

WAITING OR DELAYED?

Today's Text: Isaiah Chap. 64

Extracts:

For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any *God* besides You, who *acts for the one who waits for Him* [Is. 64: 4]

Cf: But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which *God has prepared for those who love Him*” [1 Cor. 2: 9]

Suzanne and Andrew Williams of Cheltenham, England, were barely 21 years old when they got married on 5 July 1986.¹ Suzanne wanted a child very badly. Her first attempt ended in stillbirth. Three other attempts ended in miscarriages. Thereafter, the doctors told her that she could not conceive any longer because she and Andrew had problems. The matter so affected her relationship with her husband that they ended up in a bitter divorce in August 1994. However, they soon realized that they still loved and needed each other. Within months, they remarried and decided that the question of childbearing should no longer be the centre of their love. Then, on December 16, 2000, against all expectations, Suzanne gave birth to Joshua! Now in her forties, Suzanne recently said, “It is hard to believe that after 16 years of trying for a baby, two marriages and a divorce, I have got my family at last!”

Thank God that Suzanne and Andrew realized early enough their mistake of divorce and decided to remarry. How many of us have derailed because we consider it a waste of time to keep waiting when nothing is happening? Why do we feel delayed each time we do not have our way? What is the optimal speed of success? What is success? If waiting is wrong or impossible, why has God reserved the best things that are beyond human comprehension for those who wait for Him?

These and more are the issues that we shall attempt to resolve in today's lesson, using Isaiah's 64th Chapter as our text.

¹ Based on Amanda Cable, “Miracle that saved our marriage,” *Daily Mail*, November 25, 2005; pp. 38-39

1. Why do we feel delayed?

Geneva is the diplomatic hub of Europe. The United Nations has its biggest office outside of New York there. Some of the UN agencies, such as the ILO, WHO and ITU, have their headquarters there. I am told that Geneva is also the spy capital of the world! It is there that spies from the East (notably, Russia and China) come to steal military and industrial intelligence from the West, and vice versa. Therefore, it is a busy city all year round, as various organizations hold one conference after another.

One thing that I love about Geneva is that the public transport system works as precisely as Swiss watches. Once you know your route and the bus number, all you need to have is the bus schedule. As you wait for the bus at the *Gare de Cornavin*, the main bus/rail station, you can read from the screens the exact time your bus will come and for how long you need to wait. Therefore, you can programme when to leave home in the morning and office in the evening.

Some how, we tend to *expect* human existence on earth to take the same form. There are definite times for certain things to happen. We must marry at a certain age. We must build our homes about a certain time. Our careers must head in a definite direction about a certain date. We deserve promotion or pay raise after a certain number of years. However, when they do not happen as expected, we panic. We think that somebody or something is holding us back. We become anxious and begin to do things to correct the situation. Our waiting becomes a delay!

Why do we feel delayed? Here are some possible explanations:

a) *We want to keep up with the Joneses*

In the family, office, business, profession or calling, there are some people that we use as our standards. We like to achieve at the same pace that they have achieved. We like to receive their attention or commendation as evidence that we have made it. When we fail, then we believe that we are being delayed.

The truth is that you are pursuing a moving target! The people that you may be looking up to are also on the move. You may succeed in due course to overtake some of them but the rest are not waiting for you! Moreover, you do not even know what they are running after. How then can you run after them? That a dwarf and a child are of the same height does not mean they are of the same age. All vultures are bald-headed. How then do you know their elders? That was why when Jeremiah complained to God that wicked people tended to prosper more than a righteous man like himself, God replied him, “if you have run with the

footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?” [Jer. 12: 1-5].

b) *We hate uncertainty!*

The worldview of life is that we are the architects of our destinies. We are self-made and should, therefore, be in control of our lives. We work hard and long for success because we operate under that principle. We believe that we can influence *everything* for our good without any external help, especially from another source. Among such people are the majority of empiricists, atheists and blasphemers. They say that what they cannot explain is not true or does not exist. Therefore, there is nothing like waiting for God’s plan or purpose. Rather, we are being delayed. However, what they do not know is that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way” [Ps. 37: 23].

c) *We are ignorant of God’s purpose for our lives*

If the whole duty of man on earth is to “fear God and keep His commandments” [Eccl. 12: 13], I wonder if we even understand why we are here. Did we come to the world to build palatial houses or occupy big positions or win honours in our chosen professions? Is it not said that we came naked and we shall return naked [Job 1: 21]? So, what qualifies us to label one activity as “waiting” and another one as “delay”? We know *nothing!*

2. God is the Architect-Builder of our lives!

Isaiah prayed, “but now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; *and all we are the work of Your hand*” [Is. 64: 8]. The Psalmist acknowledged of God’s role in our lives, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ... Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written; *the days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them*” [Ps. 139: 7, 16]. Clearly, only our Maker knows why we are here and how He will get us there. *Unless He reveals His strategy to us, we may grope in the dark!*

Let us learn something from human builders. When a building project is to be undertaken, the client sits with the contractor and his/her team of experts (architects, engineers, quantity surveyors, etc.) and both agree on certain things. Here are some of the things that they will consider:

- They will make a list of all the activities necessary to complete the project, and estimate how long it could take to complete each activity;
- They will put all the activities in a logical sequence, such that those to be performed first are placed before those to come later. For example, laying

the foundation will come before roofing. All the activities to be performed at the same time will be grouped together;

- They then link all the activities into a logical network and create a *path* to move from the first event to the last.
- They will determine the *critical path*, that is, the route which links the activities that will take the longest time to complete. It follows that *the shortest time to complete the project is the longest route in the network!*

Without any knowledge of the project plan, an onlooker who passes near the construction site each day will see some activity going on one day and stopped without it being completed a few days later. The workers may not return to it until may be a year later! To the builder, that is waiting but to the onlooker it may seem like delay! In due season, the edifice emerges.

