

# Faith Enough to Wait

Part 4 of Sermon Series:

*Pillars of Faith*

a sermon based on

Luke 14:1, 7-14

and delivered on

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at

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Today, we're wrapping up this sermon series *Pillars of Faith*. I think this might be the most difficult. Waiting. I hate waiting. When I'm sitting in the waiting room at the doctor's office filling out forms that ask for "patient" information, I almost want to scream – "I'm not patient!" I'm more like the elderly man, who after waiting three hours at the doctor's office, got up to leave, and when the nurse gave him a look he said, "I guess I'll just go home and die of natural causes."<sup>1</sup> Right?

Sometimes it feels like that with faith. Faith – that assurance of things hoped for, that conviction of things not seen – which we hear about in Hebrews 11:1 takes so long sometimes. Of course time is relative. When we're held up by a red light, we might complain about how long the light takes to change. {aside: Ironically, I've never thought that about the yellow light or the green} The red light makes me wait. Sometimes, we might even be tempted to just go for it, especially when it's the middle of the night and there isn't another car to be seen. Why must we wait, then? But we do. Or we should – I'm not about to give you permission to start running stoplights. But it can be frustrating. If there was only something we could do, right?

I've looked online for gadgets that will turn the light. They exist. Fire trucks and ambulances and police cars have them – so that they respond to emergencies more efficiently. Maybe, that's why those are the only vehicles for which those devices are legal. Think of the chaos that would ensue if everyone had one in their vehicle. Traffic lights would blink red and green like some deranged Christmas display. Here's the irony – everyone would end up stopped out of confusion or collision.

In the Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus noted how everyone was jostling to get the best seats – the seats of honor. I don't know if they were elbowing others or just trying to rush in early to get the best seat. I wonder if during the commotion anyone had been asked to move for the sake of someone more important. That might have happened. So then when Jesus pointed out that maybe it would be best to take a seat unworthy of one's sense of entitlement or self-importance trusting that the host will set things right when the time comes asking someone else to move. "Scoot down, this is my friend's seat." One embarrassed and one esteemed – not by another – but by their own attitude.

What Jesus is warning us about is rushing our expectation of faith so that we actually miss the full benefit of the things hoped for. We see it in Scripture when Abraham and Sarah enlist (and that's a nice way of putting it) Hagar in the quest to claim God's promise that Abraham would have a son.<sup>2</sup> She produced one – Ishmael, but the conflict that resulted still echoes today. Simon Magus – the magician who came to believe the Gospel – saw the miracles (healing and exorcisms) that were being done by the apostles and offered money to receive the same power – and risked damnation.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Jacob was patient. He worked seven years to earn Rachel's hand in marriage – but then his father-in-law pulled the old switcheroo and he ended up marrying her older sister, Leah. Then after having to promise seven more years, he got to marry Rachel a week later.<sup>4</sup> That might not sound encouraging, but his faithfulness – his devotion to the promise that he would marry Rachel – paid off, even when his Laban tried to pull one over. Laban got his comeuppance; but that's a story for another time.

What we miss in our impatience is a sense of God's patience with us. In Romans 2:4, Paul asks, "Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Sometimes, we're not ready to claim the blessing. God takes his time to make sure that we are.

As it says in Hebrews,

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hodgin, *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004) 105.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 16

<sup>3</sup> Acts 8:14-24

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 29:9-30

“Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.<sup>5</sup>

God so wants us to receive the promise that sometime it means waiting. How many prophets waited for Jesus to come, but didn't get to see him? He came when it was time. How many of the people wanted him to overthrow the powers of the world then? Instead, he did the opposite: He allowed himself to be sacrificed on that cross, so that he could claim a victory over death so that we don't have to be constrained by oppressors in our midst.

We're anxious for his return: some of us with anticipation that he will set things right; and others anxious that there are too many souls to reach and we need more time. Quite the paradox. But with a faith that is willing to wait – to forgo immediate gratification – there is hope.

Let me tell you about John Blanchard. He served in the army during World War II. While he was serving he came across a book in a library. The previous owner of the book had penciled in notes that revealed “a considerate soul and a gentle mind.” Her name was written inside the front cover, Miss Hollis Maynell. Lt. Blanchard was enamored. He managed to track down her address, and thus began a thirteen month correspondence. He had fallen in love.

When he returned stateside, he reached out and asked to meet her in person. She agreed. Having never met nor seen a photograph, she told him that he would recognize her by a red rose in her lapel.

As he got off the train in New York, “Lieutenant John Blanchard straightened his Army uniform and studied the crowd.” As he was searching, a bombshell blonde passing by looked him in the eye and said, “Going my way sailor.” Wow. But as she passed he got a glimpse of the rose. There she was – grey hair, well past forty. More than plump – her cankles accentuated her feet trying to burst out of her low, tight shoes.

Without hesitating and with the small blue book that had instigated the affair, he went up to the woman and said, “I'm Lieutenant John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to lunch.”

With that the woman smiled and said, “I don't know what this is all about, but that pretty blonde gal, begged me to wear this rose and told me that if you asked me to dinner, I should tell you that she's waiting for you in that restaurant across the street.”<sup>6</sup>

When we put our trust in God's promises and remain faithful, we will be blessed. As aggravating as it is to wait, as frustrating as it is to feel unappreciated, remember that God is working to assure that the promise is fulfilled just right. Promises we won't miss when we have the faith enough to wait. AMEN.

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<sup>5</sup> Heb. 6:9-12

<sup>6</sup> Gregory L. Tolle, *Lectionary Tales for the Pulpit Series. Series V. Cycle C* (Lima, Ohio: CSS Pub. Co, 2006) 139-141.