

## Q & A: Waiting on God, Faith and Knowledge, Repentance

**Turn to Isa. 64:1-4.** As I mentioned a few weeks ago, when we are between books I like open up a sermon or two to answering your questions about the Bible or life or whatever. This is gives those who ask the questions an opportunity to get an answer and an opportunity for the rest of us to think about things that maybe we haven't worked through before.

### 1 - What does it mean to wait on God?

Here's the full question: "We are supposed to wait on God for direction and guidance in life. People tell you to wait, and also tell you to "actively wait" such that you wait but don't remain inactive. How are we supposed to accomplish that? How do we wait for God? When should we move on without His guidance? What if we have prayed continuously for guidance? In short, how do we wait on God?"

Waiting on God is something we've all had to do and the reality is that no one likes to wait. No one has ever liked to wait. You think of Abraham in the book of Genesis: God promised him a son through Sarah when he was 75 years old. That son didn't arrive until about 25 years later when Abraham was 100 years old. Twenty five years is a lot of waiting. God promised the Messiah back in Genesis 3 - some 6,000 years ago. So if you do the math, that was about 4,000 years of waiting. **Galatians 4:4** says that when the fullness of time came - when it was just the right time for God - that's when he sent forth his Son. And, of course, we are waiting for Jesus again. **2 Pet. 3** says that we are again waiting for Jesus and while we're waiting there are going to be people who scoff at us saying "When is this Jesus guy you follow really coming back?" They'll scoff at us just like they scoffed at Noah when he was building the Ark.

We also wait on God for decisions or situations. We wait for medical test results. Maybe you're waiting for the person you're going to marry to come into your life. Maybe you're waiting for a decision on a job. Or a family situation to reach some conclusion. Or you've sent out college applications and you want to know the decisions. Or maybe you've gotten multiple offers on something and you're waiting to figure out which is the best.

How do we wait in a way that honors God? Let me give you a few things to keep in mind:

1) God is in no hurry to accomplish his purposes. A lot of times we're waiting for something and really what God is doing in us is building in us patience.

When I was a kid we had a black lab who we were training to do water retrieval. And we'd throw this fetching dummy out into the Columbia River as far as we could and have him just sit and watch it. And when he was younger you could tell it was all he could do it sit there. And sometimes he'd go after it before we told him to fetch. And so we'd make him wait, make him wait, make him wait until it was almost painful. And then we'd say fetch - and it was like a bolt of lightning. Why did we do that? Because a dog who can't wait on its master isn't an asset to the master.

And listen: a Christian who can't wait on God is not an asset to the Kingdom. There is nothing about the Christian faith that is impulsive. Nothing about the Christian faith that is hasty. That's on purpose.

The fruit of the Spirit is: Love, joy, peace, and what? Patience (**Gal. 5:22-23**). It's also self-control.

2) Just because we're waiting on God for something doesn't mean we just stand around doing nothing with our lives. There's always a balance in waiting and working. You remember the 2 parables in **Matt. 25**? One is the 10 virgins and the other the parable of the talents. The point of the 10 virgins is that we are to be watching and earnestly waiting for the coming of the Lord. The point of the talents is that we are to be working in the meantime. Watching **and** working.

That's true with every other area of life. If you're a young lady who's hoping one day to be married with a family, don't just sit around waiting for your guy. Go serve, go be involved in ministry, go be a blessing to those who are married. Cook meals for others, get a job, serve your family.

A lot of times people get paralyzed when they're waiting. We're waiting on God for some direction, some answer and what we end up doing is wasting a bunch of time and wasting opportunities in the mean time. Don't do that. We know that no matter what our future holds we should be in the Word learning, we should be humbly serving other people, we should be devoted to prayer, we should be discipling other people. Who are you discipling right now? It doesn't have to be some canned system, it could just be getting coffee, talking about life and praying together on a regular basis. But do something. Do anything for the Kingdom while you're waiting.

3) Know that God blesses waiting. **Read Isa. 64:1-4**

That's an interesting verse isn't it? What Isaiah wants is God to come down in judgment, rip open the heavens and make his presence known that people would fear him and stand in awe of him. And then he hides this gem in the middle of the passage. God works for those who wait.

