

God-less Waiting, God-full Quickening

1 Samuel 27:1-28:2

*“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; **but they who wait for the LORD** shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”*

Introduction: If you’ve ever wondered whether you enjoy waiting around or not, simply go to the DMV on a weekday without an appointment and find out. A few weeks ago I HAD an appointment but did not bring the necessary paperwork, so had to go home, get back in line, and wait again for my number to be called. There you sit with a mass of strangers, all of whom do NOT want to be there, all unsure of the process, hoping they don’t have to take the dreaded eye exam (ok, that’s just me), and watching as our governments finest operate behind the counter like they are working at a mom n pop diner with three customers! Everyone is on edge, and some deal with it by NOT making eye contact, while others see it as an opportunity to tell you their life story. Apparently I have a face that screams “please tell me all about your time inventions and how you thought foreign governments were tapping your phone so you shredded every piece of mail you ever received”. Waiting stinks, and Simi DMV is the best.

We want things now! We do not want to wait for decisions, traffic, or streaming services. Interruptions in internet services, tech support, or waiting in lines reveals how impatient we can be. But above these petty, day in and day out things, we have a hard time waiting for larger things in life: to buy a house, to have culture change, to see our spouse change, to have our kids stop disobeying, to have a painful situation change, to get back to some sort of normalcy, etc. Waiting not only reveals what’s really going on in my heart, i.e. *a lack of contentment, leaning toward complaining, walking in the flesh rather than the Spirit, a stunted view of God, etc.*, but also that we do not understand what God is doing IN us while waiting. The waiting room is God’s place to refine us. That’s why the Bible speaks to waiting. **“Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”** (Psalm 27:14) **“For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.”** (Psalm 62:5) Waiting reveals whether we treasure and trust the Lord completely, and being forced to wait only reinforces our opportunity to joyfully rest in Him. The whole Christian experience is actually one of waiting, as we anticipate the return of Christ and Him making all things new (Heb. 9:28; Titus 2:13) even as the creation itself awaits its redemption (Romans 8:19-22).

So this morning, we want to examine our hearts in light of waiting on the Lord, as we assess our view of situations where we are waiting for the Lord to do something or get us out of something. We come to a passage in **1 Samuel** which *ironically does not mention God at all*. It is a stretch of *God-less waiting*, where in light of waiting, David took matters into his own hands, and that led to tense situations and potentially losing his people and throne. This passage is unique not only for its lack of a mention of God, but we also know **exactly how long David functioned**. Often when we feel at the end of our rope and start leaning on our own understanding, if we would have known it would only be _____ amount of days/weeks/months, we could have endured. But God rarely tells us how long we have to wait so that we HAVE TO walk by faith, not by sight, since our faith is so valuable that God is willing to refine it, even through pressure and waiting (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

Context of Godless Waiting

If you have not been with us the last months or have been gone for a bit, it's good to catch up together where we find ourselves in the life of David and the progress of 1 Samuel. The time frame of David's life is not known exactly, but after defeating Goliath as a teenager, the rest of his teen years and 20's was in serving Saul or running for his life, since he was about 30 when he actually became the functional king (2 Sam 5:4). In other words, David's life for about 15 years was that of waiting for what was promised. In his late 20's, he has care over his family and wives, as well as 600 other men and their families. Not only was Saul pursuing him, but even the people of Israel were willing to sell him out (twice by the Ziphites, once by the city of Keilah, even after he had rescued them – 1 Sam. 23). Even though David acted justly by NOT killing Saul TWICE when he had opportunity, the hiding and living in the barren wilderness grew wearisome. And before we judge David too harshly for his upcoming actions, just try to put yourself into his shoes: he was on the run, had been promised something for over a decade, and had NO IDEA how long it would take to take hold of it...to him, it could have been another 10-20 years of running scared. But what he chose to do and how he went about it is instructive to us.

Godless Waiting Listens to the Counsel of Our Own Heart (1)

Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand."

Again, it is important to note that there is no mention of God in this passage, as David, like we do so often, tries to figure out the tension of life on his own. Coming out of a seeming victory of sparing Saul, Saul confessing his sin, and admitting his mistake (though his confessions never lasted long), David stated a faith driven trust in God's work and reward, knowing that his life was precious in the sight of God who would deliver him (1 Sam. 26:24). It is often at the time of our greatest victory and obvious faith that we fall prey to temptation and wayward thinking. This is exactly what happened to David.

Right after this event, perhaps emotionally spent and tired, he began to **listen to himself, taking counsel in his own heart**. Faith is hard and trust is proactive, and whenever we try in our own strength we will reach an end of that strength. Note that David did not **seek the Lord, seek out counsel, or confide in his friends**, but instead listened to **the propaganda or his own heart**. When he considered his plight, the decade of running, the odds stacked up, how he had been treated, the constancy of running, he began to conclude certain realities in his own heart. 1) **This WILL end with Saul's victory**, 2) **There is nothing better for me but to escape to the Philistines**, taking me out of the Promised Land and the place I was anointed king, 3) **This is the ONLY way for me to live, and that entails taking things into my own hands!**

How we think, how we make decisions, and who we listen to is the difference between pleasing the Lord and trusting ourselves. Most of us can quote **Proverbs 3:5-6**: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In ALL your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths"*, but living this truth out is difficult. We tend to do the opposite when we have been put in the waiting room, and easily *lean on our own understanding*. There is a promise here, that God will make our paths straight, but He does NOT give us a promise of **timing**, meaning the payoff of trust may take what seems like an excruciatingly long time. But that is all part of God's plan.

