

# Hurry Up and Wait

Acts 1:1-5

(Re-ImaginingChurch)

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach<sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.<sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:1-5)*

**How do you feel about waiting? How many of you enjoy a nice long wait?** Some people do. I'm not a great "wait-er"

I don't like standing in line too long at the bank, post office, or Secretary of State. I don't like waiting at a red light in front of an accelerator-challenged driver... I don't like pulling into a gas station only to find all the pumps are taken

So how good are you at waiting? I have a multiple-choice test that might help:

- A. You're in the express lane and the customer ahead of you - with over 12 items - is having an extended conversation with the cashier, how do you respond?
  - 1) You are happy. They are building community and you think about joining in and forming a small group with the three of you.
  - 2) You use the time to think how you can invite the cashier to your church
  - 3) You keep pushing your merchandise closer and closer hoping it will push the other customer's stuff onto the floor
- B. You've sat in your doctor's waiting room for over an hour, how do you respond?
  - 1) You are grateful for the chance to catch up on the July 1993 Reader's Digest
  - 2) You tell the other patients you have a highly contagious and fatal disease in an attempt to clear the waiting room and move to the head of the line
  - 3) You force yourself to hyperventilate to get immediate attention

**Change is hard. The only thing more difficult is to have to wait for change.** Change is always difficult. That's been historically true for God's people. God's people have always seemed to have a bit of trouble navigating change.

As Luke writes in **Acts 1**, there is an incredible amount of change going on and it's a transition of tremendous magnitude. For three years, 24/7, Jesus' disciples have been following him wherever he went. They ate with him. They traveled with him. They listened to him teach. They laughed with him. They grieved with him. They went on boat rides together. They were always together physically in the presence of God!

Then the disciples watched him die - on a cross. They were devastated. They commiserated together believing all hope was lost. Then came news of a resurrection that resulted in unbelievable joy. They're excited

But now Jesus is **leaving**. He offers a few final words and then "*he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from sight*" (**Acts 1:9**). 24/7. Now completely gone. Vanished. Talk about change. Talk about anxiety and uncertainty. Now what do we do? Now where do we go?

### **That's how Acts begins. Mega changes. Mega questions.**

These last words of Jesus - those last words of **wisdom** and/or **encouragement** - are especially significant and notable: **1:4** - "*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait...*" What?! The only thing worse than major changes is knowing they're coming and having to wait for them! This is the last thing the disciples wanted to hear...

My immediate inclination when something changes is to try and "fix it." We tend to push back, protest, complain, threaten - hope to unchange the change. Then the anxiety and frustration turns into an adrenaline rush. We want to do something so we can get on with it, get it done, and put it behind us. Waiting is one of the most difficult things we are called to do in life.

Fact is, we'll all in a season of waiting right now - waiting for a vaccine, a bit of normal...

- Maybe you're single and waiting for marriage; hoping to have a child and waiting
- Maybe you're anxiously waiting for the results of medical test or biopsy
- Maybe you're waiting for someone to change or for circumstances to change, or you're waiting to hear whether or not you got the job or the raise
- Maybe you're waiting for the chemotherapy or radiation treatments to take effect
- Maybe you're waiting for the Lions to get to the Superbowl (Hope you're young)

We are waiting here at Covenant. We're in a period of transition, a liminal space, a longing to return to a normal we suspect is never coming - and that can be anxiety producing and exhilarating all at the same time. I've heard people say.... "*It seems like God is getting ready to unleash something here...but I'm not sure what it is, so we'll just have to wait and see.*" But waiting is hard.

In **Acts 1**, Jesus has left the premises - one of the most difficult changes the disciples have ever had to face...and Jesus says, "*Hurry up and wait*"

**Lewis Smedes:** "*Waiting is our destiny. As creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hoped for, we wait in the darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending we cannot write. We wait for a 'not yet' that feels more like a 'not ever.'*" (Fact is, all of life is waiting...)

**So what would the disciples **do** while they wait? What do we do? What should we do?**

## THEY YIELDED

**The first book of the Bible I ever preached through was the book of Acts.** That was forty years ago. Today, in times of anxiety, uncertainty, and waiting, Acts is a great book to read and study!

We will see what happens when people yield to God's work in their lives; we will see what the Holy Spirit can do when God's people are fully yielded to his will. In Acts, the supernatural becomes **commonplace**; hearts are melted and lives are **transformed**; differences fade and lines are blurred, and **community** grows. And we see a picture of the kind of Church we all long to be.

In a time of re-examining and reimagining church, it's important to go back to **Scripture**, back to Acts and measure ourselves against the early Church.

It's easy to get caught up in what we think the Church **ought to do** and forget all about what God says the Church **ought to be**. A pastor who recently retired confided, "*I worked so hard to build a crowd, I forgot to focus on building a Church.*" (We don't want that to be our epitaph).

The reality is...I/we/anyone can build a crowd: pay people to come; we could invite a celebrity to speak; but only the Holy Spirit can build a church.

**Waiting reminds us God's Church and Kingdom are not about us.** God is building his Church in **his way** and in **his time** - but yielding makes no sense. Yielding means I'm willing to get out of the way. Yielding means I'll do it God's way - even if it doesn't make any sense. The disciples waited - it made no sense. Christ builds his church in a supernatural way that can only be attributed to him

I'm grateful we have this supernatural story of the early church as a measuring stick. We should pray that God continues to move his church in a supernatural way - in a way that can only be explained by his doing it. We should pray God will do something unmistakably supernatural among us

Someone remarked that if the Church is not **supernatural**, it can only be **superficial**.