People don't understand that about God, and have always struggled to. You know what the difference between God and all the other fake gods is? All the other fake gods require us to do something to get the to act. We have to bribe them, or serve them, give to them. Basically we have to jump through hoops and then these fake gods become our genie in a bottle. And to be honest, sometimes that's how we treat God, isn't it? God if I read my Bible more, give more, maybe then you'll bless me! Maybe then you'll give me my answer.

But the true and living God isn't like that. He acts for those who wait for him. Any parent knows how this works. Your kid comes to you and says "Hey, mom can you do this?" And you say, what? "Wait." If they wait patiently and graciously, you'll act and often more than what they ever thought. But if they become irritable, try to bribe you, pester you, are disobedient or unfaithful in the meantime it's not going to go well.

Know that when God tells us to wait it's a good thing. And when we do it with patience he will act for our good and his glory.

So waiting on God means cherishing the wait, being busy to be faithful in the meantime, and know that God blesses our waiting.

## **2 - How does faith relate to knowledge? Rom. 1:1-6**

Q: Are faith and knowledge opposed or can they coexist? (Scripture tells us that now we have both faith and knowledge, while also also saying that when we see Christ at the second coming, faith will cease and be replaced with perfect knowledge.)

This is a large question and I'm going to gel it down in about 10 minutes. If you're studying philosophy this falls under a specific area called epistemology. Epistemology is the study of how we can know things.

Some people would say that we simply can't know anything at all. Or at least we can't know anything with any certainty. Truth is relative, reality is simply an illusion.

And anyone who claims that they know anything for 100% sure is called arrogant. No one can know anything for certain, the best we can have is our own experience or our own perception of reality. We can believe things whether they're true or not. I can believe there is a God, you can believe there's no God, someone else can believe in the flying Spaghetti monster and these are all equally valid and equally true beliefs. This is commonly called post-modernism. The Bible calls it foolishness. There is objective reality. We know that.

On the other end of the spectrum are people called empiricists. People who say they don't have faith in anything they only operate out of what can be shown to them scientifically. The problem is that that's not true. Everyone operates out of faith in the smallest details of life.

Most of you came in this morning and didn't check to see if the chair you were sitting in was actually screwed together and would hold your weight. You just trusted that it would. You didn't check the foundations of the church to see if it would hold all these people. You simply trusted that it would. You trust the cooks who cook your food, you trust the engineers of your car, you trust the makers of the medicine you take. No one is a true empiricist on every level. We all operate out of trust, out of faith because the reality is that we can't possibly know all there is to know. So even people who say they couldn't possibly believe in something they can't see actually do believe in things they can't see all the time. That's why they take antibiotics, drink water out of their faucet. You get the idea.

The Bible actually strikes something of a balance between these views. God provides enough evidence for his existence and his promises for someone to objectively believe in him, yet at the same time there is a need to trust God in a saving way.

When God tells Israel he will protect them as they go into the Promised Land he says, "Look at all I did for you in Egypt - how I defeated the Egyptian army singlehandedly - and that's what I'll do for you in the Promised Land." That's pretty reasonable, isn't it? Ten plagues, pillars of fire and smoke, plundering the Egyptians, crossing through the Red Sea, standing at the base of Mt. Sinai with smoke and fire and angels blasting trumpets. You know what the Bible says about most of those who saw all that? They didn't believe God. They died in unbelief. They had some of the greatest miracles and yet rejected God. (**1 Cor. 10:5**)

Judas knew Jesus. He saw him, touched him, heard him speak. When he was in the boat with the other 12 after Jesus walked on water he bowed down in worship. Obviously not true worship because he was the son of perdition. How do you live with Jesus for 3 years and reject him?

Did you know that demons believe in God? Demons believe. Demons know. Demons have probably witnessed the glory of God in all of his majesty. They have probably seen the resurrected Jesus in his glory. They know he's coming back. James says they believe, but they shudder. They reject God. (**Jas. 2:19**)

And that's the issue. They believe in God but they don't rejoice in God. They don't praise God for his glory and goodness and mercy. They shudder, recoil. Think of those medical drama shows where they have to put a needle in someone's eye or cut them open to operate and there's blood everywhere and most of us grimace and shudder with fear. That's kind of the idea.

There's no love for God. No enjoyment or praise. That's the issue. See, Christianity is not a blind faith. There's tons of evidence for the a Creator, for the trustworthiness of the Bible, for the resurrection. Volumes and volumes have been written. Christianity is a reasonable faith.

