

## **Wait on the Lord**

Deuteronomy 18:14-20

January 29, 2012

Wait ... Wait on the Lord.

Maybe you've been praying, praying for months, praying for years, praying that she would turn her life around, praying that he would stop making choices that only hurt himself and the people who love him the most. Maybe you're wondering why, why you keep on praying when everything stays the same, when nothing ever changes.

Wait ... Wait on the Lord.

Maybe you're weighing a difficult decision, thinking about making a big move, thinking about making a big change in your life, but you want to know how things will turn out if you do. You want some reassurance you're doing the right thing. You want some kind of sign.

Wait ... Wait on the Lord.

Maybe you're caring for a husband or a wife, a mother or a father, with a chronic illness, an illness that will claim their life, later or sooner. You aren't asking "Why?" because there are no good answers to that question, but you are asking "How long?" How long will you still have them with you? How long will you still have what it takes, physically, emotionally, to do what you need to do for them, to do what you want to do for them? How long until you can't do it anymore? How long can you, how long can they, live in this limbo somewhere between life and death?

Wait ... Wait on the Lord.

Maybe you're worried about money. Maybe retirement is looming, five years or ten years out, and you are worried that you won't have enough, that you haven't saved enough, that you haven't planned well enough. Or maybe you live month to month, paycheck to paycheck, and the thought of any unexpected event -- losing a job or a sudden illness or an extended economic downturn -- terrifies you.

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Maybe you're look at your children and you wonder. You wonder what will become of them. You wonder how they will be, how their lives will turn out. You pray for them. You provide for them. You do the best you know how for them, but you just don't know. The world is a scary place. Their world is a scary place and there is so much that is beyond your control. You don't always know what you can do, you don't always know what you should do, to protect them, to guide them, to equip them.

Wait ... Wait on the Lord.

Maybe you love this church and you worry about its future, our future. You're encouraged by the patter of little feet and the chatter of little voices and by the new people coming to join our fellowship. You're encouraged by the spirit that fills our worship and our working and our praying. But you just don't know what the church will be in twenty years, fifty years, a hundred years. Who will be here to lead us? Who will be here sitting in the pews? Who will be here to support our ministries and enable our mission and maintain this building?

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Maybe you love this country and worry about its future, our future. We call ourselves a melting pot, but the pot is boiling. We have become so fragmented, so polarized -- by race, by class, by faith, by ideology. How can we continue to be a beacon for justice and for freedom in an increasingly volatile and dangerous and beleaguered world when we can't find a way to work together here to tackle the most basic issues threatening our lives and our liberties and our pursuit of happiness? Have we passed the zenith of the American experiment? Are we a nation in decline? Have we lost our way?

Wait ... Wait on the Lord.

Wait on the Lord. That was the essence of Moses' message to the people of Israel as they stood on the borders of the promised land. They had reached the end of their forty years of wandering the desert. They had reached the eastern bank of the Jordan River and were preparing to cross over, to cross over into a new life, a new and as yet unknown life for each of them, for all of them. It was an exciting time, but a scary time, too. It was a time of great unknowns, of great risks and great opportunities. And in such a time, Moses urged them to wait, to wait on the Lord.

To wait on the Lord ... instead of reading tea leaves! Moses warned them that the land they were about to enter was filled with people who look to practitioners of divination, to readers of omens, for answers.

Human beings have always practiced divination, always sought ways to tease out some knowledge of the future. The wikipedia article on “methods of divination” lists 367 methods of divination, 367 ways people have used to try to divine the future: reading burning coals, melting wax, listening to dogs, boiling donkey’s heads, using dominoes, watching babies crawl, horoscopes, consulting the dead, looking at the seeds in bird poop, and drawing lines, drawing exactly sixteen lines in the sand.

Whatever it takes, whatever works or whatever might work, to gain some knowledge of the future. People have always done it. And people still do it! We pay consultants good money to predict the future for us. We call them financial advisors, market analysts, pollsters, pundits, futurologists. We want to have some idea of what will be so we can plan for it, so we can prepare for it, so we can take advantage of it, even so we can change it.

Our desire to know the future is a reflection of our desire to be in control. We want to be the masters of our own destiny. We want to have the facts, pull the strings, steer the course. We don’t want to be taken by surprise. We don’t want to be left at the mercy of whatever comes. We don’t want to feel helpless. We don’t want to wait.

But Moses told the people of God they must not do what everybody else does. They must wait on the Lord.

Wait on the Lord! You will know all that you need to know, because the Lord will tell you! The Lord will send you a prophet, like Moses, a man like Moses to whom the Lord speaks, a woman like Moses who listens to the Lord speak.

Moses told them the Lord would send them a prophet and the Lord did. The Lord sent them Deborah and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, Abigail and Amos and Jeremiah and Hosea. The Lord sent them John, who reminded the people so much of Elijah, and the Lord sent them Jesus. Because Jesus was a prophet, too. Jesus spoke the word of the Lord. Jesus spoke the word he heard from the Lord. Jesus was much more than a prophet, but he was certainly no less than a prophet.

Through the prophets, Moses told them, the Lord would speak to them. The Lord would reassure them. The Lord would show them the way. The Lord would tell them what they needed to know. They didn’t need to consult the diviners. They simply needed to listen ... and obey.

But if you are a prophet, beware!

And there are prophets among us. People who speak the word of the Lord to us. People who reassure us when we are apprehensive or frightened. People who point us toward God's way when we are confused or lost. People who remind us of all we need to know to live, all we need to know to live as God's people in this world. Speaking as a prophet is part of my job, and speaking as a prophet is part of your job. How will the world know the truth if we do not say it? So we must beware, because there are two things a prophet must never do.

The first thing a prophet must never do is speak a message in the Lord's name that doesn't come from the Lord. Se careful! Be careful whenever you are about to say, "God says ..." because you better not be using God's name to advance your own agenda!

I am telling you that our age is rampant with false prophecy! Our world, our land, is full of people claiming to speak for God, but speaking words that clearly do not come from God. Do hateful words come from God? Do divisive and judgmental words come from God? Do words with little mercy and even less love come from God? Does God call us to ignore the poor, push away the foreigner, destroy the enemy to better our own lives?

Woe to those who enlist the Lord's name to further their own agendas! They are breaking one of the original ten commandments, as bad as murder, as serious as adultery: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord!"

The second thing a prophet must never do is speak in the name of other gods. Gods who ask us to sacrifice our own children. Gods who ask us to sacrifice other people's children. Gods of military power and economic might. Gods who require crusades, not sacrifice. Gods who favor the rich, not the poor. Gods who favor one race over another, one nation over another. These are false gods, fake gods, gods whose ways lead only to death.

Why would we use God's name to promote our own agenda? Why would we commend gods of power and wealth and might, gods who promise much to us and demand little from us? It's all about control, all about trying to control our own destinies, all about taking the future into our own hands.

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There's just one more thing I want to clear up before I finish: waiting on the Lord doesn't mean sitting around and doing nothing! Waiting on the Lord means entrusting the future to him, not to our ability to control outcomes.

We do what the Lord calls us to do. We hear and we obey. We love God and our neighbors. We show mercy. We offer forgiveness. We feed the hungry. We clothe the naked. We visit the sick. We befriend the lonely. We defend the oppressed. We tend the wounds of the injured. We make peace. We do justice. We pray for those who have lost their way. And we trust God for the results.

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