

“A Faith That Waits”

Let us pray: Gracious and Loving God, you are faithful and true. We thank you for your holy presence moving among us today. Guide us by your Holy Spirit more deeply into faith. Help us now to be still and know that You are here. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Friends, I'm afraid that there is a new shortage for us to worry about today. And no, I'm not talking about toilet paper or hand sanitizer. I am also not referring to face masks, face shields, or disposable gloves. I'm not even referring to beef.
2. As Mitch Albom so wisely pointed out in his recent article from the Detroit Free Press, what is in **noticeably short supply these days is patience**.
3. As a people who have been in quarantine since March 14th, we are running out of patience and unlike other dwindling items, this item **cannot be bought** at Costco or Kroger. It is also **not available** to order on-line from Amazon. **Patience can only be delivered by God into our lives. But we are resistant to growth in this area primarily because it is SLOW GROWTH.**
4. Pastor and author Max Lucado was right when he wrote, **“We don't like to wait. We are the giddy up generation.** We **weave** through traffic, looking for the faster lane. We **frown** at the person who taken eleven items into the ten-item express check-out. We **drum** our fingers while a song downloads or the microwave heats our coffee. We **want** six-pack abs in ten minutes and minute rice in thirty seconds. We **don't like to wait at all** –not in traffic, not for Dr. appts, not for pizza deliveries, and not on God.”
5. **But friends, we must learn to wait. This quarantine time is certainly teaching us that.** But we wait **for more** than a virus to end or for our lives to find their new normal.
6. As Christians today, we also wait **for Christ to return.** We wait on God's Kingdom to be fully restored on earth. **We wait for God's vision for our future, immediate and eternal, to be realized.**

7. Precisely because there is a certain aspect of our lives always spent in waiting, we are in great need today of the teaching of the prophet Habakkuk. **This MINOR prophet has a MAJOR word to say to us about patience and the importance of patience in our faith life.**
8. **I find it fascinating that the prophet Habakkuk was apparently at the height of his popularity not** when he was alive in the 7th century, but later in the Inter-Testament times, in those 800 years between the Old Testament writings and the New Testament writings where God's people waited in hope for the Messiah that was to come.
9. There are detailed commentaries from the Dead Sea Scrolls outlining the significance of the first 2 chapters of the book of Habakkuk. These two chapters were studied in-depth. What we know about these first two chapters is that the prophet was bold in arguing with God and he was wise in listening for God's response, even when the response was slow in coming. God did finally answer Habakkuk.
10. God said, **“Write the vision. Make it plain on tablets so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; It will surely come, it will not delay.”**
11. **God's vision was originally speaking to the experience of the people of Judah living under the oppressive reign of the Assyrians which was followed later by the even harsher Babylonians.**
12. If we were to read all 20 verses of Habakkuk chapter 2, **we would see that God understood the pain of his people.** God also understood the nature of the injustice inflicted upon his people and God's promised vision for the future very specifically addressed the five woes of the people. We learn from this that **God is specific in responding to the concerns of His people.**
13. For the people of Judah this meant that **no more people would be plundered, no more gain would come through violence, no more towns would be built with blood, and neighbors would no longer be degraded, no one would place their trust in idols any longer.** These are the **five woes God specifically addressed** in Habakkuk 2: 5-20.

14. Ultimately, as part of God’s vision, the Babylonians would be punished for their actions and the people of Judah would be rewarded for their faith, **but this reward would not be instantaneous.** It was slow, but not even as slow as we might think of slow. **This is SLOTH-LIKE SLOW.** And the prophet must have had some grasp of this truth because he says clearly, **“Although it may tarry, it will surely come.”**
15. **Friends, the God whom we worship is faithful. He keeps His promises** but what we learn from Habakkuk, as well as from other parts of scripture, is that **God’s timing is vastly different than our own.**
16. 2 Peter 3:8-9 highlights this truth. It says, **“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.”**
17. **God had a definite plan for the people of Judah, but that plan was being worked out over the course of 66 years,** which was the time from when the promise was first given to the people of Judah until the time that the promise came to fruition.
18. **God’s plan was realized, but the people had to be patient** in waiting for the unfolding of those plans.
19. **Today, I believe that God clearly knows every detail of what is happening in our world right now, just as God knew and understood the full scope** of what was happening in Habakkuk’s time. God also has a vision of the future that we can only dream of now. **We do not know or fully understand how long it will take for God’s vision to be realized,** but we trust that God is working His holy purposes out. **We only need to be patient and part of being patient is choosing how we will live and act in times of waiting.**
20. We can choose to:
21. **Wait in anger.** We’ve witnessed many on TV at government protests making this choice. These protestors are resentful and bitter that their rights are being denied. They are frustrated with waiting and frustrated by not being in charge of their own situation. Their feelings are real, but their anger risks hurting others. That’s one option.

22. **Alternatively, we can wait in resignation.** With this choice, we risk becoming cynical without any hope for the future. Despair weighs heavily upon our hearts. Under this scenario, we may survive life challenges, but fail to thrive. The longer we wait under this scenario, the less hopeful we become.

23. But friends, there is a third option available to us:

We can wait in faith and in hope-filled anticipation of what God will do next. In other words, we wait in faith trusting in God's faithful presence, holy purpose, and perfect timing. We trust that God who has been faithful through the generations of the past will be faithful to us today. Habakkuk 2 :4 describes this type of waiting succinctly, **“The righteous shall live by faith.”**

24. **This idea of living by faith is an important theme throughout the New Testament. The New Testament book of Romans is built around this idea** and the Apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk 2: 4 both in his letter to Romans, and in his letter to the Galatians. It is further repeated by the author of the book of Hebrews.

25. Perhaps we also would do well to repeat this idea. **The righteous live by faith regardless of how long they must wait.**

26. **Friends, I have no doubt that our faith can grow, deepen, and mature while we wait.**

27. As we remember how patient God is with each of us, I pray our level of patience also will grow.

28. Let's follow Habakkuk's example of grace-filled waiting. He understood that God has a vision for all those who wait. It speaks of the end and does not lie. **If it seems to tarry, wait for it. It will Surely Come.”**

29. **I have no doubt that God's vision “will surely come” to our lives and to God's world.**

30. May God help us **while we wait on His vision to be realized.** Amen.