The issue is whether or not someone takes that evidence and worships God with it or rejects God. Unbelievers have all the evidence they need to believe in God. But many reject him. **Read Rom. 1:1-6**

Here's what true saving faith is: It is a knowledge of God in Christ coupled with obedience and worship and joy.

### **3 - What is Repentance?**

Q: Does repentance simply mean a change of mind or a turning from sin in one's life (especially the OT use of the Hebrew word shub)? If so, how can we affirm that salvation is not by works if repentance is defined as a change of mind as well as turning (works)?

A: The short answer here is that I don't think these two options are mutually exclusive: change of mind or turning from sin. I think they are actually one: a change of mind that results in a turning from sin.

And I don't believe that calling someone to repent means that we've crossed the bridge into works-based salvation. Actually, I believe that it is fundamental to the very basic gospel message. And I also believe that repentance is as much a supernatural grace of God in salvation as is faith. And I want to show you that.

So let me start with a definition of repentance because I think that will help us. Repentance is a change of mind to such a degree that a person's actions will change as well. That order - mind then actions - is crucial.

Let's take the sin of drunkenness. They're not drinking one or two beers, they're drinking 8. The next morning when they've sobered up someone comes and tells them: "Hey, this is really bad for your health, really dangerous for others, and on top of all of that it's a sin." And they say, "I know. My kidneys are in trouble, I drove off the road the other night, and I'm well aware of what the Bible says. But I'm going drinking tonight." Are they repentant? Of course not. Wait a minute: they agree completely with us. Their mindset is the same as ours. Well, to some degree but their actions haven't changed.

Same person that night runs off the road and is in the hospital for a month. There's no beer in the hospital and they haven't drank for a month. Are they repentant now that they haven't had a beer in a month? No, of course not.

Obviously this is a simplistic example, but I want you to see the connection between a true change of mind and actions that follow. And I think both the OT and the NT have this basic idea in mind. Therefore the focus is on the mind rather than the actions. But here's the catch: the only way we'll know the mind has changed is how? If the actions change as well.

We first see the word repent in the Bible in **1 Kings 8:47-48** when King Solomon was praying at the dedication of the Temple. And part of his prayer was that if God's people are so disobedient that that God sends in foreign nations and hauls them off into foreign lands into captivity, and if they're in those foreign lands and repent, would God please hear their prayer and bring them back?

He prayed that prayer around 940 B.C. and that exact scenario happened to Judah in 583 B.C. - and God answered the prayer some 70 years later when his people repented.

**Psalms 7:12-13:** If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.

If you don't repent, God will come after you like a warrior and hunt you down. You don't see that on a lot of Hallmark cards. What's interesting about that psalm is that if you read the context the true issue is the heart.

At the end of his unimaginable trial, Job says to God: I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (**Job 42:5-6**)

What I like about that verse is that Job says "I despise myself." Part of true repentance is hating oneself for what we're doing. Because there's a lot of responses to sin that we could have. Denial, justification, agree but do it anyway - those are all signs of unrepentant hearts. When someone comes to me and is struggling with sin and is wondering if they're really a believer one of the encouraging signs, just to be honest, is that they even care enough to come to me and ask. They're concerned, they hate what they're doing. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean for 100% that they are saved. But it's better than the alternative.

The Hebrew word here - shub - means to return, turn back, turn around. It's the same basic meaning as the word we see in the NT.

We see the command to repent all over the NT.

John the Baptist: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (**Matt. 3:2**)

Jesus: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (**Matt 4:17**)

Jesus denounced cities that did not repent (**Matt. 11:20**)

All the apostles preach that the people should repent in **Mark 6:12**.

At the final judgment the people of Nineveh - from Jonah - will condemn those who actually met Jesus and saw his miracles because they didn't what? Repent. (**Luke 11:32**)

Jesus makes repentance the essence of the gospel message: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (**Luke 24:46–47**).

I thought salvation was by faith alone in Jesus alone for our sins to be forgiven? Here Jesus says it's repentance that gets forgiveness. How do we reconcile this? Here's how: repentance and faith are 2 sides of the same coin.

