

This is the first week in a new sermon series called “Waiting on_____”

And it’s also the first Sunday of the season of Advent in the church calendar

If you’re unfamiliar, the church calendar is not something particular to Asbury

It’s a way that for millennia the whole body of Christ—Xians everywhere

Have organized our sense of time—not around the Jan-Dec calendar

But around the story of the Gospels

(Learn more in our Learn2 course on “Worship”)

Today, the first Sunday of Advent is like New Years Day for the church

Advent means “coming” and in this season

We reflect and repent and prepare for the celebration of the 1st coming of X

And yearn / pray / anticipate the 2nd coming of X to restore/renew all things

For this season of Advent, we are focusing on the theme of WAITING

It’s preferable to talk about things we can control, steps we can take

But at some point, we all find ourselves in a season of waiting

When there is little we can do to control our situation

Whether it’s waiting for a spouse / waiting to get pregnant

Waiting to be through a hard season of life / relief from struggle

What we want to happen is for God to press a button & end our waiting

And yet, God consistently AVOIDS doing that

Whether it’s Abraham & Sarah waiting nearly 100 yrs. before pregnancy

Or Israel waiting 400 years in slavery in Egypt before deliverance

Waiting has been a central feature of the lives of many great heroes of faith

And in the middle of a season of waiting, the question inevitably comes to mind:

“How long is this going to last?”

We hear that question throughout scripture:

- My soul is in deep anguish. **How long**, Lord, **how long**?
- **How long** must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? **How long** will my enemy triumph over me?
- **How long**, Lord, will the wicked be jubilant?

And you know, for as many times as this question is asked
I've never heard God give a direct answer.

In the NT, the Apostle Paul describes what he calls his "thorn in his flesh"
We don't know if this was a sin he struggled with or a physical sickness
But Paul prayed his own "How long must I deal with this?" kind of prayer

He said: "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

It seems to be the case that God uses seasons of waiting for our good.
There are depths of wisdom/health/courage/strength/perseverance
That can only be developed through seasons of waiting
God uses our waiting to motivate us to divest from self-confidence
& invest fully—b/c what else could we do?—in the grace/faithfulness of God
But even so, it sure helps—in the middle of a season of waiting—
To have even a little confidence that we won't have to wait forever

In the book *Necessary Endings*, author Henry Cloud
Describes the difference between a wish and a hope
A wish is an intention, a desire, something you want to be true
But it lacks an objective reason to believe that WISH will come true
Hope, on the other hand, is a desire tied to objective reasons for optimism

One person says: "I'd love to lose 20 pounds."

Another says: "I'd love to lose 20 pounds, so I got a gym membership, hired a personal trainer and am changing my diet."

First person is WISHING

The second person has HOPE (a goal tied to objective reasons for optimism)

When it comes to waiting—esp. waiting for BIG issues to resolve (justice, healing, peace, etc.) people wait in 2 ways:

Worldly wishing- Wishing for change w/o real cause for optimism → despair
Xian hope (anchored in faithfulness of God) → perseverance/character

As we progress through the season of Advent

We'll talk about different things we're waiting for (Healing/Peace/Rez)

But we are reminded that we are waiting as Christians

Which means we are waiting w/hope—confidence we're not waiting in vain

Today we are talking about waiting for justice

Isaiah 9:2-7 (Pew Bible p. 1072)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness for that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

The prophecy gives a picture of the dawn of unanticipated hope

A people lived in deep darkness

Destitute and bearing on their shoulders a yoke of oppression

The victims of endless cycles of violence and war

Have all of a sudden experienced an unforeseen reversal of fortune

A light appears

After a long season of sowing (fruitless toil), the day of harvest finally comes

After a long and wearying battle, it's time to divide the plunder

Verse 4 says this great reversal is "Like the day of Midian's defeat..."

It's referring to an account in the book of Judges

When God called a timid young man named Gideon

To lead the tribes of Israel in revolt against Midianites who oppressed them

Gideon assembled a massive army, but God said it had too many people

He cut the army in half, but God said it was still too many

God reduced and reduced Gideon's army until there were only 300 men
And with that 300, God miraculously defeated the army of Midian

The prophet says that a miraculous overturning of the powers that be
Was coming— of the same variety as Gideon conquering the Midianites
When God will remove the yoke of slavery
And free the people from the rod of those who abused them

And then v. 5, my favorite verse in the passage
“Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will
be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.”

