

Waiting on the Call of God

Introduction

Good morning. Happy New Year. We are in week 2 of our 3 part sermon series entitled "Call Waiting." Last week we looked in detail at the "Call of God." I defined the call of God as when God unilaterally initiated a good news saturated invitation to all of us to join Him in His rescue mission for planet. Earth. By the way you can get a copy of it on line or if you want there are hard copies in the back. This week we will look at the "waiting" aspect of God's call.

Again, I want to thank Andrew and the shepherds for helping to set the stage each week for this series. Last week we joined them the day after the visit to Bethlehem. Now it is almost 13 years later. Not a single thing has changed. Last week some thought it was a dream the day after the visitation. What do 13 years do to a call from God when nothing has changed?

- One shepherd has completely fallen away. The shepherd who thought he was dreaming.
- One has despaired – no one not even his wife believes him. He was so excited
- One has to keep telling himself that it was real.
- Where is the other at? What he saw that night is his hope. But his hope is in the baby growing up so that He can crush the oppressors. Was that the call: Unto you is born a Savior / A Messiah / A Lord

We can see it coming. We know where this is going. He is waiting / He has hope / but he's waiting for the wrong thing and doesn't know it. More on that next week.

Today we are going to look at the time between the call of God and the fulfillment of the Call. The time when we wait. We hate to wait. Why is it that? Sometimes it is obvious / We have things to do / waiting will keep us from doing them. Sometimes we're waiting for a bad situation to change. But most of the time, there is no good reason why waiting is bad.

This week I was driving to East Granby to swap cars with my daughter. There was utility work on work route 10 in Granby. Traffic was completely stopped. I was waiting. I had the day off from work. I didn't have a particular time schedule for my errands. I had plenty of time. I was stopped on route 10 for all of about 3-4 minutes. Yet I was irritated. Why? Why did I not like waiting. I even had something to do while I was waiting so the time wasn't being wasted. But I was ticked. What was going on? Why was I so irritated that I had to wait.

I think it is because when I wait unexpectedly it shows me that I am not in control. Someone else was in control of my time. And I don't like that. Do you know why you don't like to wait?

We don't like waiting on God either. During advent 2012 I preached two sermons about waiting on God to answer a prayer of ours. Today we are looking at a different aspect of waiting on God. Waiting on the Call of God to be fulfilled in our lives / in our families / in our community / in the world. The shepherds were waiting for God to show up as Savior / Lord / Messiah / Prince of Peace. To fulfill the call they heard that night almost 13 years ago.

Last week I said that all of us have received the call of God in their lives. This week I am declaring that all of us are still waiting for this call to be completely fulfilled / actualized in our lives. Do you remember some of the things that Peter and Paul said we were called to? God has:

Called us to freedom
Called us to holiness
Called us into community

Although God has set many of us free, many of us are still addicted to various things. None of us has been set fully free.

Although God has blessed us with a rich community here at the BARN, many are lonely, many feel not included, and we have to admit that our community does not match our hopes and dreams of community.

Although God has called us to holiness, none of us can say that we've made it. Not even close. There are times that I prepare to stand before you and I think of how unholy and ungodly I really am deep down. With real life examples. How can God speak through one like me?

And how about this divine rescue mission? Are we helping many people to be rescued? There are so many people in our lives who need rescuing – and they don't know it.

In many respects, with respect to the call of God we are like the shepherds 12 years after the angelic visitation. We have heard the call of God – we long for it to be fulfilled. But we find ourselves waiting for it to happen.

There was a man who lived long ago who might be able to help us to learn a little about waiting on the call of God. Abraham, who lived over 4000 years ago, heard the call of God – much like the shepherds did and much like we have. Yet he had to wait. But we don't just have an account of Abraham's life, we have the apostle Paul's Holy Spirit inspired analysis of how Abraham waited. Wouldn't we all like to know how Abraham did this? Let's ask God to help hear from His living word today.

