

## **WHEN YOU CAN'T RUN AWAY FROM YOUR MOST TROUBLING THOUGHTS - Part Eight**

Teaching #1906 - Sunday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016 - 10 a.m.

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### **DOUBTS CAUSED BY A LACK OF PATIENCE**

Without a doubt the toughest test of faith is not loss, despair, or pain. The toughest test of faith is the test of **waiting**. It's hard to wait for a long time with true expectancy. Have you ever waited in a dentist's or doctor's office? The people who have just been seated are the most alert, looking at the receptionist desk every time they think a name is about to be called out. Those who have been there forty minutes are buried in a Time magazine. They've lost interest a long time ago. The receptionist actually has to **interrupt them** and **get their attention** when their turn finally comes to see the doctor.

Waiting, especially **long** waiting, dulls expectancy. And expectancy, at least for the Christian, is precisely what we're called to. Waiting in expectancy is what faith is all about. Anyone can wait if he's indifferent - like you wait to file your income tax return when you know you have to pay. That kind of waiting is just **hanging around** while time passes by. Anyone can wait with a cold heart and a forgetful, doubting, or bitter frame of mind. But that's not what I mean by waiting in faith.

There are people who are half-heartedly waiting for God to act in some disappointing area of life who have actually already given up. Their doubts have won the day long ago. But that's not **faith**. It's merely **resignation**. We're studying **doubt** in this series. This is the final teaching and it deals with the strongest cause of doubt I know - the silent passing of time with no response from God, no answer to our prayer, no change in our circumstances.

How does faith stay alive and expectant when it is called to wait longer than human strength seems to be able to bear? That's the issue of our final study on **doubts caused by impatience**.

#### 1) **FAITH MUST NOT ONLY BE KNOWLEDGEABLE IN ITS CONTENT, IT MUST BE VISIONARY IN ITS OUTLOOK**

Os Guinness says **"insight must lead to through-site."** That's it exactly.

I don't mean visionary in the sense of just **dreaming of some unattainable future** when everyone knows it can't be done. I'm not talking about the power of **"the undaunted human spirit."**

By visionary I don't mean **positive, unrealistic** or **mystical**. Faith is not **pretending**. I simply mean faith must see **substance** in the promise of God even when that promise isn't yet fulfilled.

In fact, the Bible uses this very concept when it describes the way faith waits for something that isn't here yet: **Hebrews 11:1 - "Now faith is the assurance [substance] of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."**

That is the best definition of faith I've read. Contrary to much current faith teaching, faith doesn't always get what it wants right away. But even when it doesn't, faith feeds itself on the **substance** of things still unseen farther up the road. Faith knows what God has promised even when the immediate need goes on screaming for a solution. When called upon to wait, faith feeds itself on the **substance** of what is yet unseen.

Let me give you a great example from the Scriptures. Here's some background to the passage we're going to read in a minute. It is the tenth year of the reign of King Zedekiah over Judah. Jerusalem, the capitol, was in the merciless grip of the mighty Babylonian empire. Jeremiah himself was in prison facing the potential end of his own life. Then, to make matters worse, God tells Jeremiah the fall of Jerusalem itself was imminent.

Then, right in the middle of this announcement from the Lord to Jeremiah, God gives Jeremiah another piece of instruction:

**Jeremiah 32:6-8 - "Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me: [7] Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' [8] Then Hanamel my cousin came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD."**

Then we see what Jeremiah did with these instructions from the Lord:

**Jeremiah 32:9-10, 13-14** - “And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. [10] I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales....[13] I charged Baruch in their presence, saying, [14] **‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last for a long time.’**”

Notice the emphasis of that last sentence - ***“that they may last for a long time.”*** There’s the waiting test. Now, just ***after*** Jeremiah has spent all his money on this land, God tells him something else:

**Jeremiah 32:24-25** - “Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it, and because of sword and famine and pestilence **the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans** who are fighting against it. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it. [25] Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, **“Buy the field for money and get witnesses”—though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.”**”

You can sense the reserved desperation in Jeremiah’s heart. He’s trying not to complain too loud. Then God pulls back the curtain:

**Jeremiah 32:42-44** - “For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them. [43] Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, ‘It is a desolation, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.’ [44] **Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, declares the LORD.**”

God’s letting Jeremiah do some ***inside trading*** with information on how things are going to go in the market in the future. Jeremiah’s not going to see it for a long time. And he doesn’t have to believe it if he doesn’t want to. But, if he’s smart (and he was) he will use this information to fortify himself, not just to ***endure*** the tough times ahead, but ***see past them in expectancy*** to the promised future God has in store.

