

## WAIT!

**Today's Text: Acts 1: 1-26**

### **Extracts:**

**And being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight [Acts 1: 4-9]**

*In the 1950's, Clark C. Moore was a science student at a university in the northeastern part of Pennsylvania, USA.<sup>1</sup> He had a girlfriend called Vonnie. In those days, there was no computer. So, he and his girlfriend expressed love to each other through romantic letters, not emails. They eventually got married and had four children. On 7 July 2011, a letter postmarked 20 February 1958 mysteriously arrived at the California University of Pennsylvania. A friend who learnt of it in the news contacted Clark Moore who had changed his name to Muhammad Siddeeq, a 73-year-old retired teacher, living in Indianapolis, Indiana. The said letter was signed “love forever Vonnie.” Siddeeq received the news with mixed emotions because he and Vonnie had since divorced.*

*Clark Moore's mixed feelings may in part be due to the fact that he had left a woman who had promised to love him forever. Vonnie may have left because the man she had expressed so much love to in writing had disappointed without realizing that he did not receive her mail! The lesson for us all is the need to wait and be patient. Who knows what will show up in due course when you wait? In this week's Bible text, Jesus told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem after His ascension into heaven, to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit that the Father had promised. There is so much we can learn from that story to assist us to cope in an increasingly complex world.*

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<sup>1</sup> Based on “US love letter posted in 1958 to arrive 53 years later,” *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-14175692> , 17 July 2011.

## 1. Background: Jesus tells His disciples to wait!

We are all in a hurry these days. We want to travel fast and arrive early. We want high scores in tests and exams without working hard for them. We want rapid promotion and better pay for dwindling productivity. Even the little child counts his/her age by the next birthday! We are all in a hurry and nobody can afford to wait. But is waiting such a bad thing? What is indeed the true meaning of waiting?

In this week's Bible story, Jesus was about to ascend to heaven. He had appeared to His disciples several times for forty days from the day of His resurrection that first Easter Sunday [Acts 1: 3]. He was about to transfer the responsibility of empowering them to the Holy Spirit as His Father had promised. For example, before His crucifixion, He had told His disciples, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" [Jn 14: 26]. That moment had finally arrived and Jesus was about to leave them. He told them to wait in Jerusalem [Acts 1: 4]. Jerusalem? Was that not the city that Jesus once lamented over for killing the prophets and stoning those sent to her [Matt. 23: 37]? Why should the disciples wait there and for what? We can examine the story as follows:

### a) *Jesus told His disciples what to wait for*

While commanding them not to depart from Jerusalem, Jesus told His disciples "to *wait for the Promise of the Father.*" The Promise of the Father is the Holy Spirit "for John truly baptized with water, but [the disciples] shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit *not many days [from then]*" [Acts 1: 4-5]. Jesus added, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" [v. 8]. Clearly, *the disciples knew what to wait for and why.* They knew that it would be soon *but they did not know when or how it would happen.* What situation are you facing right now?

Some of us may have had the privilege to be told in advance what to wait for. For example, at 75 years of age, Abraham (then known as Abram) was told by God to leave his country, family and father's house to go to a land that He would show him and that in him, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" [Gen. 12: 1-3]. Ten years later, nothing happened. God appeared to him in a vision to assure him not to be afraid because He was his "exceedingly great reward." Abram asked God, "What will You give me, seeing I go childless." God assured him that "one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" [Gen. 15: 1-5]. Even with such assured guidance, Abraham had to wait for another fifteen years before the child of promise, Isaac, was born [Gen. 21: 5]. Meanwhile, Abram had fumbled

into raising a child, Ishmael, by Hagar, his wife, Sarah's maid [**Gen.16: 1-16**].

Some of us may not be that privileged. May be on our own or by following leads from parents, guardians and teachers or experts, we set targets to meet in life and begin to pursue them. Some of us have become stuck, making no visible progress (by our measurements). Some of us have been forced to wait because it is logical or inevitable to do so. Some of us may conclude that we were on the wrong course all along and are now considering a new direction. In all such cases, there are bound to be strains and stresses. We may then conclude, rightly or wrongly, that we are marking time, that is, stuck in one spot, doing nothing! But is that true?

b) *While waiting, the disciples were busy!*

After Jesus had ascended, we are told that the disciples returned to Jerusalem from Mount Olivet, a Sabbath day's journey, and they "all ***continued with one accord in prayer and supplication***, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." There were about 120 people in that upper room where the disciples were staying [**Acts 1: 12-14**]. ***Peter assumed the leadership role*** that Jesus had assigned to him [**Matt. 16: 18-19; Jn 21: 15-17**] by proposing ***a replacement for Judas Iscariot and supervising the election of Matthias to be numbered with the eleven apostles*** [**Acts 1: 15-26**].

The disciples prayed and worked. They did what they needed to do while waiting. So, ***by the time the Holy Spirit descended, "they were all in one accord in one place"*** [**Acts 2: 1**]. Clearly, ***you do not fold your arms while you are waiting. You must get busy doing what you have got to do!***

c) *Then they waited and waited!*

We are told, "***In those days*** Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples..." [**Acts 1: 15**]. Jesus had assured the disciples that the Holy Spirit would descend "not many days from now" [**Acts 1: 5**]. The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost [**Acts 2: 1**]. Speaking about the resurrection of Jesus, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" [**1 Cor. 15: 20**]. Under the Law of Moses, the priest was expected to wave a sheaf of the firstfruits of the people's harvest at the Feast of Firstfruits, "on the day after the Sabbath." The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) followed by counting "fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath" [**Lev. 23: 9-16**]. Christ (the firstfruits from the dead) resurrected on Easter Sunday [the day after the Sabbath] and the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on Pentecost Sunday [fifty days after Easter Sunday]!

