

Waiting

On Sunday, we explored what Christmas can teach us about the importance of waiting.

1. Warm up question: On Sunday, Jeff shared one of his favorite Christmas memories of a time when he and his sisters thought they spotted Rudolph's nose blinking and Santa's sleigh approaching. What's one of your best Christmas memories?
2. We live in a world of instant gratification – speed dating, fast food, overnight shipping, one-week diets, instant messaging, etc. The idea of waiting – for anything – grows increasingly foreign to us. Yet the Bible is full of waiting. The Christmas story itself is a graphic example. Before Jesus was born, faithful people had waited for centuries for the coming of the promised Messiah. (“Messiah” means “anointed one,” i.e., ruler.)
 - a. One of the first Christmas prophecies is found in the book of Genesis, where on his deathbed, Jacob says, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs.” Genesis 49:10. As you see it, what does this prophecy mean? What does it tell us about the coming Messiah?
 - b. After Jacob's death, hundreds of years passed, then along came the prophet Balaam, who said, “I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” Numbers 24:17. As you see it, what does this prophecy mean? What does it tell us about the coming Messiah?
 - c. After Balaam's death, hundreds more years passed, then along came the prophet Isaiah, who spoke of an unspecified future time when his people would be able to say, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God. . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” Isaiah 9:6. As you see it, what does this prophecy mean? What does it tell us about the coming Messiah?
 - d. Picture yourself as a Jew living shortly before the time of Christ. Your nation has been in disrepair for hundreds of years and now is ruled by a Roman rod of iron. Prophecies of your coming Messiah have been rattling around for almost a thousand years or more. How do you personally think you would feel about all this? Do you think you would have lived with a vibrant Messianic expectation? Why or why not?
 - e. Although Christians differ vigorously about what form the “Second Coming” of Christ will take, most believe in some form of Second Coming. Yet we've now been waiting for two thousand years. How do you personally feel about all this

waiting? Do you live with a vibrant expectation of the Second Coming? Why or why not?

3. Shortly after Jesus' birth, his parents took him to the Jerusalem temple, where two elderly prophets recognize the Christ child. Read Luke 2:21-40.
 - a. How do you think Anna and Simeon had felt all those years, growing old waiting for the Messiah?
 - b. How do you think they felt when they saw Jesus?
 - c. How do you think Jesus' parents must have felt when they heard these words about their son?

4. As the foregoing illustrates, the Bible is full of waiting. But why? Why is life filled with so much waiting? Jeff suggested two possibilities. **Option 1:** If we do it well, waiting is a time when spiritual energy can be stored up inside of us, and in the spiritual atmosphere around us, until a positive tipping point is reached – much like an apple tree stores energy in its scions during a dormant year. **Option 2:** God would probably like to act faster, but out of love deliberately chooses to partner with us humans, therefore moves only as fast as we humans are able – much like a mother baking with her child. Which of these two theories most appeals to you – and why? Do you have any other theory as to why God's work on earth moves so slowly?

5. Jeff suggested that how we wait makes all the difference. "Destructive waiting" occurs when we allow ourselves to descend into frustration. "Constructive waiting" occurs when we allow ourselves to embrace positive anticipation, as Anna and Simeon did.
 - a. Can you think of a time in your life when you let frustration get the best of you and descended into destructive waiting? What happened?
 - b. Can you think of a time in your life when you embraced positive anticipation and experienced constructive waiting? What happened?
 - c. Dr. King is a modern example of constructive waiting. The night before his death, after years of struggle, he acknowledged he might not live to see equality achieved. He was, nevertheless, happy because he could foresee that day coming. Do you think that attitude made King stronger and better? If so, how?
 - d. What is something important you're waiting for right now? How does it feel to wait? Describe what it would look like, in your current circumstance, to wait constructively versus destructively. Which approach have you been embracing?

As you move through this Christmas Season, let it remind you of the vital importance of waiting with anticipation, instead of frustration!