

What to Do While We Wait

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, we thank you that every single Sunday we have a chance to read your word, which is precious to us. Help us to see you and your glory and your sovereignty, especially in our text, and help us to live in this world in light of that.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. Well, I have a younger brother, and when we were kids, we were very different from each other.

And our differences were made even more obvious when we had to wait. So I was more of a passive waiter, so when I had to wait, I was happy to stay sitting and waiting while watching people and looking at things.

My brother was more of an active waiter. He was very active. He had to walk around, talk to strangers, and touch things that he shouldn't have.

A couple of times he was lost. We lost him. I'm surprised that he's still with us. I wonder which one you are.

[1 : 2 4] And I wonder which one we should be as Christians as we are waiting for the coming of Jesus. Well, we certainly see either-or types of Christians, don't we?

There are some Christians who spend this waiting period being very still, firmly confident that Jesus has finished everything on the cross.

It is finished, he said, and firmly confident that God is sovereign over all. And so they don't do anything.

They just wait passively, firmly affirmed that Jesus has everything under control. Other Christians spend this waiting period being very active, very anxious, restlessly working to grow in their holiness, anxious about their progress, not enough progress, and going around talking to people, evangelizing, anxious to finish the work.

Which one should we be? Our passage today shows that our waiting attitude should not be an either-or, but a both-and attitude.

[2 : 4 4] Now, our passage today is an interlude. It stands between the six trumpets and the last one. And we will see here that God is indeed sovereign. And so we can trust him and be spiritually still.

Be still. That's a command that is repeated over and over again in the whole Bible. But we will also see that because God is sovereign, there is a task unfinished that God has entrusted to us to do before Jesus returns.

And so we go and do it. We will see two of these things. So first, God is sovereign. In chapter 4, verse 1 to 4, we read about a mighty angel.

And the details there reflect the glory of God. So this is a mighty angel that reflects all the glories of God because he is a representative of God.

And as a representative of God, this angel shows God's sovereignty. First, he stands with one foot on the sea and another foot on land.

[4 : 0 0] This is a picture of a very, very big angel. But it's also a picture of dominion. God rules over both the sea and the land.

So God is sovereign. And he holds a little scroll. This is very likely the same scroll as the one mentioned in chapter 5, the one that Jesus was worthy to open.

And that's why it's now laying open. And again, this shows God's sovereignty. God is sovereign over what will happen with the world.

And his plans are laid out in that scroll. And then when the angel speaks, the seven thunders also speak.

But strangely, the message of the seven thunders is sealed up, not revealed. There is a bit of an irony there. This is called the book of Revelation, and yet something is not revealed.

[5 : 04] There are many different interpretations of this, but I think the point is the same, that it reveals God's sovereignty, that even though he has chosen to reveal a lot about his plans in this book, some things are still a mystery to us.

Only he knows everything, and only he is sovereign over everything. We don't need to know everything. In fact, we can't know everything.

So we need to trust him. Nonetheless, some things have been revealed, and therefore some things are sure. So, for example, God will sovereignly accomplish all that he has planned.

So in verse five to seven, the angel swears by God's eternity and God's sovereignty, that even though there's mystery in God's plan, it will be accomplished.

God is sovereign. Everything happens when it should. There will be no more delay when that thing should happen.

[6 : 21] At exactly the right time, which God has ordained. Not one second later, not one second earlier. God is sovereign. Now this serves as an additional assurance to both Christians and non-Christians that judgment is coming.

And when it does, there will be no more delay. Both Christians and non-Christians might read the previous chapters from two weeks ago about the trumpets and say, all right, we keep seeing disasters and wars and bad things happening.

And if there are warnings about the great coming judgment, where is the actual final thing? Where is it?

It's been 2,000 years and all we see is just warning after warning after warning, but not the event itself. Surely it's not coming. This passage says it will come at the appropriate time and when it does, there will be no more delay.

But the time is a mystery. Only God is sovereign and therefore only God knows. He is patiently, patiently waiting for the world to turn back to Him.

[7 : 47] And so first, we see God's sovereignty. And so we can wait quietly and be still because God will accomplish His plans.

But second, we also see that this sovereign God gives His servants a mandate, a task unfinished. And so we don't just wait passively because we have to do it. In verse 8 to 10, John is commissioned to prophesy.

What's the message of the prophecy? Well, it's about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings. What about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings? Well, remember this is within the context of the trumpets of judgment.

And so John is commissioned to participate in God's act to warn the peoples, nations, peoples of many languages and kings that the coming, that the judgment is coming.

[8 : 54] And that's why the message of the prophecy is both sweet and bitter at the same time. Sweet because it's God's word and God's word is sweeter than honey.

But it's also bitter because it's a message of judgment. John is commissioned to speak of that message of judgment to the world.