“Not many days from now” became almost two weeks. Many of us would have become restless. We would have begun to question what we had been told. Take the case of King Saul who had been instructed by the prophet Samuel to wait for him to come to Gilgal and offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people of Israel. He was required to wait for seven days. On the seventh day, Samuel did not show up at the set time and the people scattered from the king. He went ahead and offered the burnt offering, an unlawful act. Soon after, the prophet arrived! That impatience of a few minutes cost Saul the establishment of his throne forever [**1 Sam. 13: 1-14**].

We learn from the foregoing story that God has a purpose for asking us to wait. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah to the rebellious and restless children of Israel, God said, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” But you said, ‘No, for we will flee on horses.’ Therefore, you shall flee! And, ‘We will ride on swift horses.’ Therefore those who pursue you shall be swift!” [**Is. 30: 15-16**]. There is something good for us about waiting. So, why must you not wait?

## 2. Why you must wait

Our study suggests the following reasons, among others:

### a) *It is actually God who is waiting!*

If you think that you can be patient, you cannot beat God’s record because He can wait for an eternity! That is why Peter has reminded us, “Do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” [**2 Pet. 3: 8**]. It was God that took the initiative to send His only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins [**Jn 3: 16**]. It was Jesus who chose us, not the other way around [**Jn 15: 16**]. Therefore, it is God that is actually waiting for us to meet Him at the appointed time and place.

Jesus has said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” [**Rev. 3: 20**]. Clearly, the Lord is the one actually waiting for you; He got to the door, stood by it and started knocking before you even knew that He was there! Therefore, each time you perceive that you are wasting time by waiting, ask yourself, “Where is the Lord waiting for me right now? What does He expect me to do to locate where He is waiting for me?” For example, when God told Joshua to make the people of Israel walk around the walls of Jericho for seven days and to shout on the last day, God’s forces (angels) were already standing on those impregnable walls, waiting for the people’s shout to press down the walls that “fell

down flat” [Josh. 5: 13-15; 6: 1-21]. Therefore, *it is God who is waiting for your response and cooperation*. If He tells you to wait, wait! That is why the Psalmist has said, “Wait! On the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart” [Ps. 27: 14].

b) *Waiting is your preparation to reach where God is waiting for you!*

Waiting may be a necessary and inevitable step that you must take to be able to meet God where He is waiting for you. For example, Peter used the period of waiting to fill vacancies and get the assembly ready by prayers and supplications for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. It took Joseph thirteen years from the time of his dreams [Gen. 37: 2] to their fulfillment as governor of Egypt [Gen. 41: 46]. During that long period of hardship, God taught him humility and integrity that later stood him in good stead while managing the economy of Egypt to serve as the womb for the conception and birth of the nation of Israel.

You may need a *maturation process*, just as it takes a butterfly to grow through a life cycle of metamorphosis, from egg to larva to pupa to adult. The caterpillar eats ravenously while the pupa is completely at rest, hanging to life by a slight thread attached to a tree in a windy forest. Even when the young butterfly emerges, it takes more time for its wings to be dry and strong enough to fly. If any stage of its maturation process is prematurely terminated, the butterfly may never fly! So, *your waiting time may be an opportunity for you to mature or get the necessary qualifications/certifications that you will need when the time that God is preparing you for comes*.

c) *Therefore, to wait is not marking time but serving God!*

Sometimes, it can be boring to wait because it may look as if you are marking time. That is why, instead of merely waiting for God, you should wait on Him.<sup>2</sup> To wait for is to mark time; to wait on is to serve, just as waiters and waitresses do in a restaurant. For example, in the movie, *It Could Happen To You* [1994],<sup>3</sup> Yvonne (played by Bridget Fonda) is a downtrodden waitress in a local New York diner. Her personal life has been miserable. Her marriage has broken down and she has just been legally declared bankrupt. However, she has not allowed her personal problems to affect her work in the restaurant. She is as affable as ever. Customers like her because she serves them well beyond the call of duty. In appreciation, they give her good tips. One day, Charlie Lang (played by Nicholas Cage), a police officer, found himself short of a tip for Yvonne.

<sup>2</sup> “Waiting for or waiting on the Lord?” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 3, No. 7, 17 Feb. 2002;

[http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume\\_3/PDFs/WaitingfororwaitingontheLord.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_3/PDFs/WaitingfororwaitingontheLord.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bing.com/movies/search/overview?q=It+Could+Happen+to+You&id=9bc5009a-1c38-4d44-9659-565cd1f8b16d&qpvit=it+could+happen+to+you&FORM=DTPSHA>

So, he promised to give her half the winnings of the lottery ticket he had just bought that day. The ticket won US\$4 million. True to his promise, the cop gave Yvonne half of it! God can do better than that for you if you wait on Him!

The Psalmist has said, “Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land” [Ps. 37: 34]. *When you find yourself in a situation that looks like marking time, wait on the Lord by your faith and obedience, worship and thanks offering.* Paul exhorted the Philippian church, “Rejoice in the Lord always... Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” [Phil. 4: 4-7].

### **3. Conclusion: Only God knows the times and the seasons!**

When the disciples asked Jesus if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at the time (of His ascension), He replied, “It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has put in His own authority. Soon after He had disappeared out of their sight, two men in white apparel (apparently angels) said to the disciples, “Why do you stand gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” [Acts 1: 11]. The day and the hour of that event are again known only to the Father [Matt. 24: 36]. Therefore, between now and the day the Lord calls you home, find time out of your busy earthly pursuits to build a personal relationship with Jesus.

*Always remember that success, no matter how you define it, is unsafe at any speed. The road to it is always under construction. Therefore, be careful how you drive yourself on its rough surface. Obey that vital road sign that God has put out there to guide your safe drive to eternity: Wait – on the Lord!*