

My Soul in Stillness Waits: For the God of Jacob to Reign

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Waiting is not easy. Isn't that right? Last week Pastor Wordell asked how many "cruel" parents put out Christmas presents weeks before Christmas and then make their children wait to open them. Of course, one of the things that makes waiting especially hard is knowing that what we're waiting for is something good, something we want, something we can't wait to enjoy. Isn't that what makes it so hard for the kids to wait for Christmas? I mean, if they knew that the gifts under the tree all contain lists of chores to do, they'd have no trouble at all waiting to open them. No, it's the anticipation of receiving something good, something you want – that's what makes waiting hard.

But now let me ask you, what if, after all the waiting, after all the anticipation, in the end, you don't get what you expect? For example, what if you dropped all kinds of hints about what a wonderful gift a new cell phone would be? You know, left the flyers lying out on the kitchen counter. Talked about how much more efficient you could be with a new phone. And when the big day arrives, there under the tree is that little box, that's just the right size. You can't wait to open it. You're sure it's that cell phone you've been dreaming about. And so you tear it open and find that it's...a calculator. "Yeah, I thought you could really use one, dear." Tell me, how do you feel at that moment? Shocked? Disappointed? Maybe even angry. It's not that a calculator, in and of itself, is a bad thing. It's just that it's not what you expected. It's not what you had been waiting for. Waiting is hard enough. But then when you don't receive what you thought you were waiting for, that's even harder.

My friends, you realize, that's not only true regarding a gift laid under the Christmas tree. It's also true regarding the gift once laid in a manger. Over the course of four thousand years, God's people waited for the coming of the Messiah. That could not have been easy, to wait year after year after year. But what made the waiting all the harder, was the fact that, for many of them, when Jesus finally arrived on the scene, he wasn't at all what they expected him to be. He didn't do what they expected him to do. And that left many of them feeling disappointed, frustrated, even angry.

Unfortunately, those feelings are not limited to people who lived two thousand years ago. There are a lot of people today who may well share those same feelings, including maybe you and me. People who are expecting God to be something or do something that they really want – and then it doesn't happen. And sometimes that leaves people feeling frustrated, disappointed, even angry at God.

My friends, today we want to turn our attention to God's Word to allow God to kind of reset our expectations. In this Advent season of waiting, we want to let God help us to rethink: 1. exactly who we are waiting for, and 2. what we are waiting for him to do. God's Word provides both answers for us. The theme for the day is simply this: My Soul in Stillness Waits: for the God of Jacob to Reign.

Let's start with who were waiting for. That title, the God of Jacob, reminds us of the

covenant that God made with Abraham, and his son Isaac, and his son Jacob. God promised to send from their line of descendants, a savior. The scriptures allow us to trace Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Abraham. According to his human nature, Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And yet, Jesus was more than just a physical descendant of those patriarchs. What did Jesus tell the Jews in his day? *"Before Abraham was born, I am."* (John 8:58) In other words, what Jesus is basically saying is that he is eternal. He is ever present. He's saying that he is God. Just as God once told Moses at the burning bush, "I am who I am," so Jesus was saying to the Jews, that's who I am. I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. Yes, I am the God of Jacob."

And don't think that the Jews missed what Jesus was saying. As soon as Jesus said those words, what did the Jews do? They picked up stones to stone him. Why? Because according to the laws of Moses, death by stoning was the penalty for the sin of blasphemy, that is, the sin of claiming that you are God. Well, the Jews knew that Jesus claimed to be God, they didn't believe him, and so they tried to kill him. But in that particular case, because Jesus' time had not yet come, Scripture says that Jesus hid himself and slipped away before the Jews could carry out their misguided plot.

But now let's ask the question, why did so many of Jesus' fellow Jews react the way they did? Why did they not appreciate the gift that they had been given, the gift that they had waited so many, many, years to receive? The answer? Because that gift was not what, or maybe better, it was not who they expected him to be. When this carpenter's kid from the backwaters of Galilee claimed that he was God's son, the promised Messiah come to save his people from their sins, the majority of the Jews said, "No thanks!" The Messiah they had been waiting so long for, wasn't what they expected him to be.

But it wasn't just who the Messiah claimed to be that bothered the Jews so much. It was what the Messiah did, or in this case, didn't do, that created the feelings of disappointment, frustration and anger toward God. And that leads us to the second thing that we're waiting for this Advent season. Today we're focused not only on who we're waiting for, but also what we're waiting for him to do. Yes, My Soul in Stillness Waits. For who? For the God of Jacob, to do what? For the God of Jacob to Reign.