## THEY ANTICIPATED

**Jesus gave them a promise along with his command to wait: "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" i.e., "You will experience God in ways you have never experienced God before!"**

He doesn't say those with the gift of evangelism, or those with a theological degree, or those living perfect lives will receive the Holy Spirit. He says (all) who follow him will receive the supernatural presence and **power** of God and be able to do things they can't do in their own limited strength.

Jesus says this to an unimpressive group of fisherman, zealots, and tax collectors. They battled insecurity, fear, brokenness - all kinds of mistakes from their past

So this promise was a very personal thing for them, an encouragement, a validation of their place in God's family. They would receive His power! Jesus, their rabbi, would be leaving them, but his Spirit would soon come. And with the Spirit, God would plant in them a vision of what a supernatural community of God could be and together they would turn the world right-side up.

**1:8 - [I] (say your name) will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on [me]"**

Where ever you minister - GEMS, Kid's Hope, Hand-to-hand, Sunday School, Student Ministry; small group leader, intercessor; usher, lead worshipper or tech...

...To you who tried to have a spiritual conversation with your neighbor that didn't seem to go anywhere...

...To you who think your role in the kingdom doesn't really seem to matter much because it doesn't appear you'll be moving mountains anytime soon...

Imagine what God could do through you if you were fully yielded to him; **Anticipate** the supernatural power coming your way through His Spirit

## THEY PRAYED

**As the disciples watched Jesus ascend to heaven, they wondered, "What's next?"** Their anxiety deepened. Their questions multiplied. So what did they do?

**1:12,14** - *"They returned to Jerusalem...when they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying...They all joined together constantly in prayer."*

Notice they're all there - they number about 120! Notice they are **all** praying. Notice they are all praying **together** - impassioned corporate intercession - not just their personal devotions. They're all anticipating the power that has been promised

In Acts, almost every time you read about God's people coming together, you read they're praying! (Imagine today turning all our gatherings into prayer services)

- **Acts 2:1** - *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place."*
- **Acts 2:44**: *"All the believers were together and had everything in common."*
- **Acts 4:24**: *"They raised their voices together in prayer."*
- **Acts 5:12**: *"And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade."*

They're not only together in one place, they are praying *"in one accord"* (**1:14**); they were changing the world. Prayer as we will continue to discover is one of the essentials for Christ's Church.

**They were unified; and it was their praying together that brought them together.**

## THEY CAME TOGETHER

**Does this mean the early church didn't have any disagreements or differences?** No. They had some deep problems, some heated conflicts, some significant differences of opinion, tensions and relational bruises. But they dealt with them in a way that **preserved** the **unity**. They stayed together.

A few years ago, NASA “lost” a 125 million dollar Mars Climate Orbiter. It just disappeared. Do you know why they lost it? They lost it because one set of NASA engineers was using metric measurements, and another set of NASA engineers was using English measurements. And these are (literally) rocket scientists! As a result, the orbiter flew too close to Mars and either burned up or broke up - they’re not really sure.

To accomplish what needs to be done, we need to be on the same page; we need to be talking the same language. The language that unified the early church was **prayer**. When a church fails to prioritize prayer, it closes the conduit to God’s power. When a church is not united in prayer, it breaks up, flames out, or disappears.

**A few weeks before Jesus said “goodbye”, he was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying (cf. John 17).** Remember what he was praying about the night before he was crucified?

He was praying everyone who followed him would be **one**. He prayed they would be unified; he prayed for our unity. Just a few weeks later, the early church, all 120 members, were together, **unified** and **praying**!

**Don’t miss that or you’ll miss what really happens in Acts 2 on Pentecost when thousands of people come to faith and the Church is born.** The Church was **birthed** in prayer - **together**

*A commentator: “I have always felt that Pentecost happened, not just according to a date on the calendar, but in response to a reconciliation among the disciples.”*

There were deep tensions and sharp divisions among Jesus’ disciples both during and after Jesus’ ministry - these were strong-willed people! But until they came together on their knees, fully open to God and to each other, they would have to wait. The Holy Spirit (and the power that accompanies him) would not be **given** (could not be given) until they **came together**.

I’ve never known a divided and disagreeable (contentious) group to receive the power of the Holy Spirit...

...never seen a church, in which division and disunity existed, blessed with the fruit of the Holy Spirit

...never seen a congregation transformed until they shared one heart and one mind, until they started loving each other as Christ loved them, and until they sought to heal their broken relationships.

**Allow me to be very specific and direct for a few minutes...** (Hopefully I’ve been here long enough that you now I love you, but...)

If you know you have an unhealed relationship with someone, if you've knowingly offended someone, if you are holding resentment/bitterness against a brother/sister in Christ, you are impeding the work of the Holy Spirit. If that's true, that needs to be addressed - a.s.a.p. As the Holy Spirit prompts you, make the phone call, offer your confession/apology, seek reconciliation... It can't wait...

If we can't unite in prayer together because there is relational junk dividing us as the body of Christ; we will not experience the Spirit's power without unity (which, by the way, is not the same as uniformity).

The first followers of Christ came together and healed their **relational wounds**. Meanwhile, God **waited**...and then **revealed** himself in ways he never had before.

## CONCLUSION

**God taught the early Church that good things come to those who wait on Him...**to those who don't run ahead of Him, take things into their own hands, grow impatient, or insist on doing it their way in their time.

The story is told of an old, country preacher who, as the years went by, began to lose his eyesight. It got to the point that he couldn't see anymore, so on Sunday mornings, he would have someone open his Bible and read from the Book of Acts. (He would always pick the Book of Acts). Then he would just stand up, put his hand on the text he couldn't read, and say, "*Do it again, Lord. Do it again!*"

**That's my prayer - that God will do what he did in the early church again. Do it again, Lord! Do it again here among us, Lord. (Will you join me in that prayer?!)**