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# God waits for us

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 10 December 2023

Isaiah 40:1-11 • 2 Peter 3:8-15a • Mark 1:1-8

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

As we read the Bible, and it is a book which can and I think should be read every day, we often come across verses that jump out at us. They catch our attention and make us pause in our reading, either because they are surprising, or they are something we never thought of before, or they suddenly make us understand better a truth about God or Jesus. Or they illuminate something in our daily lives, or suggest a course of action where we might have been uncertain about what to do. The Bible is not a technical manual, but it is curious how often it can help us in the most ordinary ways if we let it. And if we approach it with the attitude that we give thanks to God in all things, and

that all our activities and thoughts and feelings can be dedicated to God, we will be surprised how the Bible can guide us.

What struck me in my reading this week was the very reassuring and hope-giving verse in our selection from 2 Peter today. Peter writes: "The Lord ... is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance." It's verses like this one that make my job easy, because I want above all to bring as many people to faith as I can, or to deepen the faith of as many as I can. God sometimes seems to have a bad reputation with those who do not yet know God. To some, God may seem to be wrathful, unforgiving and quick to anger, and one who delights in punishment. It is true that there are many instances of punishment in the Bible, and God may indeed punish us; but what God wants to do is to love us, to take care of us, to make us feel happy and safe.

God does not want any one of us to perish. Peter was not speaking of simply dying at the end of one's life on earth, but about the eternal life which cheats death and is a gift from God. In other words, God does not want any of us to miss out on living forever in the joy of Communion with our heavenly Father. God made us not just for this short life, but for all time. We are built to last, not just for 70 or 80 years, but forever. We speak of dying as leaving this life, but God's view is of eternity. Since the Holy Spirit is with us and in us, there is in a sense no discontinuity in God's eyes from the earthly to the heavenly life. To perish would be to lose our life eternally, and God wants that for no one.

To be clear, since eternal life is a gift from God, what we are saying is that God wants to give this gift to all of us. We must accept Jesus as our Saviour in order to be eligible for this gift. God is under no obligation; God's grace is a free gift. I do not, and I cannot, place any conditions on God. It is clear that God wants us first to repent of our wrongdoings, and commit our lives to Jesus Christ; and then, if God wills, we will receive this great gift. But since we believe that God wants this for us, we may indeed live in the strong hope of eternal life.

Fortunately, since we are fallible human beings and do not always do the right things we should do, or avoid the wrongs things we shouldn't do, Peter also tells us that God is patient. God will wait for us to accept Jesus. No matter how late in life we repent, if we are sincere, God will accept our repentance. This is not of course a license to do whatever we want for 69 years and then repent in our 70th year, because the benefits of living in God's grace are great. God may well choose to accept a deathbed confession — but why wait? There is joy in living in God's grace. It's the way God designed the world to work. If we fight against God, we just make things more difficult for ourselves. To be sure, life can be difficult even for the most faith-filled person; but the burden is always lightened if we share it with God. I wish I had come to Christ earlier in

my life, not that I was otherwise such a terrible person, but the joy to be found in the life of faith I lead now makes me wish I had known it sooner. I have to consider that it was God's plan.

The years of our lives are a gift from God. Perhaps it took me longer than some people to come to Christ, but God gave me that time. Time is opportunity. Speaking of the time before Christ's birth, William Barclay writes:

The years God gave the world were a further opportunity for men to repent and turn to him. Every day which comes to us is a gift of mercy. It is an opportunity to develop ourselves; to render some service to our fellow-men; to take one step closer to God.<sup>1</sup>

This is true also of the times we live in, in anticipation of Jesus' second coming. I give thanks that God gave me plenty of time to come to Jesus and let him change my life. It was time spent, perhaps, in preparation for becoming a Christian, and I cannot truly regret it taking so long, as I know that God's time is different from ours — and it is God's time that matters.

As for those who do not yet know Jesus, we join with God in wanting them to take that positive step of faith. God wants all people to turn to Christ in faith, and as God's people, that should be our greatest wish as well. In imitation of Christ, we pray that all the world will come to know the grace, the patience, the compassion, and above all the love of our Creator. In Jesus' name, amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, *The Letters of James and Peter* (St Andrew Press:1976), p342-3.