

Learn to Wait Quietly for God

✠ God reserves His glory. (vv.14-18)

✠ God's grace empowers full commitment. (vv.19-21)

In the name of Jesus, always worth the wait, dear Christians, growing patient:

What cartoon was it that had a little boy on his knees praying? "I want patience – NOW!" The thought has been repeated by many artists because in spite of all our time saving devices, we're more hurried than ever. Watch a few customers in line. Patience is a virtue especially in times of want.

That's why Jeremiah the prophet in Lamentations is so convincing. Deep in the rubble of the LORD's temple at Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit turned the lights on inside his soul: "*I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.*" (3:24-26 NIV) There's that word "*salvation*" again, whose Hebrew root (שׁוּׁ) also forms the Name of Jesus. Our Savior knew how to wait for the right time. With His prophet Elijah, we **Learn to Wait Quietly for God** because...

✠ God reserves His glory. (vv.14-18)

Elijah had plenty of practice waiting. He bursts onto the Bible scene in 1 Kings 17 with waiting words to wicked King Ahab: "*As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.*" (17:1 NIV) He had to wait by the brook Kerith while the ravens from God brought him bread and meat, morning and evening. He had to wait while the widow at Zarephath made him a meal from the last of her supplies. He told her to also wait on the LORD: "*For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'*" (17:14) And most of you are very familiar with Elijah's most spectacular wait – all day long while the prophets of Baal danced around their altar raving for fire from heaven. Finally at the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah's simple prayer for God's glory brought down the LORD's fire on the soaked sacrifice, stones and soil. The wait for rain was over. But death threats from wicked Queen Jezebel meant no waiting. Elijah had to run for his life.

When we find him in our text, he has traveled forty days and forty nights, fed by heavenly food from the angel (Angel ?) of the LORD. Running, yes, but toward the mountain of the LORD at Horeb, or Sinai. After all his waiting, Elijah is impatient. The same angry words in our first verse Elijah had spoken earlier. When the LORD asked: "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" He replied, "*I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*" That time the LORD said, "*Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.*" But the LORD was not in the wind or earthquake or fire. The LORD came to His waiting prophet in the "*still small voice*" (KJV), the "*gentle whisper*" (NIV) of His Word.

Can you count how many times you've been right there with Elijah, waiting on the LORD? Maybe it's your marriage or your job, your children or your parents, your health, your wealth, your wellbeing – that one thing weighs so heavy on your heart it keeps you up at night and sometimes down in tears. You pray. You turn to the LORD in repentance. You seek the "*still small voice*" of God's holy Word as He has treasured it up in the Bible. And then after all your waiting the bottom drops out as it did for Elijah when that evil queen threatened his life anyway. So you can relate to Elijah's impatience when God asks the same question and gets exactly the same answer. Elijah replied, "*I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*"

How many ways could God answer that! “You have no right to question me. You’re only doing your duty. You’re wrong about being the only one. You deserve to die for your sins.” Our conscience could destroy us with doubts if we did not bring our broken hearts to the LORD who met with Moses on that same mountain and explained His Name: *“the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”* (Exodus 34:6-7 NIV)

When Elijah was falling backward, the LORD’s compassion surged forward. In mercy God gave Him a way out. Head back toward Damascus. Anoint your successor Elisha along with the next generation of leaders. They will bring God’s war to wicked Queen Jezebel and everyone who follows her false god Baal. The waiting is over. **God reserves His glory** for His own time and circumstance. At last God is ready to rain down wrath on the wrongdoers. Elijah could be confident of something Christian defenseman C. S. Lewis said centuries later: “The mills of the Lord grind slowly, but they grind exceeding fine.” God has delivered us from wrath. **We Learn to Wait Quietly on God** until...

✝ **God’s grace empowers full commitment. (vv.19-21)**

Elisha must have been quite well-to-do. Imagine coming up to someone’s farm and seeing twelve tractors out in a huge field all at once with your successor driving the last one. Wouldn’t you wonder whether God got it all wrong? Why would he want to leave all that to help me? And what’s he doing last in line eating dust when he could be out front in the clean air and sunshine? When you signal for him to follow, he runs after you, begging to kiss his mom and dad goodbye. Now you’re not so sure this is going to work out. *“Go back. What have I done to you?”* Elijah tells him.

Jesus had no time for emotional commitments either. As a young mission when we were still worshiping in the school, visitors would come up after church all excited to offer everything you can imagine. Most of them we never saw again. Jesus could see behind the flashing smiles of would-be disciples like the one who said, *“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”* *Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* *Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”* *But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”* (Matthew 8:19-22 NIV) Words are cheap. God wants your heart.

People stream to churches that entertain them and scratch their itching ears with inspiring stories to stir their emotions. They’ll put up with endless money sermons. Stories are still told about bar tenders in Milwaukee who would give the priest a bag of money from some bootlegger trying to buy God’s grace for his crimes. Jesus said to one rich young man, *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* (Matthew 19:21) **Grace** is a gift. In His Word Jesus gives us **God’s** undeserved love that **empowers full commitment**.

Elisha’s neighbors must have been shocked when he sacrificed his oxen for a going away party. Talk about burning your bridges to not look back. Elisha forsook his wealth to serve Elijah. Maybe the old prophet was clouded by grief from long hard battles, but he and his young successor could see success coming. And centuries after God took Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind, he and Moses stood with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, saw the glory of the LORD’s Christ and encouraged Him to the cross.

By faith in the Holy Scriptures you and I have stood there too. We’ve knelt in the dust, spattered with the blood of God’s own Son. We’ve received His body and blood – in, with and under the bread and wine – as the pledge and guarantee of God’s forgiveness. We’ve been washed and clothed in Christ by our Baptism. Don’t give up. Don’t give in. God’s not done with you yet. So don’t be done with God.

“Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving, Perform your duties faithfully, And trust his Word; though undeserving, You’ll find his promise true to be. God never yet forsook in need The soul that trusted him indeed.” (CW 444:4) Let your life be one glad, heartfelt, unending: “Amen!”