

Portrait of Waiting

Ruth 3:18 – 4:10

I. The Problem and the Power of Waiting

It's almost frustrating how the Bible is so consistently honest about the role of waiting in life.

We like passion, we aren't so fond of patience.

We like to walk in victory, but we aren't so fond of waiting on the Lord.

- The Scriptures do not lie to us or give us false hope regarding God's propensity for putting His people in places where they have to wait...
- And this isn't just a New Testament phenomenon...go back to the OT, and you'll see that waiting was difficult THEN!

AND NOW...BUT NOW...Here is the state of the world – we move faster and have no patience for waiting more than ever before.

Fast Food, Faster Times

Stanford DeVoe, a researcher at the University of Toronto, wanted to explore if our "fast-food culture" was changing our lives in ways beyond just our eating habits. So DeVoe and another colleague conducted a series of experiments in which researchers subliminally flashed corporate logos for McDonald's, KFC, Taco Bell, Burger King, Subway, and Wendy's. A control group saw other images but no fast-food logos. When the two groups were asked to do an unrelated task, the fast-food group tried to complete it much faster than the non-fast-food group. In another experiment, flashes of fast-food images made students less able to sit back and enjoy music. A third experiment found that people exposed to fast-food logos showed a greater reluctance for saving.

Based on these experiments, DeVoe has concluded that fast food helps us save time, but even just thinking about fast food restaurants make us live with more speed and less patience. DeVoe said, "Fast food culture ... doesn't just change the way we eat but it can also fundamentally alter the way we experience our time.

DeVoe claims that the impatience promoted by our fast-food culture and mindset "stops us from smelling the roses."

- Science Daily, "Exposure to Fast Food Can Make Us Impatient," (3-26-10)

The Pace of Interest

With customer interactions occurring increasingly on the internet, the amount of time that brands have to capture attention in an advertisement is incredibly small. The average ad on Facebook is viewed for only 2.5 seconds by desktop users. On mobile, that number drops to a mere 1.7 seconds.

- Michael Brenner, "How to Build an Ad That Grabs Attention in 2 Seconds or Less," October 3, 2019, marketinginsidergroup.com

If we hate waiting and we are growing less patient there are a couple of things that we probably need to deal with:

- Patience is not just a "valuable skill to have," but Paul tells the Galatian church it is literally one of the evidences of God's presence in our lives – what we call the "fruit of the Spirit" (**Galatians 5:22-23**)

So what if patience is not just something we need to get better at so we're good at waiting in line, waiting for food, or waiting in traffic?

The apostle Paul actually sets up a profound line of thinking when he suggests **one of the characteristics of God we reflect** when the Spirit of God is directing our life is patience.

So what Paul seems to be saying by implication is this: impatience is one of the markers of a world that is **operating in opposition with the way it was created to run originally**.

And you could say that about any of the fruit of the Spirit.

It's important to remember that the fruit of the Spirit are not just ethical or moral characteristics that we need to adopt to be good, polite and well adjusted humans. No, the fruit of the spirit are literally the reflections of the character of God that get into us when the spirit of God is given access to the deep places of our being.

So, being able to wait it's not just a skill set that keeps us happy for longer, they're actually seems to be a deeper benefit that we might get a glimpse of in Romans chapter 8.

- The Bible tells so many stories about waiting that we cannot, in good conscience, believe that every time we wait for something it is because Creation has short-circuited or God is punishing us!
 - o This just is NOT true!
 - o So what if waiting is actually healthy? What if patience is actually beneficial? What if the world's bent toward hyper-efficiency isn't actually consistent with the way the world was designed to work?
 - o What if waiting is not just a skill set that keeps us happy for longer, but it actually seems to hold a deeper benefit?

We might get a glimpse of in Romans chapter 8:

Romans 8:22-25

²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ **But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.**

WAITING CREATES SPACE FOR US TO PONDER AND MEDITATE ON THE ONE WE'RE WAITING FOR AND ON THE HOPE WE'RE WAITING WITH.

- Paul said in **Philippians 4:8-9** that the more we set our minds on good things, the more we would experience the God of peace (something Paul seems to say as a way to highlight which aspect of God's goodness this practice gives us access to)
- **But at the pace most of us live at, how can we possible meditate on the depths of the goodness, on the epic heights of purity and excellence of God?**

So when we take the time, when we see Him, something happens: our perception of God changes – it changes when we go from being a number in a que to being a son or daughter **waiting in hopeful patience because we've been given the first taste of the fullness of the beauty which is coming.**

Waiting on the Lord is not like waiting in line, it is like waiting in love.

- Most of us don't like to wait in line, lines represent delays between us and our goals – think back to the last time you were excited about waiting in traffic...or just think how hurriedness causes you to dream of becoming a warrior for justice at Food Lion when you see someone with 12 items in a 10-or-less line!