In this Gideon-like overturning of the forces of oppression
War and violence and slavery and injustice
Are becoming a thing of the past
Don't we all long for that day?
When we won't need weapons/armies/court/prisons/security systems/locks
Because true justice and peace will be established on earth
Can we even imagine that day?

We all nod our heads, but imagine how you would feel hearing this:
If you were a Syrian refugee in a tent in Lebanon, worrying about your kids
If you were a teenage girl in Nigeria, kidnapped by an extremist group
If you were an Indian family in forced labor in a brick factory
If you lived in an inner city in the US & had lost friends to drugs/gun violence

Read the text empathetically, through the lens of one who has known
Real oppression, injustice, violence
And consider the good news
That a day is coming when God—against all odds
Will miraculously un-make a world of war and remake it as a world of justice

What would be the result? Text says: Rejoicing, celebration, partying, gratitude
But to whom will we owe our thanks?
How is God going to bring all of this about?
By what means will God end oppression, eliminate injustice?

v. 6- “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given

A child? A baby?

No, God would put together a committee & come up with a strategic plan.
No, God would come storming in with armies of angels

And yet, this is God’s Gideon-deliverance

The great reversal by which God would establish justice
Would come through the birth of a child
“And the government will be on his shoulders.”

You know, people are skeptical and disillusioned with government

Not because government is inherently bad
But b/c we have learned that our govern-ors are not fully trustworthy

But isn’t this good news:

Justice/trust will be restored to gov’t when the appointed/anointed son
Would assume his reign over the peoples of the earth

This son will be the heir of the throne of David

& his reign will have no end—no term limits—no ultimate changing of guard
He will establish/uphold a kingdom of peace/righteousness forever

And the text concludes: “The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

This great project of overturning the powers of oppression
And establishing a kingdom of justice and righteousness
Will be accomplished by the eager enthusiasm
Of the Lord Almighty through the reign of his anointed Son

Don’t forget—even in the darkest of times—that this is our hope as Xians

That injustice and violence and war are all on a countdown clock...
That Christ will come to establish justice on earth

And bring true peace in our time

So, when the next tragedy strikes we will mourn and we will cry
But we will also say, “This, too, will be made right.”
This is Christian hope.

In many ways, 2016 has been a very difficult year

Ongoing war in Syria (proxy war between US & Russia)

Continued threat of ISIS

Person drove truck through crowd in Nice, France

Any number of shootings—both here and abroad

Continued racial tensions in major US cities

Rise of the Zika virus

I hesitate to begin listing these b/c I know I'm going to forget something

And that's part of the tragedy

There have been SO many tragedies that we can barely keep up with them

It's wearying to have a new major news event every other week

We are so accustomed to tragedies that we forget that this is not normal

This is not how things should be.

Fear and mistrust are the norm for us, but they weren't supposed to be.

Unfortunately for many Christians, we haven't had a good framework

For making sense of these tragedies

Of course we know God doesn't like injustice/war/violence/death

But we also don't know what we think he's going to do about it

Many of us talk about the hope of going to heaven

But we're not sure what to do with earth.

We must remember—especially when tempted to be disillusioned & lose hope

That the Christian hope is not escapism

It's not flying off into a new dimension & leaving earth behind

The Christian hope is the Triune God remaking the heavens/earth

Bringing healing to the nations

Establishing a government on the shoulders of the anointed son of God, JX

Making violence and war and slavery and oppression a thing of the past

Establishing a kingdom of peace under the governance of God

We believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus
Was the first domino to fall in God's master plan of redeeming creation
And that the second was the birth of the church
Which was supposed to be an epicenter for healing and restoration
A colony of the kingdom of God on earth

And so the church, anchored in the hope of God's faithfulness
Demonstrated through the ancient promises proclaimed by Isaiah
Fulfilled in part through the incarnation of the anointed son of God
Longs and labors for justice until the day God fulfills his plans
To return & reign over creation

Every now and then we get a glimpse of what it will look like
When God establishes justice on earth
I want to share this story with you

[Video]

Church—

Don't lose heart.
Cling to our hope anchored in the faithfulness of God.
The light has come.
And the light is coming.

Our God who came to us in Jesus Christ
Will surely return
"And the government will be on his shoulders
And we will call him Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

And so we pray: Come, Lord Jesus, come. We are waiting.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.