

What is God Waiting On?
Isaiah 30

12/7/14

During the last few months I have been waiting on the Lord for some things. And to be honest with you, I have felt frustrated that answers were not coming more quickly. I know God is omnipotent—so if the answer is not coming, it's not because He's unable to do it. The problem is not too big for Him to solve. He made my body; He can certainly heal my body. He created all the wealth of the world by His word; He can certainly meet my financial needs. My rent payment is not too big of a problem for Him to solve. My relationships are not too complex for Him to fix. "Is anything too hard for God?" Yet here I am waiting on Him for answers and wondering why the delay.

That's when God took me to our text this morning in Isaiah 30. As I read that chapter in the Amplified version, I suddenly saw something I have never seen there before. The pivotal verse is verse 18. Follow with me as I read it in the Amplified version.

"And therefore the Lord (earnestly) waits (expecting, looking, and longing) to be gracious to you; and therefore He lifts Himself up, that He may have mercy on you and show loving-kindness to you. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are all those who (earnestly) wait for Him, who expect and look and long for Him (for His victory; His favor, His love, His peace, His joy, and His matchless, unbroken companionship)!"

When I read the first sentence in that verse, I realized the possibility that more than me waiting on God—God is waiting on me! God is waiting on me? "And therefore, (Richard), the Lord (earnestly) **WAITS** (expecting, looking, and longing) to be gracious to you...." That's a different perspective. I am painfully aware that I'm waiting on something; not nearly so aware that God would be waiting. Why would He need to wait for anything?

That's the heart of this message. But first we must talk about how God waits.

We have many scriptural windows into how God waits. Look at His interaction with Jonah. God tells him to go to Nineveh; Jonah goes the other direction to Tarshish. He makes his own decision about where he will go. God actively waits on Jonah to come around. He sends a storm; then He sends a fish to swallow Jonah. In the midst of all that trouble, Jonah calls out¹ on the Lord; and the Lord delivers him. God is patiently bringing Jonah around. Jonah preaches to Nineveh and the city repents. Instead of rejoicing in their salvation, Jonah is upset with God. Now this is an all-powerful God who could have just said, "Jonah, I've had it with you. I am sick and tired of your attitude. We're done." But what does God do? He reasons with Jonah. In fact, that book ends with God waiting on Jonah to come around.

When God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6, He emphasized His own willingness to wait. "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...." (KJV). Instead of the word longsuffering, most versions say, "slow to anger." Where would we be today, if God was not longsuffering? Do we have any Jonah's in the house?

Peter reminded the Christians of his day, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (KJV) 2 Peter 3:9.

And so it is so here in our text in God's dealings with His people Israel—God waits, "And therefore the Lord (earnestly) waits (expecting, looking, and longing) to be gracious to you...."

Notice the description of how God waits:

¹ Jonah 2:1-2f says, "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly, And said, I cried out of my distress to the Lord...." (Amplified). All scriptural quotes in this manuscript are from the Amplified Version unless indicated otherwise. In the distress of his circumstances (God's corrective adversities) Jonah cried out (see Isaiah 30:19) or prayed a prayer that God heard and answered.

“Earnestly”—He is emotionally involved in the process. He does not sit back coldly and wait to bless us. He is earnest in His desire to bring good in our lives. Could I suggest that your Heavenly Father is more earnest about bringing blessing to your life than you and I are about receiving it? I’m earnest in my desire to receive God’s blessing. But never, never think God is indifferent about the matter. He sent His own Son to suffer and die for our blessing. His intention toward you is to bless. Paul asked the question in Rom 8:31 “What shall we then say to these things?He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (KJV). God waits earnestly to answer our prayers.

God waits “expectantly” as well. God is extremely hopeful about you and me. He will not force us to serve Him. He will not turn us into robots. But He will work in our lives with the expectation of bringing us into the fullness of His purposes and blessings. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, I picture the father (who is representative of our Heavenly Father) looking and longing and hopeful toward his child’s response to Him. Luke 15:20 describes the event when the prodigal was returning to the father, “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (KJV). That father was earnestly, expectantly, looking and longing for that day. That’s why he saw him coming even when he was still a long way off.