- But to look at engaged people, knee deep in love, waiting on a wedding day is a much different experience, isn't it?

WAITING ON CHRISTMAS EVE WHEN I'VE BOUGHT MY FAMILY "SECRET GIFTS" MAKES ME GIDDY LIKE A LITTLE KID BECAUSE I'M **WAITING IN ANTICIPATION** FOR SOMETHING I KNOW BUT HAVE NOT YET SEEN!

When our waiting is rooted in the character of God and we are confident of His promise and truth...our waiting can actually produce peace instead of worry!! WHAT IF WAITING IS THE ANTIDOTE FOR A WORLD PLAGUED WITH ANXIETY?

So Ruth comes home with a more than enough barley but not nearly enough satisfaction...AND NAOMI TELLS HER, "WAIT..."

As she and Naomi wait, we have the privilege of seeing what's happening at the city gates...where Boaz has gone to keep his promise.

BECAUSE EVERY TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF WAITING ON GOD, EVEN IF YOU CAN'T SEE HIM, YOU CAN BE SURE NO MATTER WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING HE'S KEEPING HIS PROMISE.

II. We Can Be Settled in a Place of Waiting...

a. **Because our Redeemer is Working (3:18–4:1a)**

- i. Naomi's words to Ruth are powerful: "Wait...until you learn how the matter turns out."
 1. The word "wait" in the Hebrew is *yasab*
 - a. It doesn't simply mean to hold on
 - b. The core idea is to ABIDE, to inhabit the place you are, to make it a dwelling place
 - c. It's a word that points to settled-ness and covering
- ii. But why? Why should Ruth be settled where she is? "for the man will not rest" until the matter is settled!

AND WHAT WE SEE IN THE LANGUAGE BETWEEN CHAPTERS 3 AND 4 IS POWERFUL:

- We see that Naomi's instruction to Ruth in 3:18 is to "yasab"
- But in 4:1 we see that Boaz's posture at the city gates, early that morning is ALSO "YASAB"
- The passage literally says, "**Ruth you can settle yourself in this place of waiting because your Redeemer is waiting on your behalf at the point of decision!**"

You can be settled even when things are incomplete because your Redeemer will not settle until everything has been finished!

- The expression in 3:18, "will not rest" describing Boaz's condition, literally means that **he will not be undisturbed** – which is a useful double negative because the Redeemer is not going to release His awareness of your need until your need is fully met!
- So he's going to settle himself at the gates so she can settle herself in the house.

JESUS SETTLED HIMSELF IN A PLACE OF AFFLICTION SO WE COULD BE SETTLED IN A PLACE OF ASSURANCE. While the disciples huddled in locked rooms, Jesus hung on the cross. And long before you and I had ever done anything right or wrong, He was going to the grave on our behalf!

What I'm waiting on, GOD IS WORKING ON

And this teaches us something so important: You might be waiting but He is working.

Ruth was holding on, fighting the fight of patience...but even if she was anxious and nervous, the fact was her Redeemer was actively meeting the need.

When we've received His promise, His word, we are NOT guaranteed a front row seat, but we are guaranteed that whatever He starts in us He will absolutely finish!

Two Stages, One Play

In an ancient form of Chinese drama, plays were often performed on a two-level stage. On the first level, the drama would unfold in the natural sequence of the script, while on the second level the last act of the play would be acted out simultaneously. This gave the audience a distinct advantage—they knew how the story would end. In fact, it was not uncommon for the audience to yell to the actors on level one, warning them that their attitudes or actions were threatening the good outcomes of the final act of the play.

Life is a lot like living on “level one.” When life on level one is in the dumper, it's easy to forget that the unseen hand of God is already at work to bring the last act to His glory and our good.

b. Because our Redeemer is Wise (4:1b–6)

- i. There's nothing wrong with being smart about things...Christians aren't called to be ignorant or naïve...
 1. Actually Jesus said we are to be “wise as serpents and gentle as doves” (Matthew 10:16)
 - a. This passage is curious for several reasons, but if we're talking about Hebrew imagery the serpent did not have a great reputation (see the story of the Garden of Eden and the last days of Adam and Eve's life of perfection)
 - b. But Jesus isn't afraid to use this picture when speaking to His followers:
 - i. Do no harm, but be compelling.
 - ii. You aren't to force anyone to follow the Lord, but you also aren't supposed to make it an intellectual impossibility.
 - iii. Persecution can absolutely be a part of the believer's life, but there are some persecutions we get ourselves into NOT because of faithfulness but because of foolishness!
 - c. There's no prize for having a shallow understanding of your faith, and there's nothing anti-Jesus about being crafty
 2. Boaz leaves nothing to chance
 - a. The man with no name appears
 - b. This man, who could possibly play an enormous role in the story, is not named...he is just referred to by Boaz with a term of endearment: “friend”
 - c. Boaz has been waiting all morning for this moment, searching the approaching businessmen who have come to barter, trade, and buy at the gate
 - d. elders would, out of habit, go to the area of the gate
 - i. the gate, in Hebrew antiquity, was the official court
 - ii. business was done here, disputes were settled here, in this case we see something similar to “family court” here at the gate
 - iii. the elders were respected men of the city who had been appointed for just these types of situations
 3. Boaz has everyone settled and he begins his pitch
 - a. There's something interesting that happens here
 - b. **Boaz breaks the deal up into two parts**, two installments for this redeeming kinsman

