

Advent: A Time of Waiting

Advent leads to and culminates in Christmas, so one may wonder why there is such a focus on the end times during Advent. The answer is rather simple. The Church is not waiting for Jesus to be born, but we are waiting for Him to return. As the Church of old waited for the first coming of the Saviour, we wait for His second coming, which is the end of the world and Judgment Day.

There is much to be said about the signs of the end times and the recognising of these signs. There is much to be said about the Judgment on the Last Day; Christ's separation of His sheep from the goats; Christ's giving of the kingdom to His children while judging the wicked with fire. But a large part of the end times for the Church is simply waiting.

We wait for Christ to return. We wait for justice and peace; for everything to be set right. We wait for events to unfold which are completely out of our hands and beyond our understanding.

It is no wonder that so many Psalms mention waiting. *"Wait eagerly for the LORD! Have courage! Let your heart prove to be strong! Wait eagerly for the LORD!"* (27:14). *"I have been waiting for the LORD. My soul has been waiting, and I have been putting my hope in His Word. My soul waits for the LORD more than watch-men for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning"* (130:5-6) *"For evildoers will be cut down, but those who wait eagerly for the LORD will inherit the earth"* (37:9). *"Certainly, no one who waits in hope for You will be put to shame"* (25:3).

Waiting for the Lord reminds us who it is who holds all things in His hands. Waiting for the Lord reminds us who it is that needs to act in order to save. Waiting for the Lord is trusting in Him above all things.

Waiting does not mean doing nothing. Rather, it means fulfilling our vocations until the Lord returns. Waiting means patient endurance and having hope, both of which come by being encouraged through the Scriptures. The holy Scriptures are both the source and the means through which we receive patient endurance, encouragement, and hope. This is why God has given us His Word; it is the very purpose of the Bible.

Patient endurance means to remain steadfast under trial; to persevere in suffering; to have fortitude in the face of pressure. Thus, it means to keep fulfilling your God-given vocations when there is pressure to stop. It means to stand firm in persecution. It means to patiently endure under God's declaration that you are righteous when you are being slandered and being called anything but righteous.

Romans chapter five tells us that patient endurance is produced by suffering. This does not mean that suffering is in and of itself good, but it results in something good, namely patient endurance.

In a way, it can be compared to training for a long-distance race. You need the suffering of your training runs in order to compete in the race. The more you endure in your training, the more you can endure in the race. If you slack off in your training to avoid suffering, you're going to do poorly in the race because you won't have the endurance to finish. If you don't train at all, you are collapsing, hurting yourself, and not finishing the race is almost guaranteed.

God sends us suffering to train us, so that we would have patient endurance to run the race that is set before us (cf. Heb. 12:2). He trains us through suffering so that we can endure to the end.

Of course suffering by itself doesn't give us hope. We need the encouragement of the holy Scriptures. Suffering by itself only produces bitterness and anger as we can witness in the world around us. It is the encouragement of God's Word that we need to have hope.

God's Word gives us hope because it tells us of Jesus. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Consider Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame (cf. Heb. 12:2-3). Jesus was willing to suffer the torture, the pain, the guilt, the curse, and the shame of the cross for you to save you eternally. The joy of eternal life which is set before us is what encourages us to patiently endure while we wait for Jesus to return.

We are encouraged. We are comforted. We know that there is an end to suffering and trials. We know there is a finish line to the race even though we cannot yet see it.

Our hope is not an empty hope or wishful thinking. Our hope is founded on God's promises to us, so it is a sure and certain hope and will not put us to shame.

So we wait for the Lord as the Church has always waited for Him. His Word gives us patient endurance and hope as we wait for Jesus to return as He promised. This is the encouragement of the Scriptures for us, so that we shall remain steadfast under trial, persevere in suffering, and have fortitude in the face of pressure. We wait with hope that will not put us to shame. We wait, straightening up and raising our heads, because our redemption is drawing near.