How do we stop listening to ourselves? How do we cut through the *junk* that we tell ourselves? **First**, we must cut off the inflow of wrong thinking. So much of the junk that comes in enters through the news of the day, the marketing, algorithms of social media, and worldly wisdom. When we are not cognizant of what we are consuming, we fall prey to the schemes of our enemy. **Second**, we want to become **MATURE and WISE in our thinking** (1 Cor. 14:20). We are to arm ourselves with the same way of thinking as Christ (1 Pet. 4:1-2), since we have the *mind of Christ* (1 Cor. 2:15-26). We consume Scripture in a way that goes beyond cursory and inconsistent reading to studying to understand, knowing that it is living and active (Heb. 4:12) and renews our mind (Eph. 4:23). **Third**, we connect the dots of life with Scripture, putting the truth of God's Word wisely into practice. But what does that look like? Let's look at two clear examples in the Psalms.

Psalm 42 & 43 – These two Psalms are either two parts of one longer Psalm or written closely together. Both deal with **spiritual depression**, dealing with the stuff of life that casts down our soul, makes it feel like God's forgotten us, and leaves us to cry ourselves to sleep. *Anyone ever been there?* When the Psalmists' heart cries out: "*why are you so down cast, o my soul?*" *Why is there such turmoil within me?*", the answer is not one of pity or victimhood. In trying to understand his own spiritual status, the Psalmist turns to **speaking to himself rather than listening to himself: "HOPE IN GOD; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God"** (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5). He had to remind himself of what was true when his emotions lied to him, or made him *feel* like moving AWAY from His God and the truth.

Psalm 73 – In this glorious and instructive Psalm, Asaph battled envy, bitterness, and a weary soul as he looked around and by comparison to everyone around him, his life felt like a mess. Not only that, but he had even TRIED to walk a path of righteousness, while ALL those around him were wicked, but THEY were ALL succeeding!!! "**All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence**" (Psalm 73:13) This is why the **comparison game in life and the church is a killer, since we compare based on partial truth without context**. It was only when he changed his input that things changed: **But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. UNTIL I WENT INTO THE SANCTUARY OF GOD; then I discerned their end.**" (73:16-17) Once he changed his INPUT point, coming into the sanctuary where the truth would be proclaimed, his perspective could shift as well. This shifted his **bitterness**, shed light on his **ignorance**, and brought him back to whole hearted worship and satisfaction:

Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

²⁴ *You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.*

²⁵ **Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.**

²⁶ *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

²⁷ **For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.**

²⁸ **But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.**

Asaph was able to move from bitterness to joy without changing circumstances by moving from *comparison to Biblical clarity*, and though his enemies may still be winning in the present, the future promises would bring justice. But more importantly, he was able to move from complaint to praise, treasuring His God MORE than focusing on his waiting plight. Perspective is small when we listen to our heart, and Godly perspective is needed to wait in faith.

Godless Waiting Takes Matters into Our Own Hands (2-7)

So David arose and went over, he and the **six hundred men** who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. ³ And David lived with **Achish at Gath**, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, **Ahinoam** of Jezreel, and **Abigail** of Carmel, Nabal's widow.

⁴ And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.

⁵ Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" ⁶ So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore, Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. ⁷ And the number of the days that **David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months**.

A few strange things happened to David once he listened to his heart: **1) He took matters into his own hands**, no longer waiting for God to deliver him but finding deliverance on his own; **2) He tried a formerly failed path**, once again going to GATH, the home of Goliath and place of the legendary drooling episode. This felt eerily like **Proverbs 26:11**, "Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly". **3) Amazingly, his plan worked!** Saul called off the dogs and stopped pursuing him.

Since the king of Gath did not want a small army of 600 men camped outside of his city (would be weirdly intimidating for those coming and going!), so the king gave David **Ziklag**, a city with an exact location that is unknown, but we have some idea (see map). Of note, Ziklag WAS part of the original land promise given by God to Israel (Joshua 15:21), but was clearly never conquered and thus was settled by foreigners. Now, there is a partial positive part, as Ziklag became part of the united monarchy after this, but it was followed by a **curious note that David lived here for 16 months. What happened at the end of 16 months?** *The Philistines would wage all-out war against Judah and would eventually kill Saul and Jonathan.* In other words, at the end of 16 months, if David had stayed in Israel, he would have been rid of Saul. This will create a unique conflict that we will cover in a couple of weeks.

