

The Waiting for the Fulfillment.

by William Arthur

The sermon explores the disciples' waiting period after Jesus' ascension, highlighting their faith, perseverance, and the significance of praying in Jesus' name.

Scripture: Luke 24:53, John 16:23, Acts 1:8, Acts 1:14, Colossians 1:19

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Faithful Waiting"

Description

William Arthur preaches about the disciples' anticipation and preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension. The disciples, filled with great joy and hope, gather in Jerusalem, praising and blessing God, and praying fervently in unity for the promised baptism of fire. Despite the delay, they remain faithful, persistent, and united in prayer, eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. Peter, in his eagerness and impatience, demonstrates his readiness for the Holy Spirit's arrival by taking steps to fill the vacancy among the apostles, showing their active anticipation and preparation for the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

IT is on Thursday, probably in the evening, that the disciples return to Jerusalem. Their Master is no more at their head--indeed, no more on earth; and as yet his great promise is unfulfilled. But the scene of the ascension is in their eye; the voice of the angels in their ear. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. The Comforter is coming "not many days hence." Not with doubting or weeping do they enter the city, but with "great joy"--the joy of a triumph already sealed, and of hope foreseeing triumphs to come. Most probably that joy carries their first steps to the temple. (Luke xxiv. 53.) Oft had they entered it with him, but never so triumphantly as now. There they are, not mourning the absence of their Master, but "praising and blessing God." Thence they go to "an upper room." We know not in what street, or on what site; but there "abode" a few men whose names were not then great, but whose names will nevermore pass from the memory of mankind. With them abode also a few women, who had loved their Lord; and for the last time "Mary the mother of Jesus" is named as one of the little company. Men and women, they now began to pray, and they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" for the baptism of fire.

Did they expect to receive it that very night? This we know not; but we do know that then opened a new era in the intercourse of man with heaven. As they began to pray, how would they find all their conceptions of the Majesty on high changed! It no longer spread before and beyond the soul's eyesight, as an unvaried infinity of glory incomprehensible. The glory was brighter, the incomprehensibility remained; but the infinity

had now received a center. Every beam of the glory converged toward the person of "God manifest in the flesh," now "received up into heaven": the glory not dissolving the person in its own tide, the person not dimming the glory by any shade, though appearing through it as the sun's body through the light. Perhaps, indeed, the change was such, to their view, as would have struck the eye of an observer of nature, had one lived on our planet at the time when the sun was first set in the firmament. The light which before had been a wide and level mystery now had to his eye a law, a center, and a spring. The indistinct view of a material form amid the seemingly spiritual glory gave the feeling that somebody akin to our own globe lay at the center of illumination. This body was not the cause of the light, not even of the same nature; but around the body the "exceeding weight of glory" seemed to hang.

Oh, to feel as felt that heart which first discerned human nature in the person of Him who had been "so marred," set down "on the right hand of the Majesty on high. The glory of the Father encompassing a human form, and beaming from a human brow! "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I," was the word of Jesus. Now that they had seen him pass within the veil--seen the ushering angels attend his entrance, and heard the music of their voices--they would not feel as if he had forsaken them, but as they had often felt when the high priest passed from their view into the holiest, bearing the blood of atonement, to stand before the Presence--"he is out of sight, but there before the Lord." The first thought would be one of joy for him. Peter, how did thy breast heave when first thou didst behold, by faith clear as sight, that countenance which had looked round upon thee from the bar, now looking down upon thee from the high and lofty throne! Mary Magdalene, who was bent under the sevenfold power of the devil when first that face beamed on thee; who didst fall at his feet when, just arisen from the dead, he first appeared to thee, what was the flow of thy tears, what the odor of thy joy, when the full truth burst on thy view, that he had "overcome, and was set down with the Father on his throne"! And thou, John, what felt thy bosom when he, on whose bosom thine own head had leaned, appeared to thy mind no more with such as thee, but, as "in the beginning, with God"? And thou, too, Mary the blessed, through whose soul the sword had gone, how did thy "soul magnify the Lord"; how did thy "spirit rejoice in God thy Saviour," when thy meek eye saw the infinite accomplishment of Gabriel's word, He shall be great!

Mingling with this first joy for the Master's exaltation, and presently rising to the surface and overspreading all their emotions, would be the feeling: "He has entered for us within the veil! He bears our names upon his heart for a memorial before the Lord! He maketh intercession for us!" Tush! which of the Twelve is it that starts up as if a spirit had entered him, and, pointing upward, says to the brethren: "Let us ask the Father in his name! He said to us, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.'" (John xvi. 23, 24.)