**Look** over at **Acts 3:14-20**. I want to do a small survey of Acts because I think it's super helpful. The Hebrew word for repent is shub (שׁוּב), the Greek work is metanoia (μετάνοια). And they mean basically the same thing. To change one's mind, to turn from what you're doing. This is Peter preaching the gospel at the Temple right after he healed a beggar who couldn't walk. **Read 14-20**

According to verse 19 how are their sins blotted out? Repent.

Now, I want to just make a simple observation: If the apostles are preaching that repentance is necessary for salvation, and we know that salvation is not of works - it's only by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ - then whatever else we can say about repentance, we can certainly say that it is not a work.

If I tell you I don't own any red vehicles but that I do own a Ford pickup, what can you conclude about my pickup? That's it's not red.

In the same way, if I tell you salvation is not of works, but does demand repentance, what can we conclude? Repentance is not a work that merits salvation. In logic and rhetoric this is called the law of non-contradiction.

**Look at Acts 11:18**. At this point in Acts the gospel is spreading. The apostles preached it in Jerusalem. Then they spread outward to Judea and Samaria and now they're getting farther out. They went to the coastal area and Gentiles believed. And Gentiles were saved. How do they know the Gentiles were truly saved? Because they were filled with the Spirit and started speaking in tongues just like the apostles did at the beginning of Acts. The issue of tongues is for a different time. Just know that these guys knew that the Gentiles were saved through faith alone in Jesus and it was confirmed by speaking in tongues.

That caused quite an uproar in the Jewish community: how do uncircumcised Gentiles make it into the Kingdom without circumcision? Here's how: **Read 18**

This is clutch: God grants them repentance. The word is to give them something. We believe that God grants faith - that even our faith in Jesus that saves us is a gift of God. But Peter makes it clear that repentance is also a gift.

The NLT - which I usually think does a good job - kind of butchers this passage: "God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life." God didn't give out privileges, he gave out repentance and eternal life.

Why repentance need to be granted? Why does it need to be supernaturally given by God? Because although someone can agree what they are doing is sin, although they can try in their own human power to stop sin - and some do - they can't actually produce godly repentance in their own power. True, godly repentance is just as much a gift of God as true, godly faith in Jesus Christ. And both have to be given by God.

**2 Tim. 2:25:** God's servant...correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.

Now here's where it gets interesting. **Look at Acts 17:30-31.** This is Paul in Athens preaching the gospel. And notice what he says to these gentiles. **Read**

God commands all people everywhere to what? Repent. You'll never see in the books of Acts the gospel preached as "Jesus loves you, just believe in him." It's always something like "the Lord is coming back in judgment to destroy all the unrighteous. How do we know? Because Jesus rose from the dead and the only way to avoid that judgment is to repent and believe in him."

Think about that for a minute. God commands all men everywhere to repent. He commands it. But at the same time, it's something he has to grant to a person. How does that work? The answer is that it's a mystery.

Listen, this is one of the mysteries of the gospel: when we preach the gospel to people, we are calling them to do things they cannot do in their own power. We are calling them to follow Jesus, believe in Jesus, repent toward God. All of those things require God's intervention to do. We are like Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones calling dead skeletons to life. Dead bones don't have the capacity to hear, let alone to live. But we preach and God raises the dead.

When you look at the book of Acts there are basically 5 things that happen at conversion. Not every time someone is converted are they all recorded. But when you survey Acts there are 5 things. The first and the last are human effort and the middle 3 are God's doing.

1) Preaching of the gospel; 2) giving of the Spirit; 3) faith; 4) repentance; 5) baptism. So preaching and baptism are the human aspects of the gospel proclamation. But giving the Holy Spirit, faith and repentance are all God's work. But guess what? They are part of preaching the gospel.

Last one here: **Look at Acts 20:17-21.** This is Paul talking with the Ephesian elders. He knows this is the last time he'll ever see them so these are his parting words. **Read**

Here's what I want to leave you with: if you are talking with someone about the gospel, do not shrink back in calling them to repent from their sin. A lot of times we are fine talking about the details of theology, who believe Jesus is and that we have to believe in him. But we also have to boldly call people to leave their sin and repent toward God.

I've heard some people say they can just talk about Jesus and his sacrifice and people will eventually figure out that they need to leave their sin as well. That may happen, but really that's shrinking back from the whole gospel. The whole gospel isn't just information about Jesus, but eternal life that only comes through faith alone in Christ alone.

May we be faithful to present that message and may God do the supernatural work of saving.