But John is not the only one who is commissioned to do this. In the next chapter we read about God's two witnesses who are likewise commissioned to prophesy.

Chapter 11 verse 3 to 4. God says this, And I will appoint my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1260 days. Clothed in sackcloth, they are the two olive trees and the two lampstands and they stand before the Lord of the earth.

Now, like all numbers, I think all numbers in the book of Revelation, 1260 is not literal either. It amounts to roughly three and a half years.

[10 : 06] And seven is the perfect number, complete, eternal. Three and a half is just half of that which means this is just basically saying they are commissioned to prophesy not forever but just half of eternity.

Again, not literal but just not forever. But who are these two witnesses? Well, these two witnesses represent the church as a whole which is a community of witnesses to Jesus.

how do we know that? Well, these two witnesses are called two olive trees in verse 4. They are the two olive trees and olive trees and Old Testament image for God's people.

Israel was often called olive tree. They are also called two lampstands and we've seen that in the book of Revelation lampstands are symbols for God's church. Seven lampstands for seven churches. and they also stand before the Lord which is a description of the saints in chapter 7.

[11 : 16] Remember in chapter 7 the wicked hide from the Lord but the saints stand before the Lord. These two witnesses represent the church and there are two of them because that's the minimum requirement for witnessing in the Old Testament.

again two is a symbol. These two witnesses represent is a symbol for the whole community of witnesses in the church.

That's us. And so everything that will be said here applies to us. And in verse 5 to 6 we are given the power to prophesy.

verse 5 if anyone tries to harm them fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

[12 : 31] These are not literal symbols of prophesying power. Fire comes out from our mouths means we are given great power in our words when we speak from God's word.

We could lead people to life with our words or if they keep rejecting the message of the gospel that we speak they are heading to death.

the power to stop rain refers to the prophesying power of Elijah in the Old Testament who did stop rain and the power to turn waters into blood refers to Moses with the plagues in Egypt.

So these are symbols for great prophesying powers which are given to us. We have great prophesying powers.

Do you believe that? when we speak of God's word. We are called and equipped to prophesy as in to warn the world using God's word like John in the previous chapter.

[13 : 48] And that is the unfinished task that we must do as a community as we wait for the coming of Jesus. So we wait quietly sure because God is sovereign and we trust him and he will accomplish his plans but we also must work and do this unfinished task given to us.

We have been empowered to do so. So how do we prophesy? How do we warn people of the coming judgment?

Well, as a community this is what we do every Sunday. We preach the gospel, the good news, because there is the bad news.

Judgment. As individuals, we can evangelize, which is what we've been focusing on this year. In our evangelism, we can present both the warning that God has shown in the world, you know, with all the wars and disasters and all the bad things happening, that this world is not to be depended on, but also offer salvation in Jesus.

A few years ago, before I joined this church, I was leading a Bible study in my previous church, and I knew that at least two of the people there did not know Jesus.

[15 : 23] So I shared about my past before I gave my life to Jesus. My past addiction to pornography, how it led me to unhappiness, deep unhappiness.

My past reliance on my wealth, I came from a relatively wealthy family and I trusted on my wealth and that disappointed me greatly. My past pursuit of people's acceptance, which led me to not enjoying life because I kept having to please people.

These are warnings, aren't they? We have covered this two weeks ago, that this world cannot satisfy. What we have cannot satisfy. Then I shared about what Jesus offers, the freedom, the community, love, the life, the life that he has given me when he died for me on the cross, when he died for us on the cross.

So we can present both warning and gospel. The warning message, however, can be confronting and offensive.

And so the devil hates us for warning people, and people might also hate us for warning them. In verse 7, now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them.

[17 : 02] Now we haven't met this beast before in the book of Revelation, but in Daniel 7, and later on in Revelation 13, there are beasts that represent satanic influence in political powers, Satan

using political powers to destroy, to try to destroy Christians.

Now the early Christians have seen such a beast, the Roman Empire, who constantly persecuted and murdered Christians, or like we mentioned two weeks ago, Nero, the Emperor Nero, who burned Christians alive and used them as torches for his garden.

But this beast can manifest in any political power, in the past, in the present, or in the future, when that government wants to destroy Christians and wants to destroy the church.

So government can hate churches. But people can also hate the church as well. In verse 8 to 10, after they died, their bodies, the witnesses' bodies, will lie in the public square of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, that is, enemies of God's people, not literally, where also their Lord was crucified.

For three and a half days, again, there's that three and a half, some from every people, tribe, language and nation, will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.

[18 : 39] The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

We read here of the mockery, the celebration of the church's failures, because at the end of verse 10, our message of judgment can torment them.

When I was working for City Bible Forum, a Christian organization, people constantly commented on our social media, mocking us, mocking Christians, and wishing that our entire work would fail.

