

# God Works for Those Who Wait for Him

by John Piper

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*God works for those who wait for Him, providing all the services we need and achieving all that we need for our eternal good.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 33:16, Psalm 106:13, Psalm 127:1, Proverbs 21:31, Isaiah 30:15-31, Philippians 4:19

**Topics:** "Trusting God", "Divine Providence"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on the importance of trusting in the Lord's work for those who wait for Him, emphasizing that God's labor surpasses human efforts in providing for our needs and securing our eternal good. He highlights the uniqueness, competence, and condition of God's work, stressing the necessity of seeking God's counsel, being still when He commands, and maintaining reliance on His help even in our own actions. Piper encourages the congregation to have a spirit of expectancy, knowing that God's victory is certain when we wait for Him in all circumstances.

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## Transcript

September 5, 1982

Isaiah 64:1-4

One of the rare delights of this summer was that my 2½ year old Abraham became a preacher. One morning I came up from downstairs and awakened the family with Psalm 20:7, "Some boast of chariots and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God." I announced it like a general to his army: this is the banner over our family. From then on Abraham has become a preacher. He climbs on the kitchen stool and calls out, arms waving, "We not trust in chariots, we not trust in horses; we trust in Lord our God!" And that has made my summer!

I want to speak this morning on why every family and every person should raise that banner over your front door. The reason is given in Isaiah 64:4, "From of old no one has heard, or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him." The reason everyone should say, "We not trust in horses, we not trust in chariots, we trust in 'ord our God," is that God works for people like that. And if God is working for you surely things will turn out better than they would if everyone else in the world were working for you, but not God.

On this Labor Day Sunday I want us to lift up and enjoy the God who labors for us. If everything that we needed in this life and in the life to come could be achieved by mere human labor, then it would be fitting on Labor Day just to celebrate man and his labors. But, in fact, everyone knows that the things we need most are not owing to our labor. Did we labor to be created? Did we make our eyes so we could have the joy of sight? Or our ears for hearing? Or our nose and mouth for smelling and tasting? Did we create our wives or husbands or parents or friends who give so much delight to our life? Did we supply the earth with water for drinking? Did we make the sun and station it at just the right distance to hold the earth fast, warm our days, tan our skin, make our crops grow? Did we surround the earth with air to carry clouds and birds and oxygen for our lungs? Do we paint the sunrises and sunsets that never cease but make their way endlessly around the globe for all to see? And when we come to die, will it be by our labor that a holy and just God can acquit us of all our sin, take away all fear and pain and guilt, and give us new resurrection bodies for ever and ever in the age to come? All the things we need most will be achieved for us by the labor of God or not at all. And so as Labor Day approaches tomorrow I want to leave this great truth ringing in your ears: "God works for those who wait for him."

I will mention briefly three things about this work which God does: 1) its uniqueness; 2) its competence; 3) its condition.

First, the uniqueness of such work. The text suggests that in working for those who wait for him God does something utterly unique. "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him." No one has ever heard or seen the likes of this God. Isaiah contrasts Jehovah with the Babylonian gods in Isaiah 46:1-4. Bel and Nebo are the Jupiter and Mercury of Babylon and they are as helpless as their falling images. They have to be carried. Their subjects have to work for them. But the Lord of Israel is the creator and he does the carrying.

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop, they bow down together; they cannot save the burden but themselves go into captivity. Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to grey hairs I will carry you. I have made and I will bear; I will carry and will save (cf. Jer. 10:5).

What sets Jehovah apart from all the other gods is that he does not need to be carried. He has made and he will carry. He will work for those who wait for him. The distinguishing mark of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus is that he magnifies his greatness by coming down to work for us. It says in Isaiah 30:18, "He exalts himself to show mercy to you." God aims to be an utterly unique, wonderful and exalted God, and the way he does it is by condescending to forgive sinners and work for those who wait for him. Therefore, no eye has ever seen the likes of such a God; it is without parallel anywhere that the Creator should come down and work for the creature.

Second, we should consider for a moment the competence of this work. We've all had work done for us. I had landscaping work done for me so water would drain away from the back door. They did it wrong twice and had to come back a third time. I had work done for me on my transmission and it's still not right. We all know what it is like to depend on a workman and then to be let down through incompetence in one form or another.

But things are altogether different when God becomes our workman. God is not lacking in any of the things that cause human workmen to let us down in the service we need. They may lack a sufficient

concern for the reputation and honor of their firm. They may lack sufficient understanding of how to do the job. They may lack sufficient strength or endurance to finish it. In other words, their motivation, their knowledge and their power may be inadequate for what needs to be done and so they sometimes let us down.