Now we are in Isaiah 30. It’s about 700 BC. They have a big problem to solve. Assyria is the most powerful empire on earth. It is poised to attack Israel. This is no small problem and it’s got to be solved. A problem in our lives is always a test—in that we have to decide how we will resolve it.

Now in our text we want to talk about why God has to wait. Notice that verse 18 begins with the word “therefore.” “And therefore the Lord (earnestly) waits (expecting, looking, and longing) to be gracious to you....” Draw a circle around that word

“therefore” with an arrow pointing to the previous 17 verses. The explanation of why God waits is there in those 17 verses. Follow with me as we read.

Isa 30:1-17

"Woe to the rebellious children, says the LORD, who take counsel and carry out a plan, but not Mine, and who make a league and pour out drink offering, but not by my Spirit, thus adding sin to sin;

2 Who set out to go down to Egypt, and have not asked Me—to flee to the stronghold of Pharaoh and to strengthen themselves in his strength and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!

3 Therefore shall the strength and protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt be to your humiliation and confusion.

4 For though [Pharaoh's] officials are at Zoan and his ambassadors arrive at Hanes [in Egypt],

5 Yet will all be ashamed because of a people [the Egyptians] who cannot profit them, who are not a help or benefit, but a shame and disgrace.

6 A mournful, inspired prediction (a burden to be lifted up) concerning the beasts of the South (the Negeb): Oh, the heavy burden, the load of treasures going to Egypt! Through a land of trouble and anguish, in which are lioness and lion, viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their riches upon the shoulders of young donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that will not and cannot profit them.

7 For Egypt's help is worthless and toward no purpose. Therefore I have called her Rahab Who Sits Still.

8 Now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be a witness for the time to come forever more.

9 For this is a rebellious people, faithless and lying sons, children who will not hear the law and instruction of the Lord:

10 Who [virtually] say to the seers [by their conduct], See not! and to the prophets Prophecy not to us what is right! Speak to us smooth things, prophecy deceitful illusions.

11 Get out of the true way, turn aside from the path, cease holding up before us the Holy One of Israel.

12 Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you despise and spurn this [My] word and trust in cunning and oppression, in crookedness and perverseness, and rely on them,

13 Therefore this iniquity and guilt will be to you like a broken section of a high wall, bulging out and ready [at some distant day] to fall, whose crash will [then] come suddenly and swiftly, in an instant.

14 And he shall break it as a potter's vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing so that there cannot be found among its pieces one large enough to carry coals of fire from the hearth or to dip out of the cistern.

15 For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning [to Me] and resting [in Me] you shall be saved; in quietness and in trusting confidence shall be your strength. But you would not,

16 And you said, 'No! We will speed [our own course] on horses. Therefore you will speed [in flight from your enemies]! You said, 'We will ride upon swift steeds [down our own way]! Therefore will they who pursue you be swift, [so swift that]

17 A thousand of you will flee at the threat of one of them; at the threat of five you will flee till you are left like a beacon or a flagpole on the top of a mountain, and like a signal on a hill.

18 And therefore the Lord [earnestly] waits [expecting, looking, and longing] to be gracious to you....”

So what is God waiting for? He is waiting for His people to come around to His way of doing things. He is waiting for them to have a change of heart. All the difficulties and judgment woven into

those first 17 verses are not designed to punish but to turn those people around toward God.²

First, we must realize that Isaiah is not talking to the Assyrians. He is not talking to the Egyptians. He is not talking to pagans. He is talking to God's own people. He even refers to them as "rebellious" or self-willed children.

Second, these people probably did not see themselves that way. They went to church every week. They did some good things—maybe donated to Salvation Army and gave a turkey to a needy family. If they had already seen themselves in this light, there would have been no need for God to send Isaiah to say this to them. They felt they were God's people, people of covenant, Abraham's seed. In Isaiah 58:3 God's people are baffled that God is not answering their prayers. "Why have we fasted, they say, and You do not see it? Why have we afflicted ourselves, and You take no knowledge [of it]?" In that chapter and the one that follows God explains to them what they're doing wrong.³

The same thing was true in Jesus' day. The Pharisees saw themselves as the defenders of the truth and the representatives of God Himself. As a Pharisee, Paul (Saul) saw himself as doing God a service as he persecuted the church.