In the project of life, God is the Architect-Builder and we are simply the building materials. He picks and chooses us as He deems necessary, just as the contractor of a building chooses to use stones and cement one day and roofing sheets the next day. The materials cannot complain or question how they are being selected. It is only when we realize this that we can wait when we have to!

3. The art of waiting

Happily, God does not leave us completely in the dark as to His purposes and plans. He knows that we like to run even when nobody pursues us. Consequently, He has made our waiting possible or easier by:

- a) *Giving us an idea of what to expect and the given time*

As we saw in the Geneva public transport system, you can afford to relax while waiting for the next bus because you know what to expect at a specific time. In like manner, God may reveal to you a promise and when He will deliver it. That way, you can afford to have inner peace even when there is turbulence around you.

A good example is the story of the barren Shunammite woman who had shown kindness to Elisha the prophet. She had given up hope of ever having her own children. Then the prophet called her and said, “About this time *next year* you shall embrace *a son*.” That is a definite promise at a definite time. She was given three months to try for conception and nine months to carry the pregnancy. The word of God says, “The woman conceived, and bore a son *when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her*” [2 Kgs 4: 1-17]. Of course, the prophet spoke as he was directed by the Spirit of God [1 Pet. 1: 20-21].

- b) *Giving us a specific time but not indicating how a specific promise will be fulfilled*

Sometimes, God may reveal what He has for you and when it will happen but without specifying how He will do it. In that case, you have enough information to wait without worrying.

For example, there was a time that the Syrians besieged Israel and cut off its food supplies. There was so much hunger in the land that women began to eat their own children [**2 Kgs 6: 24-29**]. They prayed and fasted and God sent the prophet Elisha to tell the king of Israel, “Thus says the Lord: *‘Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria’*” [**2 Kgs 7: 1**]. In other words, the people were assured that within 24 hours, their economic hardship would be over but they were not told how. However, as four hungry lepers walked towards the Syrian camp which had abundant supplies, God caused their weak legs to make such a loud noise that the Syrians thought that the Israelites had hired Hittites and Egyptians to attack them. They abandoned everything and fled. The Israelites came and looted their camp. There was so much for everybody that prices tumbled within a day as the Lord had said [**vv. 3-10**]. The only one who did not benefit was the king’s ADC who had doubted God’s word. That is a warning that you should not worry and doubt while you are waiting.

c) *Making a specific promise without a specific time*

Sometimes, God may give you the privilege to know what He plans to do without giving you an idea of time. This is more difficult than the earlier cases because Satan could tempt you to misinterpret God’s promise. For example, Abraham (then called Abram) was 75 years old when God told him to leave his country and go to a new land where He would make him the father of many nations [**Gen. 12: 1-5**]. After ten years in the new land, nothing happened! He and his wife, Sarah (then Sarai), remained barren. God appeared again to him and said that his heir would not be a servant but “one who will come from your own body” [**Gen. 15: 1-4**]. When Abraham informed his wife, they interpreted that to mean that he could raise children by a fertile woman. That was how Ishmael was born through Sarah’s maid, Hagar [**Gen. 16: 1-4**]!

Joseph faced a similar situation. At age 17, God showed him in a dream that he would be the star of his family [**Gen. 37: 1-10**]. How and when, he was never told. However, for the next 13 years, his life turned from bad to worse. His own brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. He was put into jail following a false accusation of attempted rape by his master’s wife. Even after helping the Pharaoh’s butler to be restored to his privileged position with the king, Joseph spent two more years in jail [**Gen. 41: 1**]! However, at the *appropriate time according to God’s purpose*, Joseph was set free and became the Governor of Egypt! Throughout his ordeal, Joseph

remained faithful to God. In deed, eye has not seen nor ear perceived how God acts for those who wait for Him [Is. 64: 4].

It is possible that your situation is outside of those three that we have seen above. For example, you may have a problem that refuses to go away. Even with prayers and fasting, you have heard nothing specific about it from God. Should you panic and worry? No! Do what Hannah, the barren wife of Elkanah, did. Her rival, Elkinah's other wife, Peninnah, had children and they joined together to "provoke her severely, to make her miserable" [1 Sam. 1: 1-6]. That was on for a long time. What was Hannah's reaction? She took the matter to God. With bitterness in her heart, she prayed and wept in anguish. She made a vow to God that if He gave her a son, she would give him back into His service. The priest, Eli, did not hear her prayers but said the grace, that God should grant her heart's desire. She wiped away her tears and *believed*. She became the mother of Samuel [vv. 9-28] and five other children [1 Sam. 2: 21]! She waited and won!

4. Conclusion: Can you wait for the Lord's return?

As you wait for your prayers to be answered, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- ❑ Is it God's will or purpose for me?
- ❑ As I wait, am I fretting (feeling delayed) or going about my Father's business by taking the necessary human steps of cooperation?
- ❑ While waiting *for* Him, am I also waiting *on* Him? Am I a waiter (servant doing His will) or a worrier (a nervous wreck!)? Am I walking by faith or by sight?

The bigger challenge has to do with the return of Jesus as King and Judge because "*of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven*" but God the Father only [Matt. 24: 36]. There will come wars and rumours of wars. There will be false prophets. Lawlessness will abound and the followers of Christ will be betrayed and persecuted [vv. 4-12]. Jesus said to His disciples, "What I say to you, I say to all: *Watch!*" [Mk 13: 37]. Eye has not seen nor ear perceived how God will reward those who can wait for the return of our glorious Lord. Those who wait are those who love God.

Are you among them?