I quoted that from one of the comments. there was a guy who got offended by a video that we posted online of a talk about what the Bible says about humanity and what Jesus offers to the humanity, and he did not like what we said about humanity at all.

He got offended. And so, he started name-calling us. He kept calling us dumb and irrational, and kept asking for evidence of the existence of God.

[19 : 59] And I kept giving him evidence and arguments for God, but he did not want to take that because our message was offensive. And instead, he kept calling us stupid and irrational.

The mockery, the celebration of the church's failures, and the active attempt at destroying Christians have been happening over and over and over again throughout history.

When we read the book of Revelation, we don't need to wait for a future. It's here. And yet, even after being mocked, rejected, even killed, even after the church seems to be defeated, it rises up again in verse 11 to 13.

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.

Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, come up here. And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies looked on. At that very hour, there was a severe earthquake, and a tenth of the city collapsed, 7,000 people were killed in an earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

[21 : 30] Despite every attempt at destroying us, God is keeping us with the power of Jesus. Here the church is pictured in the pattern of Jesus dying, rising back to life, and then called up to God.

Every single time the church seems to be close to dying, we rise again. And again, this happens, this has been happening over and over again throughout history and in all over the world.

Churches in some countries that are very close to dying, and yet, they don't die. Christians just rise up.

More Christians rise up. We are like cockroaches. We can't die. And at the end of history, we will be vindicated as God calls us home in victory.

And those who mock and hate and persecute and kill Christians will be judged unless they repent like those people in verse 13. Get terrified and give glory to the God of heaven.

[22 : 50] Just a few weeks ago, I met a Christian uni student, and he said he had friends from another religion who constantly mocked his God, our God.

Some friends, huh? And apparently, these friends always said, look at those Christians in such and such countries. Man, they are losing. They are being killed.

Where is your God? Why are they losing? Why is he losing? And so, this uni student never knew what to say and what to think about that.

And so, he asked me, if God is sovereign, why is he not acting? And here in our passage, and from the previous chapters, in the context of the trumpets, we see God waiting, both out of love and justice.

His love wants people to repent and return to him. And so, he sends warnings through disasters and wars to let people know that this world is not home.

[24 : 06] Come home to God. And he sends Christians to go and warn them. He doesn't want to judge them yet.

He wants to warn them. But his justice means when people keep rejecting him and hardening their hearts, he justly gives them over and allows them to ridicule him and reject his people, which makes them worse off in their condition.

And that is scary. But there's also a promise of final judgment. And we see that in the final trumpet in verse 14 to 15.

The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming soon. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven, which said, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

this is the final trumpet. But compared to the first six trumpets here, there's nothing scary about this.

[25 : 27] In fact, it's a celebration. Now, if the trumpets are warnings, just as we have said two weeks ago, how is this a warning? It's a warning for those who still refuse to repent because where are they here?

they're nowhere to be found. All their mockery, their celebration over the church's failures disappear and there's no trace of them or anything that they've done.

It's like they've been forgotten, completely replaced by the celebration of heaven. The contrast is stark.

We just went straight from the persecution and mocking of God's people to this. Victory is achieved just like that.

It's like there's an instant seizing of power. Suddenly, the kingdom of the world now belongs to God. And straight away after that, there is doxology in verse 16 to 18.

[26 : 35] Christians praising God. This is like the final song at a worship service, right? That's it. The curtain rolls down. There's no fighting.

There's no chance for the unrepentant to win. The silence of the unrepentant is deafening.

So, whether the seventh trumpet will be a trumpet of doom or a trumpet of victory depends on how you respond to Jesus now. And so, before that happens, if you haven't seriously decided to follow Jesus, this is another chance for you to do so.

Come home. Return to the God who loves you and has given his life for you. He is waiting for you to come home.

He is patiently waiting. Come home to Jesus. this world is not fit to be called home. If you have been following Jesus, let's do the unfinished task out of love.

[27 : 51] Let's warn the people around us that if they continue in their path following their sins, following their idols, rejecting Jesus, they will end up in destruction.

and then offer them the path of life in Jesus. Share your story. We can do it with love, with gentleness, with a lot of wisdom, knowing what to say and how to say and when to say things, but we have to do it.

They might not want to hear us, but we still have to give them the message. I'm going to invite the band up as we close.

Now, this is a scary, scary mandate, isn't it? This task unfinished. It's scary. And the Bible says that it's scary. This message is both sweet and bitter, but we have to bear it.

And therefore, therefore, trust God. It's appropriate that our passage starts with a view of God's sovereignty. The one who is eternal, the one who rules over heaven and earth, who knows everything, who can accomplish his plans just like that.

[29 : 16] We need that view of God as we wait in this world so that we can wait both being still, trusting in God, and being active, facing a task unfinished.

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