The angels had often sung together when the prayer of repenting sinners was heard on high. Now, for the first time, they hear prayers from human lips rising to the throne authorized and accredited by the name of the Only Begotten of the Father. That name has just been set "above every name"; and as it echoes through the host above, with the solemn joy of a hundred believing voices, "things in heaven" bow. Be man ever so unworthy, "worthy is the Lamb"; and his name covers with justice every request to which it is set by his authority. What must have been that moment for the saints in paradise, who had seen the Saviour afar off, but never known the joy of praying directly in his name! Father Abraham had "rejoiced to see his day; and he saw it and was glad." What would be his gladness now, that earth and heaven were rejoicing in his name! David, to whom he was at once Lord and Son, what would be "the things" which in

that wonderful moment his tongue would speak "touching the King"?

From the hour that sin entered into the world, the Just One had never given man audience on terms fit only for the innocent. An upright inferior may approach Majesty, not without reverence, but without shame or atonement. The admission of a criminal on the same footing would be wrong. Right in our governments is the imperfect reflection of a perfect right. Had the favor of the Almighty crossed the line which divides innocence from guilt and smiled upon the latter, that smile would have been a scathing flash, wherein all morals would have blackened. Sinful man had not been hopelessly banished from the presence of God; but he had ever been taught to come displaying a sign of wrath, of death, which is the wages of sin; thus declaring to the universe that he appealed not to a justice which had never been offended, but to a justice which had been satisfied.

The altar had been the patriarch's place of prayer. The temple, where was the perpetual offering, had been the center to which every praying Israelite turned. To approach the Eternal Godhead as if no evil had been done, and no stroke merited, was never yet the privilege of a creature who had done wrong. It was wonderful, yea, mysterious, that such could be allowed to approach at all; but the Lord would ever justify his permission by demanding clear and express reference to that propitiation which he has set forth to declare his own righteousness, in that marvelous act of lifting the guilty into the mansions of the good.

How great the transition from these symbols of the atonement to the full view of its reality! During the forty days, Jesus had opened their understanding, pointed out to them the scriptures which bore upon his death, and showed its connection with remission of sins for mankind. They now looked no more to temple or to altar. They had before them the true sacrifice completed. He had "purged their sins," and, in the same body wherein he had done so, was standing before the Father.

He had given them authority to use his name. With that name their petitions carried the assent of all the rational and moral creation. The Eternal Father, in holding communion with beings who had done wrong, exposed no sinless being to doubts as to whether right and wrong were equal. He had "made peace through" Christ's "blood"; had thus "reconciled all things to himself"--to himself in the new and mysterious proceeding of government, whereby the doers of wrong were spared the effects of wrongdoing. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." (Colossians i. 19, 20.) So that creatures "in heaven," all whose joy depended on their never doing wrong, had no murmur to raise, and no temptation to undergo, when they saw creatures "on earth," who had followed ways which would make any world sorrowful, received into the arms of eternal mercy. The guilty he reconciled by forgiving their sin and recovering their hearts; and the innocent he reconciled to see offenders exalted, by "setting forth," so conspicuously that all angels desired to look into it, "a propitiation," which fully "declared his righteousness," his strict care of right--which magnified law, magnified holiness, magnified obedience, and, in the act of saving the guilty, magnified beyond all previous conception the heinousness of guilt. What sense of the distinction between right and wrong could have been maintained among innocent creatures, had they seen transgressors raised to favor and honor without atonement?

Oh, the joy of that first hour of praying in the name of Christ! Was not Martha there? As she met the Master on that mournful day, when Lazarus lay in the tomb, though despairing, she said: "But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." If such was her confidence then, what would be her confidence now--he asking for her, and she asking in his name! How the souls of the

disciples, following him above the sky, would soar, with a new wing, a new eye, and a new song! What simple and glowing collects would they be which were uttered then! What words of joy and supplication would he pour forth who first bethought him of putting the Lord in remembrance of his own promises! What short and burning petitions would go up from the lips which first quoted, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it you!" How would he plead who first remembered, "Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you!" How would tones of desire and triumph mingle in the first repetition of, "All things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive"! None of their prayers are recorded. We have ancient collects, and beautiful they are; but none of these most ancient are preserved. The Spirit has not seen it good to hand down the strong and tender collects of these ten, or of the following days. Then surely it is unlawful to impose good forms of prayer upon all men because ancient saints wrote them.

He who will never use a form in public prayer, casts away the wisdom of the past. He who will use only forms, casts away the hope of utterance to be given by the Spirit at present, and even shuts up the future in the stiff hand of the past. Whatever Church forbids a Christian congregation, no matter what may be their fears, troubles, joys, or special and pressing need, ever to send up prayer to God, except in words framed by other men in other ages, uses an authority which was never delegated. To object to all forms is narrowness. To doom a Christian temple to be a place wherein a simple and impromptu cry may never arise to heaven, is superstition.