- i. **first** Boaz tells him of the land – land was a sign of wealth, strength, power, and affluence – any man with the means would have been quick to scoop up a piece of land
- ii. **second** Boaz tells him of the door prize that comes with the land: a Moabite woman... a strange woman from a strange land, a girl that was damaged goods
- c. This is Boaz being shrewd
 - i. Boaz must have known that the nearer kinsman would be quick to snatch up the parcel of land
 - ii. But, Boaz likely also knew that taking a foreign girl he didn't even know was a much bigger deal
 - iii. **So, not lying, but being savvy**, Boaz made sure that the man understood what came with the land: **the responsibility of extending the legacy of the family**

Lying and trickery are very different from resourcefulness and shrewd living.

Here, we see Boaz is faithful to the laws and traditions of his people, and he is a gentleman as he conducts the business at hand, but he is not soft or stupid. Boaz didn't come to the gate for a parcel of land, he was a wealthy land owner already. He came to secure Ruth's hand in marriage. With that in mind, **Boaz "shaped" the situation to ensure that he had the best chance of leaving that place with his goal achieved**. Again, not by trickery, but by wise and shrewd business practice.

c. Because our Redeemer Always Wins (4:7-10)

- i. Look at what happens here:
 - 1. Boaz ANOUNCES TO EVERYONE what he has just laid claim to
 - 2. There isn't the slightest hesitation...BOAZ THE REDEEMER IS EXCITED TO PUBLICLY RECEIVE WHAT THE OTHER KINSMAN WAS QUICK TO REJECT!

Is there any greater picture of Jesus in the entire Old Testament?

What was rejected by everyone else was cherished by the Redeemer.

- The process Abraham and Sarah gave up on (biological conception) God never quit on BECAUSE GOD DOESN'T ABANDON WHAT WE TEND TO LEAVE BEHIND!
- The barren womb of Hannah wasn't abandoned by Yahweh, it produced a leader who would bring revival and restoration to a broken nation BECAUSE GOD EMBRACES WHAT MANKIND REJECTS!
- The youngest of Jesse's house, the shepherd, might have been forgotten by his family, but Samuel said, "we're all going to stand while we wait on him" BECAUSE GOD LOVES TO ELEVATE WHAT WE'VE UNDER-VALUED!

- ii. The Victory of our Redeemer reveals something amazing here
 - 1. Who were you rooting for in this story?
 - 2. The answer should be pretty simple: Boaz...AND JUST THAT FACT REVEALS SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY AMAZING:

While this is Boaz being shrewd, there is more to this exchange because of what the text is supposed to do, and likely is doing, in us.

There is a subtle tension in this text that needs to be drawn out, regarding the nameless, nearer kinsman.

If we were watching this scene play out, or reading it for the first time, we would, almost certainly, gasp when Naomi's nameless relative says, "I will redeem it." (Ru 4:4).

But why?

If the nameless relative comes through and owns up to his responsibilities then Ruth gets a husband and, most likely, a child(ren). If he owns up to his responsibilities then Naomi's family property, name, lineage, and legacy are almost certainly saved (this is, after all, an act of redemption). IF NAMELESS GUY DECIDES TO BECOME THE REDEEMER THEN EVERYBODY GETS WHAT THEY NEED...RIGHT?

EXCEPT, BY NOW, WE AREN'T INTERESTED IN WHAT THEY NEED! THIS IS NO LONGER JUST A STORY ABOUT PROPERTY, CHILDREN AND LEGACY...THIS IS A LOVE STORY!!!

We gasp at this unexpected turn at the city gates, "I will redeem it," because we don't actually want the law, we want more than the law. This is not a story about a successful legal transaction, it's a story about beauty, about hope, about rescue, and about love.

Million Dollar Highway

In Western Colorado there is a road called the Million Dollar Highway. My guess is that both tourists and even most of the people who live on the western slope don't know how this road got its name.

They probably assume it got its name because it was expensive to build. That's not correct—although it probably was expensive to build because it runs through very difficult terrain and at a high altitude. The real reason it's called the Million Dollar Highway is because waste material from the ore in gold mines was used as the bed for that highway, and not all the gold dust and nuggets were removed by the mining processes available at the time. As a result, there is a partial roadbed of gold that is probably worth a lot more than a million dollars.

It isn't the cost that gave it its name, but rather what is inside it.