

Waiting for the Consolation of Israel

Call to Worship: Psalm 67

1st Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

2nd Scripture: Luke 2:21-38

Introduction

When you compare the diligent way, in which, the foreign magi/wisemen searched to find the Christ; how they traveled so far, and made fervent inquiry to this end... with the utter indifference of the Pharisees (and many of the religious leaders of Israel), who ought to have known the signs of the times, and who were right there in Jerusalem, it is dumbfounding and very telling of the spiritual depravity of Israel. They even knew the “Bethlehem prophecy,” and shared it with the wisemen, while taking no interest themselves in searching for the child.

And when you look at various texts of Scripture, including the section we just read, you will find very clearly, that there is a distinction made between those who were anticipating, waiting and looking for the Christ, and those who weren’t. After considering this distinction, I want to fast forward and highlight the connection that waiting for *the return* of the Christ in the New Covenant, has with those who waited for the first advent of the Christ in the Old Covenant. To be sure, there is a definite connection, and we, being among those who still look forward to the return of Christ, want to be sure that we exhibit the same desires and actions which were found in the hearts of those who waited for the first coming of Christ in the Old Covenant. This connection is very beneficial for us to behold, and I hope that it will better prepare us, as we enter a new year, moving ever so fast and forward, to the end of all things.

I. Waiting for the Consolation of Israel - Old Covenant

There are three examples given in the Gospel of Luke (two from the text we just read) where this idea of “waiting” or “looking for” the coming of the Christ is specifically highlighted, with the use of the same Greek term, distinguishing a specific group of people from those who were not waiting. Let’s look at those three examples before examining the specific Greek term that is used in all three cases.

1) Luke 2:25: “And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, *waiting for the Consolation of Israel*, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” Here, we find Simeon waiting for the “Consolation of Israel”; the Consolation meaning the “Comforter,” speaking of the Christ. And the term “waiting” here is the particular term we will be looking at.

2) Luke 2:38: Here, we are told of that aged, godly prophetess, Anna. After she had seen the Christ child, we are told, “in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to *all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem*.” The term “looked for” here, is the same Greek word translated “waiting,” in the text we just read about Simeon. And again, when you hear this language, the clear impression is that not everyone was looking for, or waiting for, the Christ to come. Some were indifferent, unbelieving and unprepared, but some were expectant, waiting, and serving the Lord with anticipation. To the latter, Anna proclaimed the arrival of the Christ, who would bring redemption to Israel.

3) Luke 23:51: Here, we are told of Joseph of Arimathea, a just and good man from among the Sanhedrin, who had asked for the body of Jesus, so that, He could provide Him with a good burial in his own tomb. And we are told, “He had not consented to their decision and deed (that is, the murdering of the Christ). He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also *waiting for the Kingdom of God*.” Again, the same Greek word used in the previous two texts that we have read, is here translated as “waiting,” as Joseph, in contradistinction to the religious leaders who murdered Jesus, was waiting for (and looking to) the Kingdom of God.

And so, here we find three examples within the scope of Luke’s Gospel, where we note individuals who were waiting/looking for the Consolation of Israel, or redemption in Jerusalem, or for the Kingdom of God. And again, we are meant to understand here, that in these three examples, there are individuals who stood out among the Jews, as those who were actually looking for the coming of the Christ. And as we now consider the Greek term here used, we will find that this “looking/waiting” is not in an *inactive* sense, but rather, in a very *active* sense. In other words, the sincerity of their “waiting/looking” was affirmed by the way, in which, they lived their lives. And so, it’s not the type of waiting that sits down, relaxed, watching TV, *waiting* for cousin Joe to get home, so you can return the hammer you borrowed from him. It’s

more of a waiting for the police and the ambulance to arrive, because your child has just passed out for reasons unbeknownst to you. It's very conscious, focused, expectant and anticipating. To this end, let's consider the Greek term here used, in all three cases.

The term translated "looking/waiting for" is the Greek word "Prosdekomai." And the literal interpretation of the term is, "to receive to oneself, to give access to oneself, to embrace, to expect, to accept...etc." It would be the positive opposite of the such things as "to reject, to shun or to repudiate." Now, let me give you two other Scriptural examples, where this term is used, which can help us better appreciate the "active" sense of the word. [*Term used 14x in total]

1) Romans 16:1-2: "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may *receive* (here's our word) her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed, she has been a helper of many and of myself also." Now, clearly, Paul is not encouraging the brethren at Rome to simply, passively, leave room for Phoebe to come in. No, he wants them to welcome her; to positively be hospitable to her; to actively, consciously strive to meet whatever needs she might have...etc. Again, he wants them to exercise intentional hospitality toward this godly woman.

2) Let's read Philippians 2:25-30 together, and see how Paul commends the beloved Epaphroditus to the Philippians in a similar way, and get the sense of the weight of the same Greek term being used there by Paul. [Note vs. 29]

And so, as we consider the use of the term "prosdekomai" in these two texts, we find that the idea of "waiting/looking for" is an active concept and not a passive one. The saints at Rome and Philippi were to give special attention to the beloved brethren who were coming there; they were to prepare for their arrival, as it were, so that they might receive them hospitably, ready to meet all of their needs and to send them off again, refreshed and encouraged, remembering their faithful labors in the Lord.