Let's pray.

The Scripture

Genesis 12:1-4 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Here we have another example of what I have been calling the “Call of God.” It has all of the components we talked about. It's:

- God Initiated – Abram wasn't seeking God for this.
- Good News Saturated – “You will be a blessing “
- An invitation to Join God – There is clear participation in this call in the Hebrew
- Rescue Mission – How can one family bless all of the families of the earth? Abraham didn't exactly know it, but this family was going to include the Messiah.

But of course, most of us know the story. Abraham never saw the complete fulfillment of this call. “a great nation” “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” even the “land that I will show you.” was not fulfilled at his death.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit interprets Abraham's experience and lays out his perspective.

Romans 4 ¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Paul tells that there were two things that carried Abraham through these many years of waiting for the call of God to be fulfilled: faith and hope.

Over and over faith is mentioned in this passage. Paul describes Abraham:
²⁰ he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Then he describes the faith that Abraham had as “hopeful faith” when he said
¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told,

Let’s look at each of these by answering three questions:

- What is their definition?
- Why they are necessary?
- What does having them accomplish in us?.

Faith

What is the Definition?

Listen to Tony Evan’s definition of Faith:
Faith is acting like it is so
even when it’s not so
in order that it might be so
just because God said so.

Faith is not just holding to a belief but it is acting upon it – acting like it is so. But it is not just acting upon it – as we exercise our faith – we actually affect the outcome of our circumstances – in order that it might be so. And we do it because we have heard God’s call.

Why it is necessary?

There is one thing we have to get used to if we are going to walk with God. Waiting is part of the walking. Whether we like it or not, waiting for Him is an integral part of our relationship with Him. Listen to how Paul describes God in our passage today: From the Amplified Bible: God

calls nonexistent things as if they [already] existed.¹

This is a staggering attribute of God. He speaks to us about things that don’t exist as if they already existed. He did this with the shepherds:

Unto you this day is born a Savior / A Messiah / A Lord

Not one who will grow up to be a Savior / Messiah / Lord.

¹ See the Amplified version on this text Romans 4:17

He did this with Abraham:

I will make of you a great nation.

Calling what doesn't exist – into existence. We who are followers of God have to just come to grips with the fact that this is the way God works. And we are called to exercise faith while waiting because of the way God is.

What it does do in us?

As we learn to exercise faith / believing what God has said / even when we cannot see it, the unseen world increasingly comes into focus as the real world. And that perspective on the unseen world sets the course for how we live in the seen world.² Another way to say it is that faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a "not yet." It is the expectation of things to come from the perspective of a present that is already given. We saw this in our drama today. God was working. Jesus was there. He was growing up. They just couldn't see it. And exercising faith will help us to see what God is doing to fulfill the call of God in our life.

So that's what it is / why it is necessary and what it does in us. Let's look at hope.

Hope

What is the definition?

Paul tells us that Abraham "hoped against hope." Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means believing when everything seems hopeless. That is where Abraham was. He was in a hopeless situation.

Faith and hope are very similar when it comes to the call of God. Faith is my belief for the present. Hope is my faith for a positive future. Hope is the positive faith you hold now about the future.

Why is it necessary?

Why is hope so important? Faith is necessary because of who God is. Hope is necessary because of who we are. Emil Brunner says: What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of life.

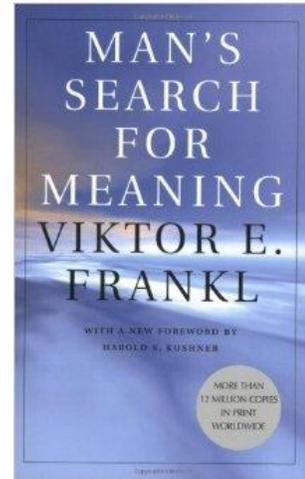
When I was in 10th grade, we read a book entitled Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl. As a pure secularist with no religious beliefs I was very affected by this book. Frankl was imprisoned in a death camp during World War II. He observed that those prisoners who gave up on life, who had lost all hope for a future, were inevitably the first to die. Frankl discovered an important truth about how we are made. Hope is essential because of the way we are made. And what it does in us when we hope against hope is that it enables us to wait until the call is fulfilled.