Does any one of the hundred and twenty, even in paradise, up to this moment forget the hour of prayer that Thursday night, after they had returned from Olivet?

The Friday morning dawns. It was on Friday the Lord had died. Would he not send his promised substitute to-day? Oh, how his cross would all day long stand before the eye of every disciple! Now came back all his words about the death "which he should accomplish"; from the night when he told Nicodemus that, as the serpent had been lifted up, so must he be, up to the night in which he said, "The hour is come"--words dark at that time, but pointed to-day as the steel of arrows. What has been mystery was mystery no longer. Now the only mystery was, "What manner of love!" Was it on that day that John's fiery heart, the heart which had rebuked the man who followed not them, which wished to burn the inhospitable villagers, and to be, with his brother, head of all--was it then this heart fully embraced the meaning of the agony witnessed by him so close at hand, as compared with others, and written upon it forever? Was it then it first saw all the import of the words, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"? and that the "son of thunder" was transformed into the child of charity?

Never before had the thought of man alternated between two such scenes as those which divided the eye of every soul in that praying company: a cross, a drooping head, hands bleeding, feet bleeding, heaven black, thieves on either side, gibes below; and a preternatural sorrow on the soul of the sufferer, which cast over the whole an infinite dreadfulness. On this the eye looks one moment, and weeps. Then a throne, high and lifted up: the glory of the Lord; angels bowing, angels singing, saints with palm and harp and voice acclaiming; and in the center of all might, majesty, and dominion, the crucified body, living, but with its wounds "as slain." On this the same eye looks, and weeps again. Oh, for the feeling of that day!

Yet the Friday wears away, and no "baptism of fire!" The Saturday sets in: its hours are filled up as before with prayer; but no answer. And now dawns the first day of the week, the day whereon he rose, the first Lord's day he had passed on his throne of glory. How did they spend that day? Surely they would fully expect that the blessing they sought would be delayed no longer. He said: "Not many days." This was the

fourth day; it must come to-day! But the evening steals on, and all their prayers might have risen into a heaven that could not hear. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday pass. Their faith does not fail; still in the temple "praising and blessing God," or in the upper room in "prayer and supplication," they continue of one accord. Though he tarry, yet will they wait for him.

This is waiting. Some speak of waiting for salvation as if it meant making ourselves at ease, and dismissing both effort and anxiety. Who so waits for any person or any event? When waiting, your mind is set on a certain point; you can give yourself to nothing else. You are looking forward, and preparing: every moment of delay increases the sensitiveness of our mind as to that one thing. A servant waiting for his master, a wife waiting for the footstep of her husband, a mother waiting for her expected boy, a merchant waiting for his richly laden ship, a sailor waiting for the sight of land, a monarch waiting for tidings of the battle all these are cases wherein the mind is set on one object, and cannot easily give attention to another.

"To-morrow will be Thursday, a full week from the ascension: that will be the day; the term of the promise will not extend farther. To-morrow the Comforter will come; to-morrow we shall be baptized with fire, and fitted to do the works our Master did, 'yea, greater works than these.'" So they would probably settle it in their mind. The Thursday finds them, as before, "of one accord in one place"; no Thomas absent through unbelief. How the scene of that day week would return to their view! How they would over and over again in mind repeat the walk from Jerusalem to Olivet; each recalling what he said to the Master, and what the Master said to him; each thinking he had got such a look as he never got before, and as he should not forget so long as he lived! How they would repeat the last words, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you"! In the repetition new faith would kindle. "Yes, we shall: let us wait on; we shall 'be indued with power from on high.'" Then another would repeat: "And ye shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth." This was vast language for them, whose thoughts were wont to move only in the sphere of Palestine. Probably they did not so much weigh the import of the terms as look at the main promise. They should be indued with the power of the Holy Ghost--that power which had made psalmists and prophets; had rendered the words of Elijah stronger than the decrees of Ahab, the words of Elisha stronger than the armies of Syria, the words of Isaiah as coals from the altar, and the words of Daniel mightier than the spirit of a king and "a thousand of his captains." Baptized with the same Spirit, they were to proclaim what these foretold, but never saw: the Child born, the Son given; the Prince cut off for sin, but not his own; the Lamb on whom were laid the iniquities of all. All this they had seen fulfilled in the person of their glorious Lord. All this they had heard explained by his own lips before and after his death. They were to go and prove to others, as he had proved to them, that "thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise again the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Here again they encountered the intimation that their message was for all, and their testimony to be borne to the uttermost parts of the earth. Yet still it seems that not the sphere, but the purport, of their commission now occupied their mind. They were to go, and, as he had preached, so would they, far and wide, in cities and villages. In what tones would they tell the people that as he used to say to those who came to him, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee," so would he now say from heaven to all who lifted an eye to him!