Let’s be clear: having the promise isn’t enough. All Christians have the very same promises from God on paper. Jeremiah doesn’t just ***listen*** to God’s promise about the future. He ***buys into it***. He focuses his resources on it. He views the ***present situation differently*** than his cell mates because he sees the present wait through the ***lens of God’s sure promise***.

This is how true faith waits. It doesn’t grow cold of heart. It doesn’t complain. And it doesn’t fall into unbelief. It ***invests itself*** in a better kingdom. It ***pins itself*** to a yet unseen future.

Where does faith get the patience to do this?

2) **WHILE WAITING FEELS LIKE GOD IS DOING NOTHING AT ALL, IN REALITY HE’S SIMPLY DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT THAN WHAT WE’RE WAITING FOR**

Much of our impatience in waiting for God comes from the fact that we are waiting for ***one*** thing while God is working on ***another***. This is what I would call the most ***stretching*** part of waiting. Our impatience (and our ***doubt***) comes from the fact that because God isn’t doing what ***we*** are waiting for Him to do, we conclude either He is ***unable*** to help us with our problem or is ***unwilling***. Either way, it’s hard to maintain confidence and trust in a God like that.

The Bible however, gives a much different picture:

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18** - “For this light momentary affliction is **preparing** for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen **but to the things that are unseen**. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Note, ***“...to the things that are unseen”***(18). That’s ***Jeremiah’s title deed***. Paul talks about the clashing of two worlds. One is immediate and visible. The other is invisible - behind the scenes - and less pressing on our physical

senses. Faith's ability to wait with strength, expectancy, and patience is directly linked to our ability to **substantiate** - "faith is the **substance** of things hoped for" - to **substantiate** the call and purpose of God in the middle of our present situation.

This has always been the secret of waiting with expectancy:

**Hebrews 11:13-16** - "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but ***having seen them and greeted them from afar***, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. [14] For people who speak thus make it clear that ***they are seeking a homeland***. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

This passage is all about **waiting**. The apostle says these people all died "***without receiving the promises***." They never did get what they were after. And here's the important point: ***Sometimes that's the very nature of faith. There is a visionary component to faith. Faith always lives between two worlds. Faith is always stretched between the promise and the not yet.***

But it can survive and thrive as long as the person is properly oriented toward a "***better country***" (16). And God is getting us ready for ***that*** world more than He's making us comfortable in ***this*** world.

### 3) **TO WAIT FOR GOD YOU MUST WAIT ON GOD**

For faith to be strong it must be fed. To trust the invisible God and live for the invisible kingdom you must anchor yourself to it tightly. This world is **hostile** to expectant faith. The present age wars against the age to come. The demands of the visible and the immediate crowd out the hope of the invisible and the ultimate.

Jesus addressed this very specifically: **Matthew 13:22** - "***As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.***"

The bottom line is the more faith experiences the pressure and pull of the present age, the more it must experience the power of the age to come. There is no successful ***waiting in faith*** unless there is a corresponding ***waiting on God***.

This is the battle of daily devotions. They don't **seem** practical in a busy, material world. And we don't always **feel** the benefit of them immediately while doing them. But like the squirrel stores up nuts for the winter, we know barren days will come. And it's too late to store up strength then.

This is why you **go to church** as much as you possibly can. You go **more**, not **less** because you're not getting ready for ***this*** city. You're pinning your heart and all your deepest ambitions to ***another*** city - an ***eternal*** city.

**Wait on the Lord**. That's still the only way to renew your strength. Faith needs something on which to anchor. This world will tear you away from the better city to come. Fight and claw for every opportunity to remember the destiny of your pilgrimage. That's what will keep your faith expectant when it faces its ultimate challenge - the test of waiting.