

What Are You Waiting For?

Do you expect to see God at the end of your life? What in the world will that be like? Many times, especially during bedtime stories, my children would ask me to describe heaven for them. I would always say that I could not give them specific details, but I did know that heaven will be the most peaceful place they could imagine, and that Jesus will be the central figure in heaven waiting for them. The Jews waited 2000 years for Jesus to appear as the long-anticipated Messiah. Since the birth of Jesus in the First Century, Christians have waited another 2000 years for Him to return. Muslims, too, are waiting for Jesus to return, something I never knew until I befriended a Muslim. In other words, over half the population of the world today is waiting for Jesus to return. Christmas is all about celebrating the fact that Jesus came to earth as God had promised. But, if He came once, why can't He come again?

The Bible asks us to live our lives in anticipation of Christ's return. We are to be vigilant and prepared to see Jesus face-to-face -- either when we die or when he returns to govern over a new heaven and a new earth. Either way, we will be seeing Him soon. Are you prepared for that? One of the best ways to prepare for His return is to help the Gospel message be spread throughout the earth. In fact, the Bible gives us clues that His return will be in response to the Gospel being spread first throughout the world. Matthew 24:14 reads, "And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all the nations will hear it; and then the end will come."

There is great reward for those who live their lives in anticipation of Christ's return. At the beginning of the New Testament, we are told a story about a simple, everyday person named Simeon. Simeon had no particular position, rank or file with the Jewish hierarchy of the time. He was more like you and me, no one special, other than the fact that he had a deep faith in God and God's anticipated Messiah. I believe that Simeon's life was highlighted as an inspiration for us to do the same - prepare for Christ's return with vigilance and prayer. Listen to the story: "At the time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the



Simeon holds the Messiah

glory of your people Israel.'" (Luke 2:25-32)

Last month, I was in the United Arab Emirates at a conference for Christian workers who have a heart for the people in the Arabian Peninsula and Iran. We heard exhilarating story after story concerning the phenomenal growth of the Gospel in this particular area of the world. During one lecture, I sat next to a man I consider to be a modern day Simeon. He was with three other men from China. They sat humbly and reverently along with me and many others in the room listening to the speaker explain the history of the Church in the Arabian Peninsula. The speaker eventually noticed this particular Chinese man; he asked him to introduce himself. The man rose from his seat, and said, "I am here to be in solidarity with the persecuted Church on the Arabian Peninsula and in Iran. I was put in jail for four years by the Chinese authorities because of my Christian faith. They threatened and beat me and asked that I stop preaching the Gospel. But, I told them I could not do that. Eventually, they let me go. The Gospel is growing so fast in China today that there is nothing anyone can do to stop it. God told me to help the underground Church in the Middle East. We are part of a Chinese missionary movement called, Back to Jerusalem. We were told that the Gospel is now growing faster in Iran than in China. We have come to see what Jesus is doing here, and to help the suffering new believers because we suffered, too." By the time the man had finished talking, the rest of us in the room were moved deeply by the sincerity of his words.

At the conference, my friends and I met another man, an American, who also reminded me of Simeon. He was giving a lecture on Yemen. He, his wife, and four children, had worked in Yemen for a number of years. In fact, in recent years, they were one of the last foreign-born workers to be asked to leave the country because of their Christian affiliation. This humble, faithful and brave man told us what it was like to go to work every day in Yemen during his last years, not knowing if he would be assaulted or killed. Other Christian workers in his area had been murdered by radical Muslims in broad daylight. The painful stress was still evident on his face. Eventually, he and his family were forced out of the country. But, rather than

return to the comforts of life in the United States, they relocated to Djibouti, an even poorer and more economically challenged country than Yemen. Civil war is now raging through Yemen. Iran and Saudi Arabia are feverishly supporting the opposing sides of the conflict. Shiites and Sunnis are killing each other at unprecedented rates. It is a tragedy, leaving so many lives and homes in shambles. There are

now millions of refugees and displaced people within Yemen, unable to escape. Children are starving. One of the few places a Yemeni refugee might be able to escape to is Djibouti, just across the Arabian Sea. And, the American and his family are now in Djibouti receiving and loving these new refugees. At the close of his presentation, the American said that the most amazing thing of all is that the underground Church in Yemen is now exploding with growth. The seeds of the Gospel that had been planted by these brave missionaries are now taking root. The



new believers in Yemen are actively offering medical, psychological and spiritual help to their fellow countrymen caught in the ravages of war. As radical Muslims kill more innocent Muslims in our world today, an increasing number of Muslims are leaving Islam all together, choosing instead to follow the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of the world.

As I mentioned, Muslims are waiting for Jesus to return to earth, just as we Christians are doing the same. But, Islam teaches that Jesus will descend back to earth at the end of time in order to help God complete the ultimate task of making the whole world Muslim. In fact, the holy books of Islam teach that Jesus will return for 40 years, smash all the crosses in the world, kill all the swine, help everyone become Muslim, then return to God. By contrast, Christians believe Jesus will return to earth, live forever, wipe away every tear, sin and death, in order to rule over a most peaceful kingdom now and forever more. The prophet Isaiah said it beautifully, "The Messiah shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4). "In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together, the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all." (Isaiah 11:6) And, the Apostle John expanded further when he wrote, "I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.'" (Revelation 21:3-4)



The wolf and the lamb

It makes a big difference when we know what we are waiting for. By anticipating the Lord's return, our lives become full of hope, love, purpose and faith. By contrast, our lives are incomplete if we are waiting for nothing in particular at the end of our days on earth. This Christmas, seize the opportunity to join Simeon in waiting, working, and praying for Jesus, our Savior, to appear. When our Lord does return, don't be caught idle with your hands in your pockets serving only yourself and your own interests. There is so much good work to do to prepare for God's kingdom to come fully to earth, whether in Yemen, China or down the streets in our neighborhoods. Join the chorus of the ages who continue to sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room, and Heaven and nature sing, and Heaven and nature sing, and Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing."

My family and I wish you a most joy-filled and peaceful Christmas.