

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach<sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.<sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

*<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

*<sup>7</sup> He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.<sup>11</sup> “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.”*

*<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city.<sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.<sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:1-14)*

### **Learning to Wait**

You overhear a conversation between a parent and their child. He looks up at mom asking, “Can we go home yet?” Mom says, “I’m sorry honey, we still have things to do.” To which the child exclaims, “But what am I supposed to do? I want to go home.” And, mom, kindly explains, “Well, you’ll just have to learn to wait.”

Learning to wait. It’s easy to say to a child when they are asking for something. It’s different to say to yourself when you are waiting for that same child to get themselves ready. Learning to wait: another thing is easier said than done, easier to expect from others than from yourself.

It had been forty days since Mary and the other women had come back with the good news. Forty days since the very-much-alive Jesus appeared to them as they hid behind those locked doors. And during those 40 days Jesus keeps appearing to them, sitting down

at meals, spending time with his followers proving he really is risen and, also, teaching them. On one of these occasions Jesus reminds them, **“Don’t leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.** Wait in Jerusalem. The Father will send the gift of the Holy Spirit to help you carry out the work I am sending you to do.”

What do you mean, wait, Jesus? Some of them began asking, **“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?”** The disciples saw with their own two eyes who Jesus was. They were witnesses to his power. They were witnesses to his message of truth. They had been spending these last days being reaffirmed with these facts. As far as they could tell, it was time for Israel to be restored! They weren’t concerned about a kingdom set up to rule on this earth. No, they knew the prophecies of the Old Testament. They remember Jesus’ own promises of a kingdom of God’s people. Jesus had already suffered. He already died. He already rose from the dead and returned to them. Isn’t it time, Jesus, to call all your people home?

We wonder the same thing. The world tries to convince itself that things are getting better. It points out the “random acts of kindness” and how people are uniting against this pandemic. But it has to because the truth is downright depressing hidden underneath all those personal agendas: the love of most is growing frigidly cold. Isn’t it time yet, Jesus, to bring us to you? It isn’t just the waiting for the Last Day when Jesus will return. The one missing a loved-one no longer with them, “Isn’t it time yet, Jesus, to bring me home to you too?” You who watch your loved ones seemingly waste and fade away, “Isn’t it time, yet, to call them home?” The one who continues to suffer physical and mental pains that rob you of enjoying the simple things in life, “Haven’t I suffered enough? Isn’t it time, Jesus?” You who look at your place in life, the situation you are in, might wonder. You slugging through the monotony of life and daily grind may question, “Isn’t it time, yet, for something better?” As things kind-of sort-of start reopen, you might wonder, “Isn’t it time for this COVID business to be behind us? Haven’t we endured long enough?” As you continue to struggle with sin and temptation, “Isn’t it time yet for this temptation to stop pricking me and bothering me? Why am I still hounded by this?”

It’s not necessarily looking for a kingdom in this world. Like the disciples, we know the promises Jesus gives. We look forward to a place with glories that far outweigh anything we have here. We are eager for that place where sadness, sickness, or pain cannot exist. We can’t wait for a place where we will have perfect contentment being with the Lord. Isn’t it time, yet?

The problem isn’t necessarily with the question itself. Even the saints in heaven ask the Father, “Lord, how long?” Jesus doesn’t get after his disciples or you. No, it’s the attitude behind the question and your reaction when Jesus tells you: **“It’s not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”** It’s not for you to know. Instead, wait.

But why can't I know? Sometimes we may think that knowing the timing will help us. It will give me something to strive for and look forward to. Or it's simply the fact that you are tired. You are wore out. You want clarity to the vague picture of the future. Sometimes we may even get so bold as to think God owes it to us! "I've put in my time. I've done my suffering. I've dealt with this long enough! That means something new and better needs to change soon." But, knowing how long a wait will be doesn't always help. You can be told your wait will be 20 minutes and still get upset because, "It should not have to take that long!" You can be told to be ready for a specific date but, between now and then, it skips your mind and you aren't prepared.