In Isaiah 30, the prophet is talking to people who feel they have simply taken the only reasonable course available to them. Assyria is way too strong for them to defend against. This problem is beyond my own resources. If I can get Egypt to help me, I might have a chance.

So here briefly are the mistakes God points out to His people in Isaiah 30.

² There is a powerful contrast in this chapter between the correction God gives His self-willed children (described in the first 17 verses) in contrast to the wrathful punishment unleashed on the wicked (verses 27-33) represented by Assyria. Most of the affliction Israel experiences is simply a consequence of their bad choices; that trouble is redemptive (designed to bring them to their senses) rather than destructive.

³ Also see Mal. 1:6; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 13; Matt. 25:14. We must read Isaiah 30:1-17 with the realization that they did not see themselves this way in order to appreciate that we may be doing things that are hindering God's blessings in our lives and not be fully aware of how our choices/behaviors are delaying blessings.

1. You are being self-willed in the way you're conducting your life.

You're not asking Me what to do; you're simply looking at the problem—sizing it up---looking at possible solutions—picking the option that looks most promising—and proceeding out of your own natural thinking. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” (NKJV). The problem many Christians fall into is to apply that verse this way, “Trust in the LORD with SOME of your heart (maybe trust God 50% and your own solutions 50%), And don't lean too much on your own understanding 6 In SOME of your ways acknowledge Him (especially on Sunday morning—but business is business—you have to handle that different) and now since I am a child of God I have the assurance that He will direct my paths. The word “all” is crucial to the promise in Proverbs 3. I have no doubt in my mind that the people in Isaiah 30 were doing some good things and they would have never described themselves the way Isaiah describes them in these first 17 verses.

2. They were not trusting God with their problem. God had given them the way of victory in Isaiah 30:15. “In returning [to Me] and resting [in Me] you shall be saved; in quietness and in trusting confidence shall be your strength. But you would not.” You've got to come to Me with the problem. Egypt may look like a solution; but I see what Egypt really is—A Do Nothing Fraud—Rahab Who Sits Still. When push comes to shove, Egypt will be no help.

God is waiting for these people to look to Him as their source. He's waiting, longing for them to make that choice so that He can bless them.

Why does God have to wait before He can send blessing to this people? If He sent blessing without their repentance, it would only drive them further into deception. If He rescued them while

they were trusting Egypt instead of Him, they would think that is the way to live.

If I went out tomorrow and poured sand in my gas tank instead of gasoline, and God miraculously made my engine run perfectly, I would conclude that the way you keep your car going is by depending on sand in your gas tank. If it were reinforced over and over I would become more and more convinced that's the way you do it.

The way life works right in this life (and in the life to come) is by depending on God as your source. If you abide in the Vine⁴, if you draw upon God's power and grace,⁵ it will work. If you rely on your own strength or the resource the world has to offer—in the long run it will not work.

So they put their trust in the wrong place.

3. They decided they didn't want to hear the truth about it all. Isaiah 30:10-11 "Who [virtually] say to the seers [by their conduct], See not!"

Notice they are not explicitly making that statement. They are making that statement by the choices they make. I don't like those negative sermons. I need to hear something uplifting. I need to be encouraged, not criticized. Well I think I'm going over here to this church.

Of course, the word of God does build us up, but it does not flatter us. In fact, the rest of verse 10 says what these people wanted was flattery, not correction.⁶

Verse 10 "Who [virtually] say to the seers [by their conduct], See not! and to the prophets Prophecy not to us what is right! Speak to us smooth⁷ things, prophesy deceitful illusions." The Hebrew word translated "deceitful" could read "flattering" illusions.

⁴ John 15

⁵ 2Cor. 12:9; 2Tim. 2:1.

⁶ 2Tim. 4:3.

⁷ NIV translates it "pleasant things."

Build up my self-esteem. Tell me it's ok if I am living in immorality and cheating on my income tax and defrauding the government with lies and stealing from my employer—God understand and He loves me so much it doesn't matter what I do.⁸

This is the great deception of our day. A lawless spirit is marching through the land and the church's own lawlessness has opened the door for it.

