

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Psalm 34

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The season of Advent reminds us how the world was waiting for the Messiah to come the first time. To announce the beginning of His public Messianic ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-3.

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.*

Isaiah 63:1-3 reminds us that the people were waiting for the Messiah. While they were waiting, they were brokenhearted, mourning, and imprisoned by their sin. Advent is the season of being reminded that God's people were waiting for the Messiah to arrive the first time. It also reminds us that we are in waiting for His return.

2020 may have given you a new perspective on what it means to wait. After all, this year we are currently struggling to endure a pandemic with all of its death, sickness, fear, and anxiety. We have watched our federal government respond in confusion and, in some cases, state governments have responded with severe restrictions. We have experienced a derecho that ruined crops and destroyed houses and trees in our part of Iowa. As a nation, we are still sorting out a contentious political season. Friends, fear, anger, and even depression are at an all-time high. Waiting in 2020 may have caused you to get on your knees, put your face in your hands, and pray, "*Come quickly Lord Jesus!*"

For some, the pandemic is not the cause of your suffering, struggle, and anxiety. You may be waiting for the test results to come back and you are praying it is not cancer. Perhaps you are waiting for a broken relationship to be healed. Perhaps you are waiting for your marriage to be healed. Perhaps you are waiting for a job. Perhaps you are waiting for a place to call home. Perhaps you are waiting for a husband or a wife. Perhaps you are waiting for a child. Perhaps you are waiting for the pain of a miscarriage to be healed. Whether it is the stuff of 2020 or something else, the fact is we often find ourselves waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting . . . and waiting.

Hard seasons of life send us into a season of waiting. Whether we want to or not . . . we must wait. Sometimes it seems like we take one step forward and two steps back. One day college classes and public-school classes resume and then a week later they are back online. Good news comes and then the bad news erases it. We see the light at the end of the tunnel but then the light on the battery goes out. We begin to wonder, “*How long O’ Lord?*”

It was the experience and observation of waiting during years of pain and suffering that inspired Charles Wesley, to write the hymn *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*. Early in 1744, Charles Wesley was meditating on Haggai 2:7 where God says, “*And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.*”

While he was meditating on Haggai 2:7, he was also reflecting on the current culture’s great class divide and also the orphan crisis in Great Britain. In 18th century England, people lived in horrible conditions. The upper classes and factories took advantage of orphans. There was not only an epidemic of homeless children, the orphanages that housed these children were in reality workhouses. Children were forced to do the jobs that no one else wanted to do while being beaten, starved, and mistreated in unimaginable ways. Charles Wesley saw this and it broke his heart. As Wesley looked around England he saw injustice everywhere and in his distress of the situation and confidence in God he penned the prayer to God that would become the popular Christmas Carol *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*.

Charles Wesley took his simple prayer and shaped it into a hymn designed to celebrate Advent. In the latter part of 1744, Wesley published the hymn in the song book called *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord*. The hymn was specifically destined to celebrate Advent. It is a hymn of remembrance of when Jesus first came BUT it is also an anthem of eager anticipation of Jesus’ return.¹

When we sing *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*, we should remember how Jesus came in the humblest form and yet He was full of glory. We should remember that Christ gives us hope in our waiting, our longing, our suffering, and our anxiety. We should remember that Jesus will return and He will set all things right according to His merciful, righteous judgment.

Although Charles Wesley meditated on Haggai 2:7 when he wrote his prayer, we will look at Psalm 34 that was written by King David.

Like *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*, Psalm 34 is a Psalm of God’s people longing for deliverance. This Psalm is a reminder that the Lord is near the brokenhearted while they wait and the He will deliver His beloved people.

I have three points this morning. I will give them to you as we work through the hymn and the text.

I. We Long for Deliverance (Luke 4:18-19)

The words of this first stanza overflow with the deep biblical longing of deliverance. Listen to it again:

*Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in Thee.*

¹ Cameron Frank and Preston Norman, *The Soul Felt Its Worth: A 25-Day Devotional Journey Through the Music of Christmas*, Kindle Edition.

Wesley's desire and our desire are grounded in our longing to be set free from sin and the fear of its consequences. Friends, only God is able to deliver us from our sin and its consequences and it is only in Jesus that we find our rest.

The first verse also reminds us of Jesus' Messianic calling. Jesus says in Luke 4:18-19:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

When Jesus came the first time, He fulfilled His calling as Messiah. His purpose was to set His people free from their sin. He broke sin's power over us and paid the penalty for our sin against God. Yet, we still are waiting for a full and final deliverance from our struggle with sin.

