

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO WAIT

Adapted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Christmas Sermons*. Zondervan, 2005; p.p. 46 – 56
Berlin, Germany / November 29, 1931

Text: Luke 12.35 - 40 (in pew Bible p. 1032 / in large print Bible p. 1605)

Intro:

- **illust.** Discipline Of Waiting

-the focus of our first Advent sermon was on receiving Christ.

- wait for God to come to you and to open your life to his call.

-today's theme deals with how we are to wait for Christ's coming.

Take Home Point:

-blessed are those servants whose Master finds them **watching** when he comes.

1. WAITING FOR UTOPIA

-we are victims of tyrannical ideologies: dress, eating & exercising.

- **illust.** Thinner Is Better

-technologies and commerce have become a law unto themselves.

- rule the course of this world.
- lie = we are the master of our destiny.

-humankind is being ground lower & lower.

- society is crumbling & image of God has been fractured.

-human race is sliding into peril.

- waiting for improved political conditions & economy & employment and buying the winning lottery ticket.
- we work feverishly to produce the "new man" / UTOPIA.
 - Bonhoeffer's context = Hitler's vision of a supreme Arian race.
 - American frustrations with Obama after one year in office.

-Bible teaches us the only true way to create a new humanity.

- in Luke's story the land is held in the grip of darkness and the master is away.
 - there stands a lone house from which light pours out into darkness.
 - servants are awake & watching, with swords and lamps in their hand.
 - on **guard** against the thief (v. 39) & **ready** to welcome the Master (v. 36).
- make sure you are ready = **waiting & watching** for the Master (v. 40).
 - longing for this world to be rescued / redeemed from its groaning.
 - longing for the Master who has the answer.

2. HOW TO WAIT FOR FOR UTOPIA

-waiting in darkness:

- not for a quick fix or silver bullet.
 - The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (Isaiah 9.2 & Matthew 4.16).
- we may not have too long to wait *before Jesus' returns in power*.
 - during Advent let us wait for Christ's **knock** (v. 36) *in **faith** & trust*.
 - Here I am! I stand at the door and **knock**. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me (Revelation 3.20).
 - It will be good for those servants whose master finds them **watching** when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them (Luke 12.37).

-waiting in expectation:

- cannot be waiting for God if we are ready to resign ourselves to his not coming.
 - must be wrestling with a "holy dissatisfaction."
- our waiting is life itself.
 - **illust.** Grace in Labour 43 Hours.
 - gripped by a certainty – not like those who wait foolishly for foolish things.
 - **illust.** Jews Not Leaving Germany Because Of Furniture.

-waiting in submission:

- not in dread of some capricious fate or disaster.
 - calm anticipation of the coming of the God of justice, love, and peace.
 - whether it is the second or third watch (v. 38).
- make plans sparingly:
 - don't boast about tomorrow / say, "If the Lord wills" (James 4.13 – 17).
 - N.T. = Roman persecution.
 - Bonhoeffer's time = Nazi persecution.
 - our time = post 9/11 trauma.

-our only hope is to be in God's hand.

- only can such servants go from Advent to Christmas.
 - "bless are those who wait."

Conclusion:

-blessed are those servants whose Master finds them watching when he comes.

- **illust.** Purpose Of Waiting At Advent

-how can we, in this time, make ourselves ready for Christ's coming?

-know, that the God who will come in judgment at the end of time has already come.

- do you know THAT God?
- God came in the miracle of Christ's birth and he waits to come in the miracle of our new birth.

-then we can wait, watch, pray, and know that Jesus will come:

- no longer clothed in our history, with its suffering and death.
- He will be seen by all as Judge and Redeemer.

-it is because God has come that we wait.

- the servant who waits is the woman / man of God.
- no one becomes a woman or man of God by their own power but by the grace and compassion of God.

-the diligent and patient servants will be seated and served by the Master (v. 37).

- wait in darkness through the second and third watch (v. 38).
- wait in expectation for the son of Man and not a false hope (v. 40).
 - **illust.** Sleeping On The Track
- wait in submission being dressed for service with your lamp burning (v. 35).

God come in our waking hours. God, we wait for your salvation, your judgment, your love, and your peace. Jesus speak to us again, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." Help us now to say, "Yes, come Lord Jesus."

Amen.

-Closing Hymn: #152 I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day (all verses).

Discipline Of Waiting

We spend the majority of our lives waiting. We wait to become an adult, to get married, have children, and then we wait for our children to grow up and have grandchildren. We wait in lines, wait in traffic, wait at airports. We wait for that next promotion or just the right job that will finally fulfill long-awaited hopes and dreams. We wait for that relationship to be healed, for a long-lost loved one to come home, for justice and a world to be set right. We wait.

Sometimes we wait without really even knowing what we are waiting for. Restlessness pervades our waiting without giving any clues, while being settled is a feeling long forgotten. We wait, and watch, and wonder, but for what?

In addition, our modern conveniences and technology make waiting for anything increasingly difficult.