But why do we think we need to know? It's often not until God forces us to sit and wait that we realize how bad we are at waiting and trusting in his will. That's really what it is, isn't it? Instead of patiently waiting, so easily we get upset when God does not operate according to our timetables and expectations. We say things like, "I just think" or "I feel" that this would be better, "If God just..." When—being careful to not say it out loud—your heart is really saying, "I feel like I could do better." Instead of being ready for Jesus' imminent return, we get caught up and distracted by the other things that need our attention now. Instead of eagerly looking ahead, the struggles can loom so large and ring so loud in our ears that we fail to hear and trust God's promises. Instead of pushing and persevering, we get wore out or become flat-out lazy caving-in to sin.

I really can be such a slow-learner, especially when it comes to learning to wait. And so God puts me through the school of hard knocks with suffering, life not going the way I want or expect. He doesn't do this because he likes to see me suffer. He does it because learning is hard. It takes discipline. There's still that Old Man of sin grabbing for my heart working overtime to pull me away from the promises of God. And so God refines me in the fires of struggle and suffering to teach me to trust him, his plan, his timing. Because God has not revealed the timing to me, to you, it's none of my business. It's none of your business. It's no one's business except God's alone. My sinful nature hates it. My reason doesn't want to hear it. But it's not about me. It's God's will and his will is always good and best. No, go ahead and ask that question, "How much longer, Lord?" Understand that more often than not the best answer is simply: "I don't know. But God does." And with child-like faith we trust in God's good will.

It sounds pretty straight forward. But if that were it, we would still be in trouble. Somedays we are really strong. Most days not so much. And Jesus knows this. That's why he prays for his people. That's why he spends those 40 days with his followers. He knows how we struggle with doubts. He knows how our trust is far from perfect on our own. And so he gives you something solid for your faith to be tied down to. First, he again promises his disciples, "I am sending the Holy Spirit and you will receive power." And then Jesus ascends being taken up before them into heaven.

What! How does this help? He leaves them! Yes, Jesus stops walking around on this earth. But he did not abandon us as orphans in this world without protection or support. That

same flesh and blood Jesus who sits on the throne ruling over all things with the Father is the same one who walked this earth, breathed our air, and suffered the weaknesses of our human bodies. He knows the struggles you are dealing with and he sympathizes with you. He knows the questions that go through your mind. He knows what it's like to be at the end and wrestling with God's plan. He knows because he's been there. He's lived it.

And it's that same Jesus who returned to the Father and intercedes for you. He is your go-between with the Father reminding him, "You cannot punish them for their lack of trust. You already punished me. You cannot hold anything against them. You promised that when I lived perfectly and died those sins would be paid in full. You raised me from the dead which you said is proof that you really did accept my work. See, I've washed their sin-stained hands with my blood so they are clean." Jesus spends those 40 days with his followers so that there would be no doubt in their minds he is risen. And if Jesus has been raised, then that means my sins really are forgiven. This is what he promises and seals to you at your baptism. We don't need anyone else to go to the Father for us because your Savior Jesus has returned to the Father in heaven for you.

And it's that same Jesus who watches over you. Though we do not know what the future will bring, don't know the exact timing of things, and we wonder, "Lord, how long?" we do know that we have a Savior who rules on your behalf. All power and authority already belongs to him. Nothing catches him by surprise. He is still the Lord of the church who works all things for the good of his people.

And it's that same risen and ascended Jesus who is with you today. As we gather together in his name, Jesus promises, "There I am with you." You hear his voice speaking through his called servant. He talks to you in the Word of the Bible. You receive his really present body and blood given and poured for you in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. And because he returned to the Father, this flesh and blood true God from beginning Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts as we learn to wait.

Don't let the questions of when and why keep your heads in the clouds waiting to see Jesus return. Don't let the uncertainty of waiting keep you from doing what Jesus calls you to do. You are witnesses to Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. As you believe and confess Jesus' lives for you, share it. Take a note out of the disciples' books for how to wait. Continue to sit with Jesus and learn his Word. Continue to gather as a family of believers encouraging each other as we wait for Christ's return. Because of the present circumstances we may not be able to meet as you would like. Instead of focusing on the struggles, focus on the blessings Jesus showers upon you and share them. Call someone on the phone and encourage them. Don't just say it but take them to the Lord in prayer. I'm still learning to wait. But as we do place your hope in your risen and ascended Jesus. Amen.