In other words, we still bear the marks of the Fall in the lives that we live. We still sin against God. We sin against our spouses, our children, our family members, our friends and our neighbors. The fact is we still struggle with sin and therefore there is a longing for full and final deliverance.

Longing for deliverance is not just the Christian's experience. It is also a common human experience. The problem is that people in the world do not seek to have their longing for deliverance satisfied in the way that was accomplished by Christ.

Think about it this way, unbelievers, may long for the pandemic to be over but their greatest need is not to be delivered from the pandemic but from their sin. Their greatest need is to be delivered from standing before Almighty God not covered by in righteousness of Christ alone.

This leads me to my second point that is found in the second part of the first verse of *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*.

II. We Long for a Deliverer (Psalm 34:8-10)

If we wait for and long for deliverance, then there must be a Deliverer. Notice what the second part of Wesley's hymn teaches us.

*Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.*

When Charles Wesley wrote, "*Israel's strength and consolation*" he meant that Jesus is the strength and consolation of all of God's people for all time not just for Israel in the Old Testament. It is the Son of God who surrounds His saints to give them comfort in their waiting.

But here is the problem. The problem is while we wait for deliverance, we often try to meet the deepest longings of our hearts with things other than Jesus. We grow tired and weary. Our longings get the best of us and we begin to look for hope in things other than the person and work of Christ.

The 17th century French mathematician, physicist, Christian philosopher and theologian, Blaise Pascal wrote, *“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”*²

In many ways, our modern conception of Christmas really works against the meaning of Advent . . . doesn't it? Here is what I mean. If we are not careful, Christmas becomes more about filling our hearts with stuff instead of waiting on Christ. Instead of filling our hearts with God's word we fill our hearts with sappy Hallmark movies. Instead of filling our hearts with worship of the Savior we will fill our hearts with materialistic purchases. Instead of filling our hearts with the communion of the saints we will fill our hearts with the communion of sports. Instead of filling our hearts with worship of Jesus we will find anything to distract us to fill that God-shaped vacuum in our hearts. Saint Augustine said it this way, *“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”*³

None of these things I mentioned are evil in and of themselves. However, when we take the good gifts of God and make them ultimate gifts we have removed God from the throne of our hearts and we seek to find rest in anything other than Jesus.

Psalm 34:8-10 helps us here:

⁸ *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!*
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
⁹ *Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,*
for those who fear him have no lack!
¹⁰ *The young lions suffer want and hunger;*
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

In this season of fear, lack of fellowship, times of disagreement with one another about how to proceed as a body, we must remember to taste and see that the Lord is good. All these things that we are struggling with in the pandemic are the designs of God to break our dependence on anyone or anything other than Christ.

I am convinced that one of the purposes this pandemic is that it is God's good, sovereign, design to keep us from finding our rest in anything other than Christ alone. Will we trust in the government? Will we trust in science? Will we trust in politics? Will we trust in stimulus checks? Or will we trust in the name of the Lord our God. I am not saying government, science, politics, or federal aid are bad. I am asking you to evaluate your heart to see what or who you are trusting in other than Jesus.

My last point is my conclusion. It is a question for application: *How do we make it through life while we wait on Jesus to return?*

III. How Do We Make It Through Life While We Wait on Jesus to Return? (Psalm 34:1-7, 11-14)

Let's look back at Psalm 34. When David wrote Psalm 34, he was on the run for his life. King Saul had put a price on David's head. So, David fled to Abimelech the Philistines' King and pretended to be crazy. King Abimelech wrote David off as a lost cause and let him live.

David probably truly felt crazy. I doubt anyone one in here has had a murder contract put out on them. It had to be immense stress. Yet, while David was under all of this great pressure and stress, his mind didn't

² <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/801132-there-is-a-god-shaped-vacuum-in-the-heart-of-each>.

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-analysis-of-one-of-the-greatest-sentences-ever-written/>.

dwell on his troubles. His heart and mind turned to the Lord. He remembered the goodness of God in his distress.

Notice what David said in vv. 1-3:

¹ *I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

² *My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.*

³ *Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

David says to himself, *"I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth."* Then notice what he says. David calls those who are with him to put their trust in the Lord as well.

You must ask yourself: In this year of stress, pressure, hardship, and strife: are you blessing the Lord or are you making it harder for others to make it through? Are you and I turning people's attention to the LORD? Are you leading others to bless the name of Jesus by His praise being continually on your lips? Are you leading others to boast in the LORD and magnify the name of Christ? In his distress, David, who was not King of Israel at the time, turned his men's hearts to trust in the Lord.