² Disappointment with God Philip Yancey

Application: How do we have hopeful faith while waiting?

During his time in the death camp, Viktor Frankl imagined his wife / remembered her / thought about the prospect of seeing her again. He spent time imagining a future lecture and being able to tell about what he learned in the Nazi death camp. He said that these times of imagining the positive future became the life giving source of hope.

We are called to do the same. Take the call of God and begin to imagine it fulfilled in your life. This is a way of believing. For Frankl, he had no guarantee that it would be fulfilled. You can go to the bank that the call of God will be fulfilled: You will be holy. You will be free. There will be community. Begin to imagine it in the now. This can give hope.



Abraham did that. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that as Abraham was taking Isaac up the mountain to be sacrificed, he was imagining Isaac being raised from the dead.³ He was imagining a positive future in his hopeless present. That made him hopeful in a hopeless situation.

How do we wait for the call of God? In hopeful faith, we imagine the call fulfilled – we think about it – we consider it - not caring whether it is actually fulfilled that way. That's what Abraham did. God didn't raise Isaac from the dead – He stopped the sacrifice. But Abraham hoped against hope – by believing the truthfulness of God's call and imagining how God can fulfill His call.

Can you imagine how God is going to set you free? He has called you to freedom.

Can you imagine what you will look like when God's call to holiness is actualized?

Can you imagine what it will look like, when the community of God's followers are perfectly one as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one?

Can you imagine you participating with God in a rescue mission for your family or your neighborhood or your work place?

As we learn to exercise hopeful faith, God will carry us while we wait for His call to be fulfilled.

Let's pray.

³ Hebrews 11 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Week II Waiting on the Call of God

Drama sketch

3 shepherds are sitting by a road.

SEAN You have been sulking all day. What is troubling you, my friend?

ZANS Yesterday, on my way back from celebrating the Passover with my uncle this...this Roman dog ordered me to carry his pack. For one thousand paces I lugged it.

SEAN What can you do? It's the law.

JIM If it makes you feel any better, the same thing happened to me last month. The thing weighed who knows how much. What do they carry in those packs, bricks?

ZANS That doesn't make me feel any better. Why do we still tolerate it? Where is our deliverance?

JIM Be patient. It will come. The Angel declared it.

SEAN The angel. Right. That was a long time ago.

JIM Twelve years and eight months to be exact. The infant we saw that night will be a man any day now.

ZANS I have to keep telling myself that what happened in that field was real.

SEAN I must have told a hundred people about that night. Most people listen politely. They smile and nod, and look at me like I'm a lunatic. My wife doesn't even believe me.

JIM I don't care if no one believes us. What I saw that night is what sustains me. It is my hope. With God's mercy I will live long enough to see the Christ raise our nation from this mire and crush our oppressors with his mighty hand.

ZANS I admire your faith. And I envy your patience. I wish I could wait patiently, but it is hard knowing that somewhere out there is this remarkable young man, destined to become our king. Do you think he is somewhere being trained to lead an army?

Dan Pardon me brothers, but have you seen a youth come by here? He was traveling with us back from Jerusalem and now we cannot find him. His parents are quite distraught.

SEAN I'm sorry, but no one has come by here.

Dan We are stopped just over that hill. If you happen to see him would you point him our way?

ZANS Of course.

(Man leaves)

JIM What kind of boy wanders off on a journey?

ZANS Young people are so easily distracted. He probably met a girl.

SEAN I'm sure the Christ is not at all like that. I imagine he is strong. Serious. Disciplined.

JIM Someday we will know. I count the days until his power is revealed.

ZANS May we all live to see it.