

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!” You can understand why Mary and Martha would say this. When Jesus received word that Lazarus was sick, “he stayed where he was two more days.” By the time Jesus gets there, Lazarus has already been in the tomb four days! Jesus had missed the funeral. He had missed the committal. Jesus had missed everything! Now admittedly in the end Jesus gave them a salvation worth waiting for, but the question remains, Why did Jesus make them wait? And what I would like to suggest to you today brothers and sisters is that the wait is meaningful. When we have a problem and the Lord makes us wait for deliverance, that wait is not just dead time, the wait is meaningful.

Our Isaiah passage for today talks about the Lord waiting to deliver his people. It says in verse 18, “**Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you ... Blessed are all who wait for him.**” Now the Hebrew word that is translated “longs to be gracious to you” could also be translated “waits to be gracious to you.” It’s the same Hebrew word that is translated at the end of the verse “Blessed are all who *wait for* him.” So if we want to bring out the wordplay we could translate the verse “The LORD waits to be gracious to you, blessed are all who wait for him.” Now “longs to be gracious to you” is not a bad translation because the Lord wants to be gracious to you. He’s not waiting because he doesn’t care about you. He’s eagerly waiting to be gracious to you. He looking forward to the day when he will be gracious to you and deliver you. But if wants so badly to be gracious to me, then what is stopping him from doing it right now?

It’s not because he doesn’t care. The reason Jesus stayed for two days before going to Mary, Martha and Lazarus was not because he didn’t care about Lazarus. Look what it says in our Gospel reading: “**Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.**” (John 11:5) Then Jesus broke down and openly wept at the funeral. Don’t ever think that God is this distant God who doesn’t care about us. No, if you want to know what God is like look at Jesus. Jesus breaks down and openly sobs at the death of his friend. But if Jesus cares so much, why did he wait two days? If God cares so much why does he make us wait before he delivers us? Because the wait is meaningful.

“**Although the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction.**” (Isaiah 30:20) That’s a striking phrase isn’t it? “The bread of adversity and the water of affliction” It’s a striking phrase because bread and water are things that sustain you. In fact, bread and water are things that you absolutely need. In a sense I *need* adversity and affliction. I’m not saying that we should *like* suffering or purposely seek suffering. No I don’t *like* adversity and affliction and I don’t go looking for adversity and affliction, but I realize that I need adversity and affliction, to remind me that I need Him.

A lot of people say that God won’t give you anything you can’t handle. And that’s true. It might be a little more precise to say, “God won’t give you anything He can’t handle.” And sometimes God gives you something that you so obviously can’t handle that it becomes painfully obvious, I have to go to God to help me with this.

You see the wait is meaningful because it teaches us to rely on God and not on ourselves. In the verses just before our text God faulted the people for thinking that their *own* might would solve all their problems. In the verses just before this God said, “**In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’ Therefore you will flee! You said, ‘We will ride off on swift horses.’ Therefore your pursuers will be swift.**” (Isaiah 30:15-16) They put their trust in their own might and in their horses instead of putting their trust in God.

The Christian religion is really all about waiting. In a sense there is lots of activity. Certainly we are active in mission work. We are active in showing love to our neighbors. But there are certain things that we have to just wait for God to do. For example, we could not save ourselves from our sins. No matter how hard we might try to make ourselves better people we would never be able to save ourselves from our sin. We had to wait for God to do that. And he did when he sent Jesus to die on the cross and save us from our sins. That was all God’s

work. Not ours. Another example, we cannot beat death. We simply wait for Jesus to come back and change our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body. But the wait is meaningful because it teaches us that he has to do it and not us. And that's true for any other problem in our lives. We do what we can, if we're sick we see our doctors, we take the medicine, but at the end of the day we just wait for our God.

Another reason the wait is meaningful is because it gives you a chance to give testimony to those around you. If you have born up under suffering for a long time it makes it obvious to those around you that you have a source of power that is not human. And the fact that it's God's power is an important point because you might think to yourself: "Well, I've had some moments of doubts and despair." And that's why it's important to say that you are relying on God's power and not your own inner will power.

Another reason the wait is meaningful is because it makes our faith stronger. The bread of adversity and the water of affliction are necessary is so that you can grow in your *faith*. Martin Luther said it this way. He said that three things make a theologian. It sounds cooler in Latin: *oratio, tentatio, meditatio*. *Oratio* is prayer. *Tentatio* is suffering. And *meditatio* is meditation on God's word. So three essential ingredients to a mature faith are prayer, suffering and meditation on God's word. And there is a relationship between those three things. Suffering causes me to pray and to meditate on God's word and the result is that my faith is stronger.

Suffering by itself won't make your faith stronger. But if you combine suffering with prayer and God's word. That's makes your faith stronger. It's like Isaiah says, "**Although the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will not be hidden from you.**" (Isaiah 30:20) Isaiah is talking about those who teach God's word. Sometimes God says to us, "I'm not going to take your suffering away yet, but instead I'm going to give you my word." And you might think, well those are just words. What good can words be? Well, Jesus' word was strong enough to raise the dead. The voice of Jesus resounds in the tomb of Lazarus and the dead man walks out. Imagine what the voice of Jesus can do when it resounds in your ears and in your heart. You'll find that the word of God can sustain you through the greatest trial. God's word gives you guidance for life. Like Isaiah says, "**Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.'**" (Isaiah 30:21) You wouldn't try to drive somewhere you've never been before without looking at a map. So why try to journey through the twists and turns of life without listening to what God says in the Bible?

Another reason the wait is meaningful is that God is setting the stage to do something glorious. It's like in our Gospel, Jesus says, "**This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.**" Jesus could have come four days earlier and healed Lazarus. But that's not as glorious as seeing Lazarus walk out of his own tomb! So whenever you are going through some type of problem in life, say to yourself, "Well, I wonder what glorious thing God will do with this situation!"

Now it might be that you have been listening to me and you might think to yourself, "OK, I understanding why waiting might be meaningful. But it's still not completely satisfying. I still want to know why God lets us suffer." And I'll admit that I don't have all the answers. Some answers remain hidden in God's wisdom and are too high for us to know. We ask God why do we suffer and the answer God gives us is, "I came down to suffer with you." When they rolled the stone away from Lazarus' tomb that must have reminded Jesus that not long after Lazarus came out Jesus would have to go in. In order for Lazarus to live Jesus would have to die. Jesus joined us in our suffering so that we could join him in his glory. And in a few minutes we won't eat the bread of affliction. We will eat the bread of HIS affliction. "This is my body, given for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus cares a lot about your suffering and some day he will turn all your suffering into glory. But in order to take away all your suffering, he had to undergo suffering himself. He had to suffer to pay for all of our sins. And he loves you so much that he willingly did that. He shared in our suffering, so that we could share in his glory. Amen.