Verse 11 "Get out of the true way, turn aside from the path...." We don't want to hear about self-denial and commitment.

"...cease holding up before us the Holy One of Israel. " If you have a pen, circle the word Holy. They are not telling the preacher to stop talking about the "Loving" One, or the "Merciful" One, or the "Forgiving" One. But when you hold up before us the "Holy One" then we start feeling guilty about some of the things we want to keep doing. 1 Peter 1:15-16 makes the application for us, "...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (NKJV).

This is the message that is less and less tolerated in our society. After all Oprah Winfrey told us there are many ways to heaven and God's love will get us through. For people who do not read their Bible, her gospel sounds really good—she never holds up the "Holy One of Israel" as the standard. Her's is a very reassuring, feel-good message. The one big problem is that it's simply not true. The measurement of a message is not whether it feels good, but does it line up with the revelation of truth God has given in His word.

Anyway, it was a major problem for these people in Isaiah 30 because when you remove yourself from truth, you remove yourself from God-- because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. When you no longer want to be confronted (NIV) with the

⁸ A Gnostic error confronted by the early church (Romans 6:1-2; Titus 2:11-15; James 2:18; 2Pet. 2:19; 1John 3:7; Jude 1:4).

“Holy One of Israel”, you no longer have the avenue of repentance and entrance into blessing. Then God has to let the consequences of those decisions, correct the thinking.

“And therefore the Lord [earnestly] waits (expecting, looking, and longing) to be gracious to you....”

The world thinks that if God waits, then He must really be ticked off and must be waiting for the chance to smack somebody. Truth is, if God wants to smack somebody He doesn't have to wait, He doesn't have to ask anybody if its ok, He doesn't have to check with a committee. He's God and He can smack anytime He wants to.

But the world doesn't understand the heart of God. He doesn't wait for an opportunity to destroy.⁹ He waits for the opportunity to bless. His attitude is revealed toward even rebellious children in Isaiah 30:18 “And therefore the Lord [earnestly] waits (expecting, looking, and longing) to be gracious to you; and therefore He lifts Himself up, that He may have mercy on you and show loving-kindness to you. For the Lord is a God of justice....”

Get the picture. God is longing to bless. He rises up on His tiptoes looking for the moment when His people position themselves to receive His blessing. He is longing to solve their problem—in this case He is longing to defend them from their enemy, Assyria—to show Himself strong in behalf of His people. “For the Lord is a God of justice.” And when they get it right with Him and truly look to Him—He will execute justice in their behalf.

Follow with me as we read the rest of the chapter. This is the opportunity God is waiting for—the opportunity to bless!

Isaiah 30:19-33

“¹⁹ O people who dwell in Zion at Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. ²⁰ And though the Lord

⁹ John 10:10

gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide Himself any more, but your eyes will constantly behold your Teacher.”

(In contrast to their rejection of the Holy One of Israel, God’s correction has opened them up to the Teacher and they will out of a good heart “constantly behold” Him. Instead of following their own ways, they will now receive His guidance.)

“²¹ And your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.”

(Instead of giving blessing upon them in their rebellious state, God has worked a change of heart through their adversities described in the first part of the chapter. We see this change of heart in the next couple of verses.)

“²² Then you will defile your carved images overlaid with silver and your molten images plated with gold; you will cast them away as a filthy bloodstained cloth, and you will say to them, Be gone!”

(Once they turn from their idols watch the blessings flow. This is what God has been longing to do for His people.)

“²³ Then will He give you rain for the seed with which you sow the soil, and bread grain from the produce of the ground, and it will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures. ²⁴ The oxen likewise and the young donkeys that till the ground will eat savory *and* salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and with fork. ²⁵ And upon every high mountain and upon every high hill there will be brooks and streams of water in the day of the great slaughter [the day of the Lord], when the towers fall [and all His enemies are destroyed]. ²⁶ Moreover, the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days [concentrated in one], in

the day that the Lord binds up the hurt of His people, and heals their wound [inflicted by Him because of their sins].”

