

“The Living Fruit Diet: Patience”

Psalm 37 and 2 Corinthians 1

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A little more than a year ago now, in October 2010, an article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*. It had a kind of provocative title: “Starbucks Baristas Told No More than Two Drinks!” And that was enough for me. So I dived in to the article.

And the story said Starbucks routinely solicits comments. And recently they had been trying to decide how to deal with a perception on the part of some of their patrons that their drinks were being made too quickly and the quality wasn’t what it used to be. So the article said, the company had sent a memo to its baristas to slow down their work and prepare no more than two drinks at a time.

The goal, the memo said was to avoid the appearance that “the fine art of making coffee was being reduced to a mechanized process with all the romance of an assembly line.” And the *Journal* commented with tongue in cheek that maybe Starbucks was trying to learn how “to slow down and smell the coffee.”

Well, believe it or not, several weeks later a follow up article was written. And do you know what the article reported? Almost uniformly, Starbucks customers had begun to complain that they didn’t have the time or the patience to wait on their coffee while baristas worked on only two drinks at a time!

Well, for the last two weeks I’ve been looking together with you at some words that come from the pen of the apostle Paul. And I’ve been saying that the words describe a diet of fruit that God hopes will become part of our daily living. And God the Holy Spirit is waiting Paul says to serve us, to bring the fruit to us because Jesus promised, after the resurrection that the Father would send the Spirit to the disciples to do just that.

You know at one point, Jesus says it pretty clearly. Remember? “Don’t labor,” he tells people in the gospel of John, “Don’t labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that brings eternal life.” And I think when Jesus said that part of what he had in mind was the fruit of the Spirit.

So for the last two weeks, I've talked with you about two kinds of fruit the Spirit wants to serve up in my life and in yours, joy and peace. And I don't imagine it's been too difficult to listen to a couple of sermons about joy and peace because those words have a pretty positive connotation for most people. Joy and peace sound pretty attractive, don't they? Like qualities we'd all like to have in our lives.

But what about patience? When was the last time you sat back and said to yourself, "you know I think my life would be a lot more satisfying if I had more patience?"

Some of you have heard me talk about this before. But a few years ago the Associated Press took a poll. And the subject of the poll was patience. And after the poll was completed CNN reported on it. And here's part of what they said. And I'll do my best CNN newscaster voiceover as I read you this report.

"An Associated Press poll has found an impatient nation. It's a nation that gets antsy after five minutes on hold on the phone and 15 minutes max in a line. So says the survey.

The Department of Motor Vehicles, the U.S. version of the old Soviet bread line is apparently among the top spots where Americans hate to wait. But it's not the only one.

Hana Sklar is 23. She lives in New York and yes, she wants things done in a New York minute. She says she typically loses patience after waiting less than one minute in a line or on the phone.

And the poll shows that getting out of the big city doesn't make much of a difference. People in the suburbs can bear a few more minutes in a line before losing their patience. But that's it. So no big surprises in this poll: Americans want what they want, and they want it now. Or at least awfully close to now."

And I think the CNN report got it right. We do. We want what we want now. Or at least awfully close to now. But God wants something different for us. So, and I don't know whether you've ever noticed this, but God pretty commonly keeps people waiting on Him.

Let me give you a few examples. Let's take Abraham for a starter. God comes to Abraham. And Abraham's 75 years old. And God says, "Abraham, I'm going to make you a father. In fact, I'm going to make you the father of a nation. But not

right now. I need to put you on hold for a while." And Abraham waited on hold for 24 years. Remember that? Twenty-four years! The God who created time, the God who can control it kept Abraham waiting 24 years!

Then God promised David he was going to make him King. He sent Samuel his prophet to anoint Him King. The only problem was God didn't tell David he wasn't going to be able to rule right away. For you see, as it turned out David had to stand in line behind a man named Saul who was already taking his turn as King. And Saul had no plans to end his turn any time soon. So he threw a spear at David, chased him out of the royal court and tried to hunt him down for years in the wilderness.

And that's probably when David wrote the words of Psalm 37, "Don't fret because of those who are evil ... Be still before the Lord. Wait patiently for Him."

Then God made another promise, a great promise. God was going to send his people a Messiah, a Savior. So people waited and waited for centuries while they were ruled over by Babylon, then by Persia, then by Greece, then by Rome. And for centuries they waited on God.

Then he came, the child of the promise. And one of the first people to recognize him was a man named Simeon. "Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. He was righteous" Luke says, "and he was a devout man, waiting for the consolation of Israel." And he saw him, in the temple, in the arms of a woman named Mary, a child named Jesus. And Simeon knew who he was, Luke says, and he rejoiced.

But a lot of people didn't rejoice, because even though Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God, he kept everyone waiting for it. He kept everyone in expectation to see how it was going to happen. And when it didn't happen in the way they were hoping it would happen, the crowds turned against him. "Crucify him," they told Pilate, "crucify him."