You realize, that's what God promised that the Messiah would do, right? Think of all the passages in the Old Testament that refer to the coming Messiah as a king, or someone who would rule over a kingdom. Jeremiah 23:5, *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land."* Or the words of Isaiah, *Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign over David's throne and over his kingdom. (Isaiah 9:7)* Or even the words of our Old Testament lesson today, where Jacob himself said, *"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he to whom it belongs shall come."* (Genesis 49:10)

All of those passages point to a king who is coming to reign. And of course, in our gospel reading today, the angel Gabriel ultimately identifies who that king would be when he said about the child that Mary would bear, *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:32-33)*

Obviously, when you put all those passages together, it shouldn't surprise us to find out that the Jews in Jesus' day expected the Messiah to be, well, a king, kind of like King David or King Solomon, someone who would go to war for them, defeat their enemies, someone who

would bring peace and prosperity to their nation. That's the kind of king they were waiting for.

And you see that mentality throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, don't you? After Jesus fed the 5000, what did the crowds want to do? Scripture says, *they intended to come and make him a king by force. (John 6:15)*. On a number of occasions people asked Jesus when he was going to establish his kingdom on earth. Even Jesus' disciples had this expectation that Jesus was going to restore the nation of Israel to a position of prominence. Remember the words of the disciples just before Jesus ascended into heaven? "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6)* Right down to the end, that's what a lot of Jews were expecting Jesus to do. They had their hopes up. They were looking forward to what Jesus could do for them. That's why when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, they gave him a reception fit for a king. But when that week ended with Jesus being bloodied and beaten and looking nothing like a king, the people wanted nothing to do with him. When Pilate posted the sign that said that Jesus was "the King of the Jews", the chief priests objected. They said, "*Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be the king of the Jews.*" (John 19:21) Isn't that right? Because Jesus wasn't the kind of king that they expected him to be, they rejected him. It's like they were really hoping for one kind of Christmas gift and they got something else instead. And they didn't like it..

Tell me, can you relate? Could it be that there are times when what we expect of Jesus is not what we get in real life? I mean, think about it. If Jesus is the Lord of the nations, why is our nation such a mess? Can we really say that King Jesus reigns, when in our country, kids are being shot in our schools, run over in the streets, or legally put to death before they see the light of day? If Jesus really is our King, then how come our lives as Christians are often times so hard? I mean, every day we are bombarded by the same temptations over and over again. We feel like we're fighting a losing battle. The world seems to be lined up against us. In so many ways, we are hurting, emotionally, physically. It's like, if Jesus really is reigning as king, then why doesn't it feel like he's reigning as king?

Again, could it be that what we expected Jesus' reign to be is not what Jesus promised his reign to be? The fact is, Jesus is reigning right now. But his kingdom is not some kind of Utopia here on Earth. It's not the beginning of a 1000 year Millennial rule here on Earth that many of our friends in other church bodies are waiting for. No, the fact is, Christ is reigning right now over three different kingdoms.

First, Christ rules over what is sometimes called the Kingdom of Power. As God Almighty, Jesus has full control over everything in all creation. He proved it by stilling the storm, raising the dead, driving out demons. Jesus still has the ultimate authority over wind and wave, plague and pestilence, nations and governments. Granted, he sometimes allows those things to kind of run their course, but in the end he is still controlling them—all for the benefit of whom? For the benefit of believers. What does Scripture say? *God placed all things under [Jesus'] feet and appointed him head over everything for the church. (Ephesians 1:20)*

That brings us to Jesus' second Kingdom, what is sometimes called the Kingdom of Grace. This is the kingdom that Jesus was talking about when he said, "*The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.*" (Luke 17:21) Jesus is talking about the kingdom that is established in human hearts when the Holy Spirit works through his word and sacraments to leads people to trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin. When you and I can say, "Jesus is my Lord; I'm under his authority," then, Jesus has set up his throne in our hearts. Then Jesus is reigning in his Kingdom of Grace.

And that brings us to the final kingdom, Christ's Kingdom of Glory. That's the kingdom that we're still waiting to experience. It's the kingdom that Jesus rules in Heaven, seated on his throne, surrounded by all his holy angels. That's the kingdom that God promises to all those who will one day stand before the throne of God dressed in robes of Jesus' righteousness. On the Last Day, it is to those believers that Jesus will say, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom (the Kingdom of Glory) prepared for you since the creation of the world.*" (Matthew 25 verse 34)

My friends, that's the kingdom we are still waiting to enjoy. But of this you can be sure, on the day we open that gift, it will not be what we expected to receive. It will be even better. It will be beyond what we could have ever thought or imagined; better than we could ever want or certainly deserve. But that day has not yet arrived. And so therefore, we wait. We wait trusting that Christ Our King is still reigning over his kingdom of power in this world. We wait, grateful that Christ the King has already established his kingdom of grace in our hearts. And we wait, eagerly expecting the Day when Christ our King will gather us into the Kingdom of Glory, to reign with Jesus and all the saints in glory everlasting. For all these reasons and more, you and I can say in this Advent season...My Soul in Stillness Waits. Amen.