

“Waiting For God?!”

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Acts 1:6-14 = The Ascension

What are you waiting for?

Decades ago, a preteen, I remember running errands with my Grandfather Losher. What started out as another boring, mundane day, yet something provocative happens when least expected.

Grandfather spotted an old friend doing yardwork, one he had not seen in decades, an old army air corps buddy from WWI. The friend was quite bent with age and moved with a slowness borne of pain, You could just feel a dark, bitter cloud engulfing him.

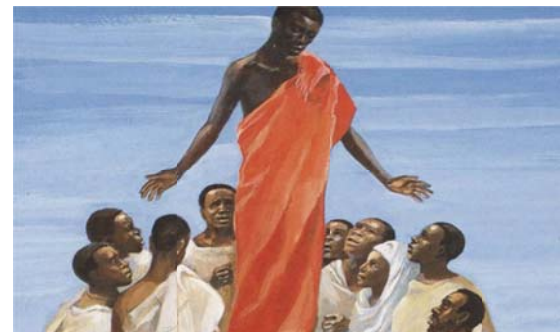
My Grandfather’s attempt at an honest, cheery greeting: “How are you doing?” The man replied with something I’ve never forgotten: *“Just waiting to die.”*

What are you waiting for? “Just waiting to die?” Are you waiting with Dylan for *“the ship to come in?”* Waiting for the rain to fall? Waiting for your luck to change? Waiting for the market to turn? Waiting for the tide to rise and float all boats? Waiting for the trickle down to fill your pockets? Waiting for Godot?

How do we wait ~ patiently, or with anxiety? Like little children on a car trip do we keep asking “Are we there yet?” Fidgeting, with stoic resignation or joyous anticipation? How do we wait for the LORD?

Jesus starts out by telling us how not to wait. In our text today, Jesus is taking his earthly leave. The disciples, tired of waiting and missing the point as usual, like children on a car trip, “Are we there yet?”

“LORD is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”



And he said unto
them, It is not
for you to know
the times or the
seasons, which the
Father hath put
in his own power.

ACTS 17

Jesus parries perfectly. As he has told us many times before:

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the father has set.”

Jesus' voice rings out with new authority ~ he speaks as one who has experienced death and returned. He shocks us out of our spiritual complacency. We too ask Jesus our impatient questions: “Are we there yet?”

Jesus makes it crystal clear. That is not the way to wait. Nothing will happen according to the way we think it should. It does not come about by playing cabalistic numbers games with Holy Writ. The unfolding of events will happen according to God's choosing. Let go of desire to control the unfolding of world-changing events. Let go of desire to predict the dates and times.

There have been many who have tried:

- William Miller believed Jesus would return on October 22, 1844.
- Jehovah's Witnesses have predicted the return of Jesus in 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920, 1925, 1941, 1975 and 1994.
- Charles Wesley predicted it would be in 1794.
- Famous forecaster Nostradamus predicted doomsday would happen in July 1999.
- English mystic Joanna Southcott predicted it on October 19, 1814, when she would give birth to the Messiah.

All these and many others including big name television evangelists have been more than merely mistaken, unfortunately they fulfill perfectly the very Biblical definition of a false prophet: [Deut. 18:22]

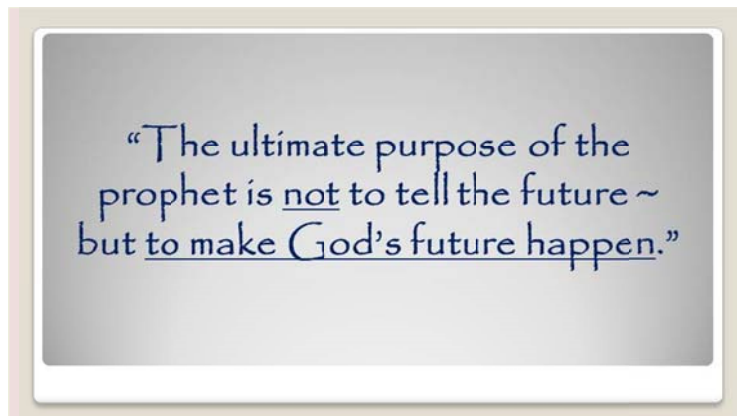
²²If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.



Just two verses earlier the death penalty is prescribed for all false prophets, those who say an event will happen in God's time and it does not. All these modern day false prophets disobey the very words of Jesus:

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” [Matthew 24:26]

Perhaps the kindest way to say all this is they all just miss the point of Scripture and fundamentally misunderstand Biblical Prophecy. Rather, as an insightful church leader (Joel A. Barker) has rightly said:



That's what God really wants us to be doing.