It is here that David chose *pragmatism over faithfulness, which risked his future kingdom and did not trust in the Lord.* "**There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death**" (Prov. 14:12). David got tired of waiting, but in his weariness he became short sighted. He fell prey to the "if only" fallacy that we all are tempted with today: "if only" *I could be free from this situation, if only I had a spouse or could get out of this marriage, if only God would answer this prayer, if only my kids, or boss, or spouse would respond, if only, if only, if only!* David believed that if he could be rid of Saul, life would lock in. And for a short amount of time, it did! It seemed like his plan worked! "See, I told you! This whole waiting thing was lame! I needed to DO something!" **When pragmatism (It works!) is the standard, compromise is SURE to follow, and self-justification becomes the norm. And this combo leads us into joyless striving, playing a role reserved only for God.** David was a model for this very thing.

Godless Waiting Reaps the Consequences of Our Own Actions (27:8-28:2)

Now David and his men went up and **made raids** against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. ⁹ **And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish.** ¹⁰ When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" **David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah,"** or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." ¹¹ And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, "lest they should tell about us and

say, *‘So David has done.’*” Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines.
¹² And Achish trusted David, thinking, *“He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore, he shall always be my servant.”*

28 *In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, “Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army.”* ² David said to Achish, *“Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.”* And Achish said to David, *“Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.”*

David basically became a **land pirate**. He began to **raid the land around Ziklag**, attacking his enemies and making off with an immense amount of wealth. There had been times in Israel’s past where God gave explicit commands to wipe out nations, as when Joshua came into the promised land. But here, there was no such command. David had gone rogue. He became a villain. He became a dread pirate. Why do we say that? There are two specific modus operandi by which he went about his business:

- 1) **He lied to Achish as to WHERE he was raiding** – He told Achish he was making war WITH Israel, raiding the Negev. This delighted Achish, since it would have weakened his enemy, bringing him wealth, and made David a greater stench to his own people.
- 2) **In order to keep the lie from becoming known, he would kill every living person, killing men and women** – This was not a God honoring thing. He became Darth Vader more than Luke Skywalker, as towns that saw David and his men coming would have shuddered as they saw his red light saber! In other words, David did not exercise justice or righteousness in these 16 months, but again chose pragmatism and worldly wisdom to get him through.
- 3) **This led to a tense situation, where we leave David, as king Achish expected David to go up and fight WITH the Philistines AGAINST Israel, leaving David in what we call a “pickle”, caught between a rock and hard place.**

Now, what do we learn from this Godless text?! **First**, waiting on the LORD is good and hopeful, and taking matters into our own hand for pragmatic reasons is a bad path. But **second**, and maybe more importantly, the Bible does not sanitize life for us. Here is King David, a man after God’s own heart, the greatest earthly king Israel would know, from whom the line of Jesus the Messiah would come. If God wanted us to see David in a sanitized way, it would have skimmed over these 16 months. But the Bible does not set us **hero worship**, since it is clear that David was a **sinner, just like us**. When we come to Christ, we are called to holiness and purity, and that becomes our committed pursuit. However, we **MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER** that we do this in an **imperfect way**, battling and struggling with our flesh on a daily basis, failing often and giving into temptation, even in things that we hate. The standard is **perfection**, but that sets out course rather than being the basis of how we view each other. We strive to set up cultures in our **homes and this church** that we exhort and admonish each other when we have opportunity, but we also encourage and love each other through our battle with sin, quickly and lavishly giving grace and forgiveness to each other, from one sinner to another.

Do you want to know how maturity is defined? It’s not by having a veil of perfection, keeping a veneer that everything is great while you struggle alone or behind closed doors. It is the willingness to **acknowledge and admit sin**, to be open and honest, to risk what people will think of you for the payoff of living in freedom! When someone is open about their sin and serious about dealing with it, it **GROWS**

my respect and admiration, rather than diminishes it. David became the Dread Pirate Roberts for 16 months, but still found his way back. We need to have the same grace for each other.

Waiting stinks, but it is the pathway God uses for us to grow. In 1813, Adoniram Judson left everything he knew in America and arrived with his wife in Burma (modern day Myanmar). Fresh with vigor, trust and confidence, but quickly faced suffering, isolation, discouragement, and death. It took six years to see his first convert. After 12 years, the church had 18 people. In his time, he lost two wives, seven children (out of 13), and in 1824, spent a year in prison with his feet fettered causing his pregnant wife to walk two miles daily to plead for the fact that he was not a spy. But after 40 years, the church began to blossom and today, there are thousands of churches as a result of his work. Judson said, ***“Permit us to labor on in obscurity, and at the end of 20 years you may hear from us again.”*** He knew the power of waiting on the LORD, waiting through pain, waiting for God to work. ***“The joy of the Lord is not dependent on our circumstances, but on our obedience to His will.”***

Waiting is inevitable, but it should not be Godless. We know that when we wait on the Lord, He will renew our strength. We will mount up with wings like eagles. We will run and not grow weary, walk and not faint! That is what we all need in whatever waiting room we find ourselves in.