So that's what Pilate did. He crucified him and allowed him to be buried in a tomb. But on the third day the tomb was empty. And later he appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days. And because they were still waiting, they finally asked him, "Lord, is it time now? Is the wait over? Are you at last going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

And Jesus said, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has

placed under His own authority. But don't go anywhere. Don't leave Jerusalem. Wait for the gift of the Spirit." And they waited 40 days. And the Spirit came. But the waiting wasn't over.

No. For Paul writes in Romans that "we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the kingdom, the Spirit dwelling in us ... we groan while we wait for our adoption by God to be completed through the redemption of our bodies. For in that hope we were saved." Then he writes, "Now if you say you're hoping to see it happen now. That's not hope! For who hopes for what you can see now? But if you hope for what you can't see now, you wait for it patiently." And wait, and wait, and we're still waiting.

And though I certainly can't claim to know all the reasons why God's still keeping us waiting on the fulfillment of this final promise He's made to all of us, I do believe what Ben Patterson wrote once. For he wrote "What God does in us while we wait is in fact just as important as what we think we're waiting for." And I'm convinced that's Paul's perspective too. For although it's distressing to wait Paul knows there's value in waiting.

You see 2 Corinthians is a letter that's written after a long period of distress in Paul's life and the distress was caused by a wait. And this is the story. You see in between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, there was quite a bit of turmoil in the church at Corinth. People turned against Paul.

And in between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, Paul made what he says was "a painful visit" to Corinth. Some of the Corinthians apparently "opposed him to his face" and Paul had to try and talk them down. And when he left he wasn't sure how things were going to turn out.

But he left and almost as soon as he got back to Ephesus where he was staying, he sent his young friend Titus back to Corinth, to see if the situation had calmed down. It had, but it took weeks for Titus to travel to Corinth and return to Paul and bring him the news. Months of waiting and worrying and it was distressing Paul says. It wasn't easy for him.

And I always feel better when I read 2 Corinthians because I think if it wasn't easy for the Apostle Paul to patiently wait out that time in his life, if he got a little distressed not knowing what was going to happen, it's probably OK for me to feel distressed from time to time as I wait for God to work out situations in my life.

But the main point is this. Something gave Paul the power to wait, to wait through his distress, to endure it. And actually it wasn't something Paul says. It was someone. And when the waiting at last was over, listen to Paul writes to the Corinthians. You can find them in 2 Corinthians 7.

“God,” Paul writes, “God, who comforts the downcast, has finally comforted me with the coming of Titus. And not only with his coming, but also with the comfort you gave him to bring to me. He told me about your longing to see me, your deep sorrow, your real concern for me, so my joy now is greater than ever.”

And it was patience that finally allowed Paul to experience that joy. But not just any kind of patience, a special kind of patience because the word that Paul uses as he writes about it is the Greek word “hu-po-mon-ay.” And it's really a compound word. It has two parts to it.

The first part of the word, the prefix is a preposition. “Hu-po” means “under.” The second part of the word “mon - ay” “to stay, to remain, to wait.” So when you put the two parts of the word together, it literally means to “wait under.” But what was it that Paul waited under? I believe it was the mighty hand of God.

“Humble yourselves,” Peter writes, “under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up at the right time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares about you.”

A God who cares about you, a God who invites you to cast all your anxiety on Him, a God who's got the power to lift you up out of that anxiety when the time is right; that's the God, the sovereign God we must learn how to trust. For if we learn how to trust Him, turn things over to Him and wait on Him, He will take that trust and give us a spirit of patient endurance until the time is right for our waiting to come to an end.

Peter had learned that lesson in his life during the forty days he waited with 120 others in an upper room in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come on the day of Pentecost. Have you learned it yet?

Because learning that lesson is the secret to discovering a different kind of patience in your life. It's not a kind of patience you can produce by yourself. You can't produce it by saying to yourself, “I've just got to try harder to have more patience.” No the patience that Peter found and Paul found and you can find too is a different kind of patience. It doesn't come from trying. It comes from trusting., trusting that God is in control, allowing the Holy Spirit to convince you of that until you

know that whatever hardship you have to wait out isn't going to last forever.

You see the waiting gets easier when you know what you're waiting for, and when you put your trust in God you know that what you're waiting for. You're waiting for God's to lift you up at the right time. And in the meantime you know where you're waiting. You're waiting safe under His mighty hand. And you know a third thing. You know what to do while you're waiting. You know what to do with your anxiety. Cast it on Him. Cast it on Him, for he cares about you.

And when you know these truths and put them into practice in your life, the Holy Spirit can and will produce in you the fruit of patience.

So I don't know what you're waiting for this morning. I don't know how long you've been waiting. But I do know this. If you want to wait patiently, if you want to find the endurance you need to get you through your season of waiting, here's what you need to do.

“Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up at the right time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares about you.”

Let's pray ...