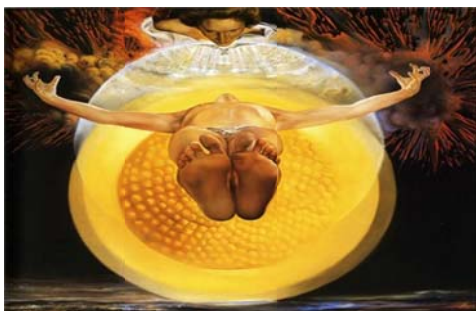
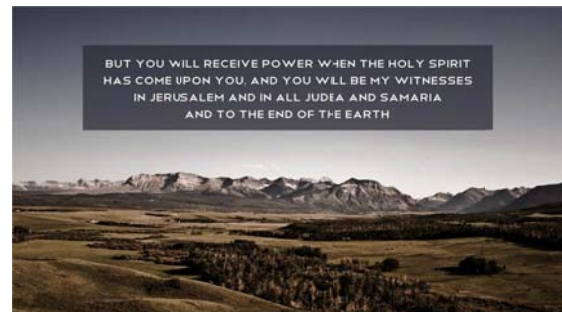
Jesus continues with a promise:

“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;”

Jesus then gives us a commission:

“and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

With this promise and commission, the only choice we have, actually have, is do we respond or not to God's graces and talents. Are we going to take up the LORD's mission?

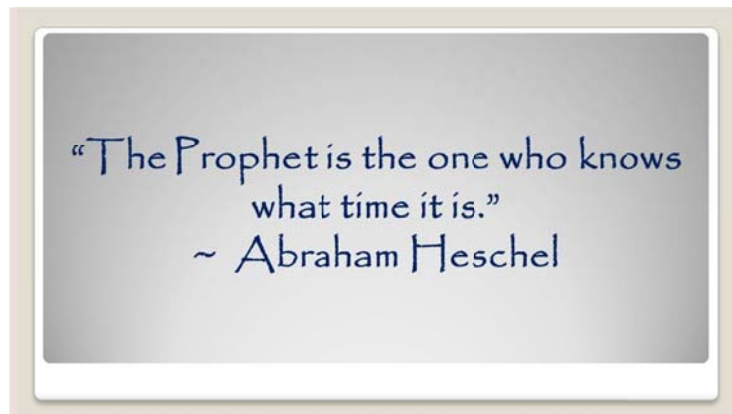


The disciples stood there looking dumbfounded, staring at a spot in space where Jesus had just disappeared. They were living in between Jesus being taken back to God and in short order the receiving from

the Spirit the gifts needed for carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

We modern disciples are caught in a different waiting time: in the time between Pentecost, when God gifted each of us with precisely what we need to build God's realm ~ between that event and the future return of Jesus again at the culmination of the age. We are part of that story and joyously take our place in God's plan, but like little children, we want so much to skip to the end of the book. "Are we there yet?"

Abraham Heschel the great Torah scholar and philosopher has rightly said:



We should know what time it is. We should know the time in which we are living, and how it fits in, how we fit into God's plan.

Waiting? How do we wait? Do we wait for God passively or actively?

Do we wait like the two characters in the play "*Waiting for Godot*?" Lost in the absurdity of life and overwhelmed by the pain of human existence, the two characters passively wait, steely cynical and coldly resigned, endlessly debating while life swirls around them.



Do we passively wait for God to do it all for us: to change our jobs, find us work, change our homes, change our families, change our lives? Should we wait for God that way?

Or should we wait like the residents of the retirement community in the BBC series "*Waiting for God*" ~ the name a takeoff on the title of that absurdist play. In this retirement community, everyone is expected to be "just waiting to



die,” but instead the inmates choose to take over the asylum.

We, like those spirited elders, should be making some godly mischief and raising some holy cane even though the end of our personal existence may be near. We work God’s plan, seek God’s kingdom, even when the whole thing seems absurd.

It’s a choice. We choose to be Jesus’ witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. We choose to make God’s future to happen. We take charge of ourselves, our lives and our calling. We commit ourselves to real change.

Don’t forget Jesus’ promise => we are to receive power! All the power we need. Indeed, we have already received power ~ at Pentecost. Then how do we wait? We are just those first disciples, standing there slack-jawed, mouth gapping, uncertain expressions on our faces, staring at the space just occupied by Jesus when he was taken up. And we too are pulled out of our reverie:



“[Disciples], why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”

In these in-between times they say to us: “Shut your mouth and get busy!” “Don’t just stand there, make yourself useful!” “Use that talent! or lose it!” A little more politely perhaps, but that’s what they mean. That is how we are supposed to wait, shocked out of our spiritual complacency, our staves in our hands and our shoes on our feet.

What are you waiting for? A gold plated invitation? You have already received it: **“Follow me.”**

