

November 10, 2024

“Wait for It”

Hebrews 9:24-28

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own;

²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

²⁷ And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment,

²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.



Special Music:

“Come, Lord Jesus”

Redemption City Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TP92s1tLPaA>

THE GREAT FORGET

Jolita Patterson liked to begin her mornings strolling in the small park near City Hall in Parable, TX. At the age of sixty-eight, she still held a full-time job as the desk clerk for the Water Department, which was located in the south wing of the John J. Farmer Municipal Building, adjacent to the park. The utility department for the town didn't open until 10:00 AM, so she would arrive at the park by nine to stroll the paths and then sit for a while on the benches under the Oak and Pecan trees scattered about. Since the town had finally been in a position to hire Frank Portales back as the city landscaper, the grounds of the park had returned to their former pristine excellence. Jolita usually brought a small bag of stale bread with her to feed the pigeons and the occasional wayward duck.

There were several statues in the park commemorating favorite sons and founding fathers. None were considered controversial which played into the laid-back nature of the community. Even the statue of Major Alexander P. Stover in full Confederate Uniform leading a charge on his stallion didn't cause much of a stir like it would have in other places.

Having walked the perimeter of the park, Jolita sat on a bench under the oldest Oak tree in parable, its magnificent limbs spread in a welcoming gesture, its top several feet taller than the rest of the trees. Near the bench was a large rock. Jolita remembered climbing on that rock as a child, pretending to be another statue in the park, thinking that if she stood still enough, anyone walking

by would believe her to be a statue herself. The polite adults would ignore her and then wink back at her after they had passed by. She sighed and giggled to herself over the memory.

Nearby, pacing up and down the walkway, was Crazy Carl. Carl's real name was Carl Davenport, but the kids in Parable called him Crazy Carl because every day for the last couple of years, he had shown up at the park for a few hours in the morning with a homemade sandwich board sign around his neck that said, "The time is at hand! Prepare for the moment!" Carl was mute from an accident that occurred while working with a hale baler some 30 years back. He was able to do some handy work about town, which gave him enough to live on. But no one had been willing to hire him full time. And no one knew why he would show up at 8 am like clockwork wearing that sign in the park. Probably because no one had thought to ask him. After all the, the message sounded pretty dark and doomsdayish, and no one believed that Carl had much of anything practical to tell them. He was just a foolish old man that would never be considered to be a prophet by any respectable person.

But for some reason, this morning, Jolita's curiosity got the best of her. She stood up and walked over to Carl. His back was to her, so it startled him when she tapped him on the shoulder. Carl whirled around in surprise. No one ever stopped to talk to him. The state had sent him to school to learn sign language, but no one else in town had bothered to learn, so people didn't even try to communicate.

"Carl? It's Carl, right?"

Carl took a step back but nodded that he understood.

“Carl, can you tell me about your sign?” Jolita continued

With fingers aflurry, Carl began a one-sided conversation that Jolita was never going to understand. She stopped Carl with the words, “I’m sorry Carl, but I can’t sign. I don’t know what you are saying.”

Carl stopped, took a pause, and put a finger to his chin as if he was giving the situation some thought.

“What is so important about your sign, Carl? What are you trying to tell us?” Jolita asked, trying to encourage the man.

Carl held a finger in the air, and a smile came to his face. He grabbed Jolita’s hand, which she resisted. It was obvious that he wanted to show her something, but she wasn’t sure about letting him touch her. Carl smiled, grabbed her hand again and led her over to the big rock. He then pointed at a brass plaque at the base of the stone. No one ever took the time to read the plaques in the park, and this one was the least notable of all. Carl waved his hand like a magician and once again encouraged her to read the plaque. It said:

“On this day, November 24, 1924, the community of Parable, TX buried a copper and porcelain time capsule containing artifacts, documents, and precious memories for future generations. Every hundred years, this capsule is to be opened, at which time some past treasures may be examined and future mementos may be added. This is so declared by the City Council and Community Leaders of the town of Parable, TX.”

