

What Are You Waiting For?

Philippians 3:17-21

June 19, 2022

What do you do when you have to wait? What do you do when you're waiting in the doctor's office, waiting on hold with customer service, waiting at the checkout, waiting for the oven timer to get to zero, waiting for the UPS guy to deliver a package, or waiting for your spouse to finish their conversation after church?

What about when you have to wait for an event? Do you remember what it felt like as a kid to have to wait for your birthday? Is anyone here counting down the days until vacation, a summer wedding, or a family reunion? Parents, have you already started the countdown to the first day of school?

Waiting isn't easy, especially when you don't know when the thing you're waiting for will come. Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus told his followers that they would have to *wait* for his return. He said to his disciples,

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3, NIV).

Similarly, in the opening chapter of Acts, the disciples were told to wait for the Lord's return following his ascension into heaven. Luke describes that scene in Acts 1:

After [Jesus] said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11, NIV).

And so, ever since that day, Christians have been *waiting* for Jesus to return from heaven, as the text says, "in the same way as [the disciples] saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11, ESV).

As we reach the end of our sermon series examining our church's Statement of Faith, let's look at what we believe as a church about Christ's return as stated in Article 9:

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

Let's take note of a few things here. First, Jesus will return personally and bodily. This means that Jesus himself will come again in the same glorified resurrection body in which he had ascended into heaven. Second, when Christ comes again, his return will be glorious. When he appears, there will be no doubt in the minds of both believers and unbelievers that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

But what tends to fascinate us about Christ's return is that, as our Statement of Faith puts it, he will come *at a time known only to God*. That hasn't stopped people from speculating about *when* his coming might take place. But rather than wasting our energy trying to *predict* his return, Scripture instead calls believers to *prepare* for his return. Let me again read how Article 9 of our Statement of Faith summarizes the teaching of Scripture on the Lord's return:

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

Roughly eight generations of Christians have lived and died since Christ's return was promised to the church. That's a long time. So let's be honest, to what degree does Article 9 describe *your* attitude toward the coming of Jesus? Would you say that you live in *constant expectancy* of his coming? Does the blessed hope of his return motivate *you* as a believer to godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic mission?

Turn with me to the end of Philippians 3 to the passage that was read for us earlier. I love this passage of Scripture because the focus is on something I love about gospel ministry: discipleship.

We use that term a lot in Christian settings, but let me define it for us so that we're all on the same page. Discipleship is simply *helping others to follow Jesus*.

What comes to mind when you hear these words?

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV).

Maybe when you hear these verses you think about missions. Yes, some disciple-makers have been uniquely called and equipped by God and have been sent out by their local church to make disciples in a context not their own. We call these people *missionaries*. Other disciple-makers have been uniquely called and equipped by

God to serve in full-time vocational ministry. This list would include pastors, campus ministers, Christian educators, and many more whose disciple-making ministry is wrapped up with their vocation.

But there's an entire group of disciple-makers who have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus to help others follow him. This group of disciple-makers includes every single believer in Jesus Christ. If you're a Christian, you are his disciple. And if you are his disciple, then you have been called to make disciples.

From the day that you came to faith in him to the day that Christ returns for his church, you are to be about the mission of making disciples. That is what Article 9 of our Statement of Faith is teaching us about what we are to do with our time on earth while we eagerly await the Lord's return.

Enough introduction; let's dig into Philippians 3:17-21 where Paul first says to these followers of Jesus,

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do (Phil. 3:17, NIV).

Paul begins by exhorting his readers to follow his example. But what gave Paul the right to call these Christians to imitate *his* life? We know that Paul wasn't perfect. In a letter he wrote to his ministry partner, Timothy, Paul admitted that he was a sinner who needed the saving grace of Jesus Christ as much, if not more than anyone else.

But whenever he wrote to encourage and instruct believers, Paul often pointed to his own life as a worthy example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. For example, when writing to the church in Corinth, Paul said,

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1, NIV).

Yikes! Is it just me, or would anyone else be slightly embarrassed to turn to the person next to them and say, "Imitate me, as I imitate Jesus"? But Paul doesn't hesitate. It's not that he saw himself as some super-saint. Paul's confidence was not in himself, nor was it in his own righteousness. But Paul could confidently say "follow my example," because he was laser-focused on imitating his Lord.

But Paul wasn't the only example these believers were to look to as a model of mature discipleship. He also told the Philippian church to "keep your eyes on those who live as we do." In this same letter, Paul not only pointed to his own example, but he also pointed to men like Timothy who he described this way in chapter 2:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show

genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel (Phil. 2:19-22, NIV).

Similarly, Paul also encouraged these Christians to take a good look at a member of their own congregation, a man named Epaphroditus, whom Paul described as

“my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs” (Phil. 2:25, NIV).

He reminded them that in his service to Paul and to their church, Epaphroditus

“almost died for the work of Christ” (Phil. 2:30, NIV).

Or take the two women that Paul mentions in chapter 4 for example, Euodia, and Syntyche. Even though they were at the time needing to resolve some unnamed dispute, Paul reminded the Philippians that these two godly women had

“contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3, NIV).

In essence, Paul’s instruction to follow his example and that of others who lived similar gospel-centered lives is a command that we who claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ need to obey today: **Watch the lives of those who walk with Christ.**

So let me ask you, *whose walk are you watching?* Who are you intentionally looking to as an example of what a Christ-like attitude and lifestyle should look like? Who are you spending time with in order to imitate their Christ-like behavior, their spiritual disciplines, their love for others, and their heart for service? I’m not asking who you admire. Paul’s charge isn’t about *admiration*, it’s about *imitation*.

