. I'm not only talking about the silliness of setting dates for the rapture; I'm talking about setting up false expectations for God to act in your life now. We have false hopes about how quickly God will meet our desires for money or a spouse. We have a hard time waiting for God to heal or restore a relationship or bring a prodigal back to faith. We expect God to bring swift justice to our family, our church, and our world, and instead the wicked keep prospering and the righteous keep suffering. We want *thy kingdom to come and thy will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven*, but it's hard to wait.

And instead of finding fault with *ourselves* for being impatient and bad at waiting, we are tempted to find fault with *God* for not showing up on time. When that happens, instead of learning to wait rightly, with a Godward hope, we either stop waiting altogether, or we start sinning while we wait. Brothers and sisters, you've seen it happen to people around you, people in your family. They've given up on God, and they are looking somewhere else for their hope. Maybe you've noticed stirrings of it in your own heart, and so you start to wonder, will I survive the wait? Will my faith survive the wait?

Paul's introduction to his first letter to the Corinthians has a lot to say to people who are waiting. And four times, he mentions the Lord Jesus Christ. His point is that the Lord Jesus Christ has *everything* to do with waiting. Without Jesus, you can't wait rightly. Without Jesus, you aren't waiting for the right thing. **What we need to see is that in all our waiting, we are waiting for Jesus, and while we wait for Jesus, we wait *through* Jesus and *with* Jesus.**

The first point, that **we wait for Jesus**, sounds like what a preacher is supposed to say, and so it doesn't always connect. Sure, I'd like Jesus, but I'd also like to be able to pay the rent. Yes, I'm waiting for Jesus, but I'm also waiting for justice to come in a situation where I've been wronged. Of course I want Jesus, but what I really want is to see my mom or dad again.

But here's the point: every good thing that you want comes through Christ. Jesus came to save the world, not by snatching you out of it, but by healing and restoring and remaking it. This means that Jesus doesn't just give off good spiritual vibes, He actually meets your needs. Seek first the kingdom, He said, and all these things will be added to you. Waiting for Jesus doesn't exclude all the other things you wait for; it includes them. It doesn't work the other way, though. Focusing on Jesus gets you everything else, but focusing on everything else doesn't get you Jesus! Gaining the whole world without Jesus isn't worth it. Seeking first the kingdom doesn't displace the other things you're waiting for; it shows you where they can be found: in Jesus.

The problem is that the kingdom hasn't fully come yet, and so if we lose sight of the *future* blessings of the kingdom, and think that "more kingdom" equals "more church services", then we're not waiting rightly. What we wait for as Christians is not just spiritual strength for another day in a messed-up world; we wait for *a completely renewed world*. And our text today reminds us that that's what happens through *the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ*. And that's important: Jesus is Lord right now; He's ruling and reigning right now, but He has not been revealed yet. He is Lord, but the extent of His Lordship has not yet been revealed.

When the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed, everything wrong will be put right, all questions will be answered, tears and pain will disappear, political chaos will end, sin will be finished, injustice will be eliminated, and the walls of national and racial pride will be torn down. That day is coming, and we see signs of it even now, but it just hasn't come *yet*. And so we wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed, knowing that everything else we wait for comes with Him.

Second part of our waiting is that **we wait through Jesus**. Paul gives thanks to God for you because of the grace that was given to you in Christ Jesus. What grace? "That in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and knowledge – even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you – so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Knowledge, confirmed testimony, and gifts.

Think about every movie you've ever seen that involves one group waiting while the hero goes off to save the day. What do the waiters need? They need to know that someone is out there saving them. Without this knowledge, they might try to go save themselves, and that never works. Then, there's always some scene when they are about to give up and send someone else when they receive some sign, some confirmation that their hero is still alive, still fighting, still on his quest. And at a very basic level, they have survival needs – the hero is facing a ticking clock, because the group is going to run out of food, or water, or oxygen, or shelter, or whatever.

But God has taken care of all that in Christ. Jesus has won salvation for the world, and now He's preparing a place for you. He's promised to return, and confirmed that promise by sending the Holy Spirit, the comforter, whose gifts sustain and strengthen the Church until He comes again. You know what you're waiting for – it's not a blind hope that things will get better someday. You have that testimony *confirmed* – you know Jesus is saving the world, because He's saved you and He's saving people around you. And you are not lacking any gift that you need to sustain you. All of that, Paul says, was given to you in Christ Jesus. What happened in and through Jesus at His first coming gives you everything you need to wait until He comes again.

The third aspect of our waiting is that **we wait with Jesus**. Not only is Jesus *out there* saving the world; He is *with you* by His Spirit to sustain you to the end. His bodily presence is elsewhere, but because of the wonder and mystery of who He is as the God-man, both these things can be true: "I go to prepare a place for you", **and** "I am with you always."

And notice what the presence of Jesus does for our waiting. Because He is with us to sustain us, we will be found *guiltless* in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our impatience, our sin, the mistakes that we make while waiting cannot overcome the grace of God that was given to us. We will not fail in our waiting, because Jesus is with us in our waiting, Jesus keeps us in our waiting, and Jesus takes away our guilt in our waiting. This is what His atoning sacrifice on the cross accomplished at His first coming – He won forgiveness for us, so that through faith in Him, our guilt is covered, cleansed, and taken away. He will not lose us while we wait! He will sustain us guiltless to the end.

This is because God is faithful (v.9). Not because we are faithful, and certainly not because we are good at waiting. We aren't! But God is faithful, and He sustains us in Christ because He is the one who called us into fellowship and communion with Christ in the first place! This wasn't our plan, it was His, and so it doesn't depend ultimately on our faithfulness, but on His. Now, we are called to be faithful, but God's faithfulness is the foundation of our faithfulness, not the other way around.

So as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, remember that you are part of the fellowship of His Son. His grace and gifts are given here, as we come to worship Him. God enriches you with speech and knowledge here, He confirms the testimony about Christ here, and here is where He renews the gifts of His Spirit to you. This is how your Lord Jesus sustains you while you wait: through fellowship with God and with the people of God. So as we enter into the season of Advent, and tell the story of Jesus, remember that this story isn't finished, and that the ending that we wait for is even better than the beginning that we celebrate each December. We should celebrate His coming as a baby, but that coming is only the beginning. And so during Advent, we say and sing and pray "Come Lord Jesus." And we wait.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Let us pray: *“Faithful God, we wait for you to come. We know that you will because you already have and because you promised to return. While we wait, send your Spirit so that we may grow in grace. Prepare us for your coming, Lord. Amen.”*¹

¹ Taken from *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd edition, D.1.4.8, pg. 434.