But with God things are utterly different. His motivation to preserve his honor and avoid the reputation of a bungler is infinite. His knowledge of how everything works and how to meet every need is infinite. And his strength and endurance are infinite. God cannot fail. As he says in Isaiah 46:9,10,

I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose."

If God undertakes to work for us, he cannot fail. He will succeed in providing all the services we need. As Paul says in Philippians 4:19,20,

My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Finally, we must ask about the condition of this divine service. For whom does God work? In one respect God works for everyone. He works to produce life and to provide sun and rain and harvest for all his creatures, even those in rebellion. He gives health and prosperity to millions who ignore him or give him token acknowledgment. All this is meant to lead them to repentance and gratitude and worship. But if their hearts remain cold toward God, even his kindness will heighten their guilt in the end (Rom. 2:4,5). This general work which God does for all his creatures is called common grace. It is common to all men.

But the work of God referred to in our text is a special grace. It is work done only for those who have a certain disposition. "No eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him." The work mentioned here is more than creation and preservation. It is more than meeting a few natural needs. It is the investment of all God's energy in every way for our eternal good. This he does only for those who wait for him.

So the big question for all of us who want to have God working for and not against us is, how do we wait for him? What does waiting mean? In Isaiah "waiting for God" implies that the people of God are in trouble. They are in danger from enemies and the temptation is very great to hastily seek the help of men instead of waiting for God to act. But in Isaiah 31:1 it says,

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many or in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy one of Israel or consult the Lord.

Waiting for the Lord means first of all then, looking to the Lord, consulting or seeking his will before any human aid is pursued. In short, we wait for the Lord when we pause to pray before we act. It says in Psalm 106:13, "They soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel." The first act of waiting is to seek God's counsel in prayer before any attempt is made to solve the problem ourselves. And it should go without saying that when we wait for God's counsel we are submissive and open to it. We are not telling him what he must do. We are like patients phoning the doctor for advice on how to treat the rising pain.

The answer may come from the Lord in two forms, both of which involve more waiting for him. He may tell you to do nothing or he may tell you to do something. For example, in Isaiah 30:15 the Lord says,

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." And you would not, but you said, "No! We will speed upon horses," therefore you shall speed away, and, "We will ride upon swift steeds," therefore your pursuers shall be swift.

In other words, God's will was that they let him save them in quietness and rest. But they preferred to escape their own way and God did not work for them. So when we pray for God's counsel we must be prepared to hear him say what Moses did at the Red Sea, "Fear not, stand firm, and behold the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today... The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still." So the second thing waiting means is, trust the Lord enough to be still when he says to. Then he will bare his arm and work for you.

But the Physician may answer your phone call by saying, "Take your pill." God may say, "Enter the battle." In 2 Samuel 5:19, when the Philistines were pursuing David it says, "David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt thou give them into my hand?' And the Lord said to David, 'Go up. For I will certainly give the Philistines into thy hand.'" He did not take matters into his own hands. He waited for the Lord. Then the Lord said, act.

But the thing we have to remember (and this changes all of life) is that we do not cease to wait for God when we begin to act ourselves. For we know the lesson of Proverbs 21:31, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord." Even when we follow the Lord into battle we carry with us a spirit of waiting for his help. We say with the psalmist (33:16-22),

A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory and by its great might it cannot save... Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Yea, our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let thy steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in thee.

If the Lord instructs us to take certain precautions against the enemy, even in the midst of that activity we must keep on waiting for the Lord's help because we know Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stays awake in vain." Therefore the third way that we wait for the Lord is by having a sense of reliance on his work even when we are most active. We are waiting for the Lord when we have a spirit of expectancy that, though all our labor is fragile and vulnerable, nevertheless, God never fails and the final result is in his hands.

In conclusion, then, these three things. When circumstances arise in which you feel that something must be done, for safety or for service, wait for the Lord and he will work for you. First pray, seek his counsel, submit to his wisdom and power. Second, if he says to be still, then leave it all in his hands, trusting his supernatural involvement in the situation. I don't mean laziness or shirking of duty. I mean that when you are most prepared, most capable, most primed for battle and think that most hangs on you, he may say, "Stay home, be quiet, pray and watch me act." Third, if the Lord says, "Prepare, train, work, fight, argue, struggle," even then maintain that humble reliance on the Lord. Have a spirit of expectancy that, though your labors are shabby, the final issue is the Lord's and he loves to work for people who wait for him.

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