You might ask, “How do I know if someone is walking with Christ?” The simple answer is this: Do they look like Christ? Here’s what I mean by that. Actually, here’s what Paul means by that:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to

be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:1-8, NIV).

About ten years ago, PBS posted a quote on their Facebook page that ended up being shared by more than 90,000 people. Do you want to know what it said? It was a quote from the children’s TV host, Mr. Rogers who said,

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

Where should you look in order to find people who are genuinely walking with the Lord to pattern your life after? Look for the people who exhibit cross-embracing, others-serving, humble-hearted devotion to Jesus Christ.

But before we move on, don’t overlook the first two words found in verse 17. Paul exhorted these believers to *join together* in following his example.

Indulge me for a moment while I turn this part of the sermon into a commercial for a ministry that is very close to my heart. Let me talk briefly about Life Groups.

Disciple-making, by definition, requires more than one person. We are to join together in our pursuit of being made more and more like Christ. And that is what our Life Group ministry is designed to do. Life Groups are more than a Bible study; they are more than a small group discussion. Life Groups are designed to be a place where we can watch the lives of those who walk with Christ.

This September, when our Life Groups resume, would you prayerfully consider joining a group where you can watch the lives of others as they walk with Christ?

Now, why was Paul so adamant that these believers should focus their attention on Christ-like examples? Because Paul knew that they would encounter many examples of those who live in opposition to the gospel. In other words, Paul was warning them to **watch out for those who oppose the way of the cross**. Look at how Paul describes these counter-examples in verses 18-19:

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things (Phil. 3:18-19, NIV).

It’s no surprise that in this fallen world we will encounter many people whose lives illustrate their opposition to the gospel. But the reason that Paul felt the need to

repeatedly warn, and the reason that his warnings were often accompanied by tears is that these counter-examples could also be found in the church.

Paul wept over the fact that there were many professed Christians gathered in churches whose lives were so contrary to the gospel that they displayed no evidence of genuine faith. And what's worse was that if believers started to pattern their lives after these bad apples rather than follow the example of godly men and women who were bearing the fruit of Christ-likeness, there was a chance that they might be led astray.

The first evidence that these people were living lives in opposition to the gospel was that their gut had become their god. What Paul means in verse 19 is that these folks were not motivated by obedience to Christ, rather they were slaves to their own sinful self-interests. When Christ doesn't have our allegiance, our appetites will.

Second, because Christ was not at work in their hearts, these people displayed an attitude that glorified and delighted in what is truly shameful. Isaiah spoke of this same attitude when he prophesied,

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isa. 5:20, NIV).

Paul summarized this spirit of opposition to the work of Christ by stating that this type of mindset was entirely focused on earthly things. This is the same distinction that Paul made in the passage that Pastor Douglas preached last Sunday from Colossians 3:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col. 3:1-2, NIV).

An earthly mindset driven by the pursuit of selfish appetites and the glory of all that is shameful can only lead in one direction: hell. Paul warned at the beginning of verse 19 that this attitude of opposition to the cross would certainly end in destruction.

I wish we had more time to dive deep into Article 10 of our Statement of Faith on the subject of our Response and Eternal Destiny. Article 10 reads as follows:

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.

As Pastor Douglas spoke about last Sunday, every one of us is faced with the decision to follow Christ in faith or to follow our own hearts in rebellion against God. When the Lord Jesus comes again, as the old Apostles Creed says, he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

For those who have believed the gospel by turning to God in repentance and by trusting in Christ, God welcomes them into eternal blessedness and joy in heaven. But for those who persist in their rebellion against their Creator, God will grant them their desire to separate themselves from him for eternity, but it will be an eternity of eternal conscious punishment in hell.

So again I ask you, *whose walk are you watching?* Another way to ask that is who is currently discipling you? We are all being disciplined by someone or something, even if we aren't aware of it. Take a good look at all of the people, the messages, and the media that are influencing you on a daily basis. Are these voices leading you toward Christ-likeness and a cross-centered lifestyle? Are these examples modeling thinking and behavior that is shaped more by the gospel or more by your gut?

As we bring this message and this series to a close, I want you to see that Paul gives a second reason why we as Christians should watch the lives of those who walk with Christ. Read along with me in verses 20-21,

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21, NIV).

Follow the example of those who are fellow citizens of heaven and whose focus is on the coming Savior.

First, it is no small thing to be declared a citizen of heaven. I've traveled internationally enough to know that when you're far from home, you never go anywhere without your passport. Now, my little blue passport doesn't make me a U.S. citizen, but it does declare to anyone who looks at it that I possess all the privileges and status that come with being a U.S. citizen. It also gives me the confidence that when my trip is over, I know that I will be welcomed home.

When Paul says in verse 20 that our citizenship is in heaven, he is again calling these brothers and sisters in the Lord to join together with him in resting in their heavenly status as citizens of the kingdom.

Second, Paul reminds us that as citizens of heaven, we are awaiting the return of our Savior from heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ. Why are we waiting? Because Jesus promised that he would come and bring us home.

How should we wait? Paul says that we eagerly await our Savior, emphasizing that we are not just passing time, but that we are actively pursuing godly living, sacrificial service, and energetic mission.

What are we waiting for? We are awaiting the completion of Christ's transforming work in us.

Paul says elsewhere in his letter to the church in Rome,

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Rom 8:28-30, NIV)

We've not yet reached the end of that sentence, but one day we will. As Paul says here in Philippians 3:21, the Lord Jesus Christ

who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil 3:21, NIV).

Let's pray.