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12-12-2015

Impatient Waiting

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Recommended Citation

Lappenga, Benjamin J., "Impatient Waiting" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 407.
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Impatient Waiting

Abstract

"Another tendency in Christian thinking about waiting, however, is worthy of our consideration this Advent season: the perception that good Christian waiting means patience, defined as dutiful acceptance of our current suffering."

Posting about the frustrations of waiting from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/impatient-waiting/>

Keywords

In All Things, Advent, waiting, Christmas, patience

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Impatient Waiting

 [inallthings.org/impatient-waiting/](https://allthings.org/impatient-waiting/)

Benjamin Lappenga

The Christmas season is a charged time, whether of joy and whimsical recollection or of overwhelming sadness; usually both. A fitting label for this is “waiting,” a wonderful and frightening tapestry of countdowns, sorrow, anticipation, and fear. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a sermon on the first Sunday of advent in 1928, reminded his congregation that “celebrating Advent means learning how to wait. Waiting is an art which our impatient age has forgotten.”¹ I wholly agree, especially with Bonhoeffer’s insistence that our waiting for the final day when God will make everything new (Rev 21:5) cannot be an excuse to ignore the way Christ meets us now in the form of people around us: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt 25:37–40).

Another tendency in Christian thinking about waiting, however, is worthy of our consideration this Advent season: the perception that good Christian waiting means patience, defined as dutiful acceptance of our current suffering. I had the privilege of teaching the Old Testament wisdom literature this semester, including the book of Job. In my preparations for the course, it was striking that in historical Christian interpretation of Job there is a strong tendency to emphasize “the patience of Job.” This is not without reason, since the well-known prologue gives this impression: “[Job] said, ‘...the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing” (Job 1:21-22).²

The problem with this view is that the prologue of Job is highly stylized, and it becomes clear that the serene and pious Job of the prologue is by no means the whole story. The Job who speaks at length in the remaining 41 chapters reacts to God with great impatience, anger, and even accusation: “I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me” (Job 30:20-21). Yes, God responds to Job with the famous “voice from the whirlwind” that offers some cosmic perspective (Job 38-41), but God never faults Job for lodging his raw and impatient complaints: “[my servant Job has] spoken of me what is right” (Job 42:8). Job’s impatience is not the greedy, selfish impatience of our age, but nor is it passive or even reverent.

In this beautiful and terrible Advent season, let us, too, voice our deepest fears and frustrations to God. Just like the psalms of lament, Job provides us with a model of how to wait. Advent is a time of waiting, to be sure, but it is certainly not the kind of waiting that ignores the brokenness and injustice in the world or behaves as if all is as it should be. Maranatha, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Footnotes

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christmas Sermons (ed. Edwin Hanton Robertson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 20. [↩](#)
2. The New Testament, too, is often read as if it endorses a dutifully patient Job: “Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job...” (James 5:11). [↩](#)