“How wonderful,” thought Jolita. Beneath that rock lay a window into the past, a treasure trove of the people of Parable, a way to remind future generations of their roots. And then the obvious struck her. The 24th of November, 1924. One hundred years was only a couple of weeks away, and for some unknown reason, no one seemed to notice that the date was creeping up on them. Except Carl. And no one was paying attention to Carl. Most of them were probably unaware of the existence of the time capsule. All this time people were thinking Carl was just plain crazy, when he was actually trying to remind them of the capsule and its importance to the town. Plans had to be made so that this extraordinary moment did not pass by unremembered. She tossed out what was left of the bread, decided to give Carl a hug to let him know she understood, and scurried off to her office.

As soon as she got to her desk, Jolita called Cora Henderson, the current mayor.

“Cora? This is Jolita! I have something important to tell you!”

“Calm down, Jolita! Take a breath. Are you all right?” the mayor asked.

“I’m fine Cora, but I just noticed something in the park!”

“I don’t really have time for this right now, Jolita. I’m late for a council meeting.”

“Then my timing couldn’t be more perfect,” said Jolita as calmly as she could. “Did you know that there is a time capsule in the park?”

“Of course I do, Jolita. Everyone knows that. But I really need to get to this meeting! Can we talk later?”

“Cora! Listen to me!” demanded Jolita. “That time capsule is supposed to be opened on the November 24th.”

“What are you talking about, Jolita? It’s a time capsule. We’re never supposed to open it!”

“But the plaque by the rock says that we have to open it on November 24th, 2024. And that’s only a couple of weeks away! Nobody seems to understand that!”

“Calm down, Jolita,” said the mayor. “I’m sure you are wrong about that. But just so you know that I hear you, I will send Frank Portales over to check it out. Now I really must get to my meeting,” said the mayor as she hung up her phone.

Jolita was a little surprised by the mayor’s attitude. It sounded to her like the mayor believed she was just making things up. Then she had an idea. She rushed back to the plaque by the rock, took out her phone and took a picture of the inscription. She was going to be late opening the office, but this was too important to let slip away. The town council only met once a month and if she waited, the moment would slip away. Jolita hurried over to the council chamber. She was just in time because they were about to call the meeting to order. Seeing Cora enter to take her seat, Jolita rushed over to her and showed her the picture

on her phone.

“Read this, Cora. Read what it says!”

“Jolita, I don’t have ti...”

“Read it now, Cora, or you will have to have someone drag me away. This is too important for you to ignore me.”

“Well... if that is the only way you will let me get on with this meeting. Show me the photo,” said the mayor.

Cora read through the message quickly, then stopped to read it again slowly. Jolita was right. This was too important to ignore.

“Please send that to my phone, Jolita, so that I can share it with the council. And thank you, thank you for your stubbornness. We might well have missed this opportunity without your diligence. Thank you.”

“You really have Carl Davenport to thank...” Jolita started to say, but the mayor had already turned her back to her as she left to take her seat.

Cora grabbed her gavel and knocked it on the strike plate and said, “I hereby call this meeting to order. Please put down your agendas. We have a more pressing item to discuss. Jolita has brought to my attention an extremely important matter. I am sending a very important message to your phone, right now. We must start making preparations immediately!”

Feeling that odd one out, Jolita returned to her office thinking, “We waited a hundred years and still found ourselves unprepared for this moment. And we

would have missed this moment if I hadn't taken time to ask Carl what his sign was all about. In our foolishness, we almost missed this opportunity."

Waiting! We all have to do it. For most of us, it tries our patience to the limit. We wait for our doctors. We wait to speak to government administrators. We wait in checkout lines. We wait for meetings to start. We wait for friends and family who are late. We stand in line waiting for hours to ride a three-minute thrill at the amusement park. We wait for the stop light to change. We wait for new opportunities. We wait for the sand to slip through an hourglass. I have never spoken to anyone that has told me that they enjoy waiting. And what do people do while they are waiting, generally held captive because where they are? Most of us don't strike up conversations with strangers. Instead, we whip out our phones, check our messages and emails, play games. We do everything we can to avoid the boredom and monotony of waiting. And sometimes we wait for soooooo... long that we give up and step out of line feeling like life is cheating us by making us wait.

The Jews know all about waiting. They waited 40 years to enter the promised land. They waited almost 500 years until Jesus came, and most are still waiting for the Messiah today. And Christian today's have waited for over 2000 years for the return of Christ, many in anticipation, and many others with a sense of dread.