(Notice back in verse 20 where their affliction came from--the wounds God is binding up here are the wounds He has lovingly inflicted on His people to turn them from their own destruction. When we immediately attribute trouble as simply coming from the devil, there is the danger that we won't repent of what needs to be changed in our own lives. Before you blame it on the devil, make sure there's nothing you need to address in your own behavior. There is a devil that opposes the advancement of God's kingdom. Paul encountered much opposition while doing exactly what God told him to do. But often when trouble that comes into a Christian's life, God is trying to get the heart right so that He can bless and defend that child of God. Remember the problem Israel was trying to solve with their enemy, Assyria. Now see the imagery of how God steps in to defend His people in the remaining verses.)

“²⁷ Behold, the ^[a]Name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with His anger, and in thick, rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is like a consuming fire. ²⁸ And His breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction; and a bridle that causes them to err will be in the jaws of the people. ²⁹ You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart as when one marches in procession with a flute to go to the temple on the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. ³⁰ And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard and the descending blow of His arm to be seen, coming down with indignant anger and with the flame of a devouring fire, amid crashing blast *and* cloudburst, tempest, and hailstones. ³¹ At the voice of the Lord the Assyrians will be stricken with dismay *and* terror, when He smites them with His rod. ³² And every passing stroke of the staff of punishment *and* doom which the Lord lays upon them shall be to the sound of [Israel's] timbrels

and lyres, when in battle He attacks [Assyria] with swinging *and* menacing arms. ³³ For Topheth [a place of burning and abomination] has already been laid out *and* long ago prepared; yes, for the [Assyrian] king *and* [the god] Molech it has been made ready, its pyre made deep *and* large, with fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.”

Now come back with me to the key factor in the shift of God’s people from a position of correction from the Lord in verses 1-17 to a position of blessing from the Lord in verses 18-33.

Beginning with the latter half of verse 18 “...Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are all those who (earnestly) wait for Him, who expect and look and long for Him (for His victory; His favor, His love, His peace, His joy, and His matchless, unbroken companionship)!” This is what we’re waiting for in one form or another in our lives—(for His victory; His favor, His love, His peace, His joy, and His matchless, unbroken companionship)! That alone is the outline for a great sermon. Whatever you’re waiting on God for, can surely fall into that description somewhere—not the least of which is “His matchless, unbroken companionship”.

So here is an interesting parallel in Isaiah 30:18: God waiting and us waiting—waiting for us to get positioned for the outpouring of the Father’s bless. Blessed are all who earnestly wait for Him—I want that blessing—who expect and look and long for Him. That is a certain kind of waiting that we should be participating in. It’s not a passive waiting; It’s earnest—it’s engaged—it’s expectant). It is a waiting that is looking to God for the answer.

The first part of the next verse is an essential part of it. Isaiah 30:19 “O people who dwell in Zion at Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.” When God brought me to Isaiah 30 I did not realize He would be driving home once again

the theme of everything He has said to me the last three months.¹⁰ “...He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry...” Are there unanswered prayers in your life? Are there problems to be solved? Are there unrealized blessings? “He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry...” When God spoke to me from that verse in this chapter, my response is “But I have been crying out to you—with an unusual level of earnest. I have been seeking you.” But He alone knows when the cry is what it ought to be. What He expects from one person may not be the same as what He expects from another. “To whom much is given, much is required.” Bottom line, He decides when the cry is what it ought to be for me. I’m not saying prayers or crying out to God earn us anything. I am saying that God is for many of us waiting, longing to bless us beyond our wildest dreams—He is waiting to hear our cry. A quick prayer asking God for help does not seem to satisfy the criteria in my case. What is God wanting from you in terms of crying out to Him? That is between you and Him. What I see in our text is this: There is a crying out to God that addresses the issues in our own hearts at a level that positions us to receive blessings we long for. Jerm. 29:12-13 “Then you will call upon Me, and you will come and pray to Me, and I will hear and heed. Then you will seek Me, inquire for, and require Me [as a vital necessity] and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” When? “...when you search for Me with all your heart.” Verse 14 “I will be found by you, says the Lord....”

¹⁰ See my sermon dated Sept. 14, 2014 entitled “Between a Rock and a Hard Place” and sermon dated Oct. 26, 2014 entitled “God Will Fix It For You.”