When we have trouble waiting for an instant message, how can we even fathom having to wait for thousands of years for a promised king? Yet the ancient Hebrew patriarchs, kings, prophets, and priests waited expectantly generation after generation for the coming of the Messiah (Ravi Zacharias in *Slice Of Infinity*).

Thinner Is Better

Girls as young as three have already absorbed the idea that thinner is better, reveals a new study that is the first to examine body image in children this young.

"I think a lot of parents and researchers assumed that kids were not affected by these messages, that this was something that affected adolescents or adults but not young children," says Jennifer Harriger, an assistant professor of psychology at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

"It's important to monitor what kids are being exposed to (and) parents really need to watch the types of comments they make in front of their children because they're so impressionable at this age."

There's been very little research on the body image attitudes of very young children because they can't yet articulate their views, she says, so she and her fellow researchers had to be creative in designing their experiments.

They used the thinnest, largest and average body type in a series of standard drawings of different girls' body types, adding colour to make them appealing but also identical.

In one experiment, the figures were made into game pieces and the researchers asked 55 girls aged three to five to choose one game piece for Chutes and Ladders. Sixty-nine per cent chose the thinnest figure, 20 per cent the average one and 11 per cent the largest. When Harriger asked the girls who picked the thin or average figure to trade her for the biggest character, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) were reluctant or flat-out refused.

"I was surprised that kids as young as three were so emotionally invested in their game piece that they would say to a complete stranger, 'No, I don't want to switch with you. No, I hate that one,'" she says. "It was completely shocking to me."

Children at that age tend to take on the identity of characters they inhabit while playing, Harriger says, and their unwillingness to switch game pieces suggests that they're not just aware of other people's stereotypes about overweight people but that they've internalized these views.

The researchers also showed the girls the same figures and asked them to pick one they would want as a best friend. Seventy-one per cent of girls picked the thinnest figure, compared to 22 per cent who picked the average figure and just seven per cent who selected the large figure (Shannon Proudfoot in *The StarPhoenix*, December 2, 2010 D5).

PURPOSE Of Waiting At Advent

After all that waiting and hundreds of years of silence with no prophetic word, a baby was born in Bethlehem. His birth, in the midst of the Roman domination, would be the end of all their waiting. But Jesus was not the earthly warrior-king many expected. And even after waiting, the final realization of the Messiah's eternal reign is *still* yet to be seen, coming in the future, when the baby born in Bethlehem returns in power to judge the living and the dead.

The season of Advent is an invitation to waiting. It is to enter into a season of longing and anticipation. Advent invites us to wait expectantly for God to act. We are invited to wait both like the people of Israel for the Promised One, and with the early Christians for the return of Jesus as the Lord of all Creation.

Yet, the waiting of Advent is not a passive waiting. Just as one sets about *preparing* for an anticipated event or expected guest, so we who wait diligently prepare as we anticipate God's arrival. The prophets of old called out to a people waiting in exile: "Clear the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3).

There is work to be done even as we wait with the patriarchs, kings, prophets, and priests for Christ's return. We groan as we work for the day that Isaiah foresaw when weapons will be turned into agricultural instruments. We cry out with Zechariah, rejoicing that the dawn from on high is breaking upon us, and shining that light in our world through witness and action. We pray with millions of others, named and unnamed, whose expectations of the future kingdom may be hazy, yet who still yearn for something more complete and more real than what they know.

We are all waiting for something, or for someone. We might be restless in our waiting. Yet, as the season of Advent shows, our waiting can be a holy waiting—filled with expectant longing for the coming King (Ravi Zacharias in *Slice Of Infinity*).

Sleeping On The Track

Ed Hinton writes in *Sports Illustrated* that champion race car driver Dale Earnhardt was known for being so calm before races that occasionally he would take a catnap just before the start. While other drivers would have a pulse rate of 100 to 120 before a race, his would be less than 60.

But on August 31, 1997, at the Southern 500 race in Darlington, South Carolina, Earnhardt unintentionally took catnapping to a dangerous new level. At the start of the race, Earnhardt fell asleep at the wheel – he went into a semiconscious state but kept on driving. When he reached the first turn, he hit the wall but kept on going. At the second turn he again hit the wall, harder this time. He continued slowly around the track for two laps, looking for his pit but unable to find it. Finally he pulled off the track. Later he would say he remembered nothing of this.

Sixteen doctors examined Earnhardt to find out what had happened. They found nothing definite but suggested three possibilities:

- A small blood vessel may have spasmed and restricted blood to the brain.
- Or he may have had a temporary short-circuit of the brain because of a previous accident.
- The third option was vasodepressor syndrome, in which the pulse rate falls rather than rises under stress.

The doctors didn't think the problem would reoccur, and they cleared Earnhardt to continue racing.

Frightening but true, it is possible, for awhile, to drive over one hundred miles an hour and yet be asleep. In the same way, we can be busily racing through life – our eyes seemingly open, our hands on the wheel, our foot to the floor – yet spiritually asleep. Sooner or later, though, the trouble begins (*750 Engaging Illustrations* Craig Brian Larson, p. 518).