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Every generation since Jesus has been waiting, thinking that their generation will be the one that gets to see the return of Christ. Every generation

has faced wars and rumors of wars. Every generation has seen famine and pestilence somewhere in the world. Phenomena of all kinds, earthquakes, floods, poverty, sickness, and disease have always been with us. Nothing has changed. But in truth, there have been many times in history that were much worse than what we face today, relatively speaking. After all, earthquakes are scariest when it is the floor beneath our own feet that is shifting rather than in another country. Just because bombs aren't falling out of the sky on us where we stand, doesn't mean that bombs aren't falling somewhere.

But Jesus does his best to alleviate our fears. While so many people are frightened and run around frightening others by saying, "The end is near! The end is near!", Jesus is telling us, "Nobody knows the time and place I will come back. Not even me. My Father has chosen not to share that with me."

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father". Matthew 24:36

We want to believe that Jesus, being God's Son, would know everything. But even he cannot answer this question. God the Father is keeping this information from him. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:27:

"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

And yet, we insist on worrying. Sometimes, it is our default state while we are waiting. "Since we are having to wait, why don't we just sit here and worry about what comes next? Surely that will provide us with a more positive outcome."

Except it won't. It will not add a single minute to our lives and may even cause

enough stress in our lives to cut them short. Jesus tells us that it is utter foolishness to worry about tomorrow.

I knew a number of people at the turn of the century that stockpiled food, water, and other necessities, filling their pantries and garages, because the world was going to end on January 1, 2000. I have read of so many accounts where people predicted through precise calculation the moment Jesus was going to return, and they encouraged people to go into hiding. Imagine thinking that God would gift someone information that he wouldn't even give his own son!

And so, we wait. But unlike standing in a line somewhere, playing with our phones, we have plenty of opportunities to meet the needs of God's children while we are in that state of waiting. Right? What if I tell you that is the wrong way to look at our time on this planet, being in a perpetual state of waiting and filling our time. Christian purpose is not about filling in blank moments of time. Telling you our purpose is to fill our time while waiting is a lot like me telling you that our goal is getting into heaven. To think that way causes us to lose focus on our real purpose, the purpose that God has for us.

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Therefore go and wait for me to come back. And while you are waiting, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matthew 16:18-19

Each of us knows that the addition I made to verse 19, **“and wait for me to come back. And while you are waiting”** isn’t in the Bible in any translation. But so many of us train our minds to think that way.

We all want Jesus to return. But waiting for his return was never our purpose. Jesus never meant for us to focus on his return. What he consistently tells us is to **“Love one another”, “Pray for each other,”** and **“Preach the Gospel to all people.”** What he tells us to do is:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

As a matter of fact, Jesus is pretty explicit when it comes to waiting for his return. He says this in Luke 21:

8 “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them.

9 When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”

Remember our friend Jolita from the story? Yes, she got anxious about the fact that everyone had forgotten about the time capsule, except for Carl. But she did something about it by reminding others of what was about to happen. She didn’t stand around, continuing to feed the birds, and dawdle the time away,

hoping that everyone else would remember. And it really wasn't about the time running out, but more about the opportunity that might be missed. Here was a time capsule that, like Jesus, a moment in the past with an opportunity to engage with the future. Jesus gave his very life for the opportunity for us to engage in a closer relationship with him. And he did it before we even came into the world. We have the opportunity to dig into the very nature of Christ as he reveals to us his Father, the Creator of all that is, and the opportunity to come into the presence of God. But so many of us sit around waiting for it to happen that we fail to grasp the real purpose for which God placed us here, which is to serve and lift his children.

God truly wants us to understand that not a moment of worry or anxiety, nor any amount of speculation, will make the second coming of Christ occur any sooner. So, we worry and fret over something we cannot change and were never meant to waste time speculating about.

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.”

Luke 21:34

We have a purpose driven by the Holy Spirit to engage with the people in our lives so that they can experience the same joy in Jesus that we do. But we can't do that if we are waiting and worrying about when the anvil will fall. God does not want that for us. He wants us filled with the joy of the Spirit so that we are able to live a purpose driven life. We can eagerly await his return, but not to the point that it keeps us from serving the purpose that he has laid out for us.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:44

“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

When he comes, let him not find us sitting and waiting, but instead, attending to his business, and taking care of his children.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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