What resulted from David leading his people to praise in vv. 1-3 to praise God? Look in vv. 4-7 give us the answer:

⁴ *I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me
from all my fears.*

⁵ *Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.*

⁶ *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

⁷ *The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him,
and delivers them.*

So, how do we make it through this life in a broken world? We sing hymns like *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus* that remind us to hold fast to Jesus and of the truth of God's word. We sing songs that proclaim the truth of God's word that is found in texts like Psalm 34. Let's break down the last verse and answer the question: *How do we make it through life in this broken world while we wait on Jesus to return?*

A. First, we must remember Jesus is the King who was born to redeem us

*Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,*

The first part of the second verse echoes the first verse but tells us that Jesus is King.

In 1855, Charles Spurgeon preached a Christmas sermon that used sections of *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*. Spurgeon observed that unusual line, *"born a child and yet a King."* Spurgeon said:

A very singular thing is this, that Jesus Christ was said to have been 'born the king of the Jews.' Very few have ever been 'born king.' Men are born princes, but they are seldom born kings. I do not think you can find an instance in history where any infant was born king.

He was the Prince of Wales, perhaps, and he had to wait a number of years, till his father died, and then they manufactured him into a king, by putting a crown on his head; and [giving him] a sacred [anointing], and other silly things; but he was not born a king.

I remember no one who was born a king except Jesus; and there is emphatic meaning in that verse that we sing "Born thy people to deliver; Born a child, and yet a king." The moment that He came on earth He was a king.⁴

Wesley and Spurgeon remind us that the deliverance we are longing for comes not in the form of politics. Nor does it come in an election. It does not come from our congress or our president. Again, I am not minimizing the importance of citizenship but only to say that our Deliverer came in the humble birth of the baby born in Bethlehem who was born to the Virgin Mary in a lowly cattle stall and laid in a manger. Jesus was born King and He is the King right now.

As the King who is also our Creator, He lived a sinless life and then died on the cross for our sin. He was as holy and righteous on the day He died on the cross for our sin as He was on the day He was born in the manger and as He was from all eternity.

We make it through life in this broken world when we remember our King died to redeem us and deliver us.

B. Second, we must remember King Jesus was born to reign in us

*Born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;*

As our King, Jesus rules and reigns in the hearts of His people. This is the transformation that Jesus brings to the lives of His people. He changes us from the inside out. He rules in our hearts because we have been born-again by the Spirit of God.

What this means is that our joy/happiness are not at odds with our obedience to God. To pursue your obedience to God through His word is to pursue your joy in God. Listen to how David said it in Psalm 34:11-14:

¹¹ *Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.*
¹² *What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?*
¹³ *Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.*
¹⁴ *Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.*

⁴ Robert J. Morgan, *Near to the Heart of God: Meditations 366 of the Best Loved Hymns*, (p. 743). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Our obedience to God and our joy are not opposite pursuits. For the Christian, they are one in the same. Proverbs teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is not only the beginning of wisdom but it is the beginning of our joy.

So, when we sing that Jesus was:

*Born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;*

We are not singing about begrudging obedience to His rule and reign. We are singing about a new desire and a new longing that Christ has put in our hearts through the new birth.

What this means is that because we have been born again, we are able to look through our struggles and suffering in this world and set our hearts with laser focus on our joy of obeying God. Then we are able to sing with David, even when he had a price on his head, *“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”* This is what happens when King Jesus reigns in your heart and then you are able to live life with great joy in this broken world.

C. Third, we must remember He will return to take us home

*By thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.*

The last line of the hymn is one of the most comforting. It reminds us that we are made right with God by the all-sufficient merit of Christ. It is the righteousness of our King earned by His perfect life and sacrificial death that we have perfect standing with God. Jesus earned it all. We contribute nothing to our salvation except our sin and Jesus took that sin from us when He went to the cross and died in our place as our substitute. *The righteousness that Jesus earned is our all-sufficient merit to stand before the throne of God.* In this broken world one of our greatest needs as Christians is to continually go before the throne of God in the righteousness of Christ alone in prayer for strength, for comfort, and for counsel.

Finally, the last line reminds us that Christ will return and take us home to be with Him. If there is one thing the pandemic has done is make us long for heaven. We may be all over the map on how to do life in the pandemic but one thing we should all agree on is that it has increased our longing for our home in heaven. Since this thing has started, I have heard more people say that they are longing for Jesus' return.

Perhaps you are like me and God has used 2020 to pry your fingers off of your love for this life. I hope when you sing *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus* you will sing the last line *“raise us to thy glorious throne”* with fresh longing for heaven.