But the day wears on, and no blessing. Is not the delay long? "Not many days!" Does the promise hold good? They must have felt disappointed as the evening fell, and no sign of an answer to their oft-repeated

prayer. Now is the hour of trial. Will their faith fail? Will some begin to forsake the meetings which bring not the baptism they seek? Will some stay at home, or "go a-fishing," saying that they will wait the Lord's time, and not be unwarrantably anxious about what, after all, does not depend on them, but on the Lord? Will no one say: "We have done our duty, and must leave results; we cannot command the fulfillment of the promise; we have asked for it, asked sincerely, fervently, repeatedly; we can do no more"?

Or, what is equally probable, will they begin to find out that the cause why they remain unblessed, and yet "orphans," lies in the unfaithfulness of their companions? Happily, the spirit of faith and love abides upon them. John does not turn upon Peter and say: "It is your fault; for you denied the Master." Philip does not turn to John and say: "It is your fault; for you and James wanted to lord it over us all." Andrew does not turn to John and say: "It is your fault; for you would not believe, even when we had declared it to you." The Seventy do not say: "It is the fault of the Twelve; for, after the Lord had lifted them above us all, one of them sold him, another denied him, and a third disbelieved him." The Marys do not say: "It is the fault of the whole company, a cold and unfaithful company, professing to love the Master to his face; but the moment he fell into the hands of his enemies, ye all forsook him and fled!"

Well did they know that they had been slow of heart; been unworthy of such a Teacher; often grieved him, and made him ask: "How long shall I be with you?" John would never forget the rebuke, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Peter would never forget, the third time, "Lovest thou me?" Philip would never forget, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" And surely Thomas would never forget, "Be not faithless, but believing."

Yet they all knew he had not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. His own lips had said: "He that is whole hath no need of a physician, but he that is sick." Had he not taken to his bosom the very head whose heats of ambition and of vindictiveness he had rebuked? Had he not said to Peter, "Feed my lambs"? Had he not said to Thomas, "Reach hither thy hand"? His promise was not made because they were a Church without spot or wrinkle; but because they were feeble, and, deprived of his own presence, would be orphans indeed, did no other power cover them. He knew every fault with which either of them could charge the others; yet the promise had passed his lips, and the fire would fall even on them, unworthy as they were. Happy for them that none fancied he could fix upon others the cause of their unanswered prayers!

The Thursday is gone--eight days. The Friday and the Saturday follow it, marked by the same persistency in union, in praise, in prayer, and by the same absence of encouragement. Ten days gone! The promise, "Not many days," is all but broken.

Peter was always warm and earnest. A thought of his had hardly time to become a thought before it turned into either word or action. When once his mind had embraced the glorious idea of standing up before the world a witness for his ascended Master, it would seem as if the whole plan was to be carried out in a day. One cannot help imagining how he bore the restraint; of the ten days--the days of prayer, of belief, of waiting --in which they were not permitted to begin their work.

"Strange," we almost hear him say, "Strange! The Lord has died that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations. He has finished the work, risen from the dead, and led captivity captive. The heavens have received him. The angels proclaim him. Us he took from our homes. How he taught and trained and practiced us--all, as we now see, for this work of proclaiming his love and the pardon it brings to all mankind! Here we are, unfitted for every other calling. His commission is to us as

a prophet's call, as a king's anointing. He said: 'Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' We want to go. Men stand in need; they are dying daily, dying in unbelief. Why does he not permit us to go? Why is the first command so long suspended by the other--'Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be indued with power from on high'? We have tarried ten days. Why does our Master delay? The world needs the sound of his gospel; we are waiting to bear it forth. He is exalted at God's right hand, and all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth; yet does he look down upon the world sleeping a sleep unto death, and upon us waiting to blow the trumpet! Is not his instruction, his commission, enough? We are ordained, after much teaching: may we not go? No; we must abide by his word: 'Tarry until ye be indued with power from on high.'"

The final proof given by Peter that he was waiting indeed, making all preparations for the event, was in calling upon his brethren to fill up the number of the apostles. One had fallen. His place was vacant; and another was to take his "bishopric." Peter concluded that they were to fill up this vacancy, and called upon the company to select two men. No one objected that it remained to be seen whether they should be indued with power or not. All acted as feeling the certainty that the Holy Spirit was about to come, and the apostolic commission to be fulfilled to the ends of the earth.

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