This type of a conscious preparation; this type of a focused and conscious awareness; this type of open arms with a readiness to receive, is the way, in which, the *faithful*, Old Covenant people of God, looked for, anticipated, and longed after the Messiah and His Kingdom. And the profound thing about this, was that the most religious among them; the religious leaders, in general (not all, but in general), who ought to have been most in tune with the prophecies about

the coming Messiah, were indifferent and uninterested in the coming of the Christ. And the reason for this is simple. They had everything. They were content with this life, and loved receiving the attention of the people for themselves. The Christ would only strip them of the glory which they had stolen from God, as they directed the hearts of the people toward themselves and took advantage of them. And so, there is this distinction between those who looked/waited for the Consolation of Israel, and those who did not.

Now, this becomes particularly relevant for us, when we consider the fact that, we too, are presently waiting for the Christ, only, not for His first coming. We await His final return. And we can look to those examples from the Old Covenant, and how they looked ahead to the first coming, and examine our own hearts, in their light, to see if we share the same eager, active, welcoming focus and anticipation of our Lord's *final* coming. And to help us do this, we will look at two other texts which use the same Greek word, "prosdekomai," but in the sense that it relates to the *final* coming of Christ, toward which we "look" and "wait."

I. Waiting for the Consolation of Israel - New Covenant

1) Titus 2:11-15. Before we look at this text, from a contextual standpoint, it is important to recognize that Paul has just admonished several people groups concerning moral responsibilities (Older men - vs. 2, Older women - vs. 3, Young women - vs. 4, Young men - vs. 6, and Bondservants - vs. 9). And so, everyone, in some way or another has been addressed with a category of moral commands, immediately before we come to verses 11ff. And then, verse 11 begins with the word "For," indicating that Paul is going to provide them with some form of a compelling motivation that ought to drive each group unto obedience, concerning the several moral categories that he has just listed. And so, I mention this to highlight the fact that verses 11-15 contain a critical, indicative statement (describing what God has done), which is universally meant to drive all believers to obediently act, in the light of what is stated. And it is within this text that we find our "prosdekomai" clause, tying all that we have said already, to specific actions (and not passivity) that relate to the New Covenant perspective, by which, we look forward to the final coming of Christ. Let's now read the text. [Read Titus 2:11-15]

And so, here we find that God's grace that brings salvation has appeared to all men (How? In the first coming and Gospel victory of the Christ), and this amazing grace doesn't merely deliver us from the consequences of our sins and hellfire, but furthermore, it teaches us to (negatively) deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, so that, we might (positively) live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, fixing our sights in a certain direction. And it is here then, in verse 13, that we have our active term, "prosdekomai"; "*looking for* the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior" (as the Old Testament saints looked to the first coming of the Christ, we, in the same *active way*, look for the blessed hope—that hope, which while not presently seen—because it is "hope," is yet absolutely certain) and the glorious appearing (the return and final coming) of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, "who gave Himself for us (who purchased us unto this end), in order that, He might redeem us (not simply from the condemnation of our sins, but...) from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

Does it get any clearer than that, brethren? Considering the overall context and all that is directly stated in this text, can we not see clearly that "looking for/waiting for" is anything but being passive? We look forward to the return of Christ, by first, continually, consciously, meditating upon His return. And as we do this, daily, it drives our actions, and how we live out each and every day. As a wife longs to be rejoined to her husband who has gone off to war; as a wife prepares herself for the return of her husband, knowing he is going to be arriving soon, after a long time away at war, we wait for our blessed Savior. And because we anticipate His return, we live our daily lives, actively in the light of it. We have oil in our lamps as we await the Bridegroom. We engage in the daily warfare and battle against sin. We serve His church. We seek out His lost sheep. We live with a "Christ-centered" mission, not overcome by the worries and fears of this world. We live as those who are presently living in the Kingdom of God, awaiting it's final consummation. And so, this "waiting/looking," compels very real, tangible, conscious, continuous and consistent action. That's why Paul states in verse 15, "Titus, speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." This short Book is only three chapters in length, and we know that Paul doesn't waste words. In fact, ultimately, these are the Holy Spirit's Words. And so, they are extremely important for all of us, who are in

the New Covenant. Again, as the Old Covenant saints looked for the first advent of the Christ, we look for the return of Christ. There was an identifiable group who did this, in contradistinction to many who did not. Which group would we be in, if we were there, brethren, at that time? Which group would you have been in?

2) Finally, and much more briefly, look with me at Jude 1:21, where just preceding his final benediction, Jude exhorts his audience in a similar fashion. [Read verses 16-19 for contextual purposes. Then read the contrast in verses 20-21]

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, *looking for* (“prosdekomai”) the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

III. Concluding Charge

Brethren, we are entering the year 2021, and time is not slowing down for any of us. We don't know what this year will bring, but we do know that all of our days are numbered. How will we live out our remaining days on this earth? What will be the primary focus of your attention, which governs and directs how you live? Pandemics? Politics? The economy? Hobbies? Sports? The American Dream? Finances? Material assets and gain? Or, will we fix our eyes on Christ, the Author and finisher of our faith; I mean, *really* fix them there, such that, all that we do, is governed by the reality of His return?

Have you been looking for the return of Christ? Have you been living in the light of that great and glorious event? If so, how has the way in which you have lived your life affirmed this? What has your speech been like, and your actions, and your thoughts even, in the year 2020? Has it reflected a “prosdekomai” type of “looking” and “waiting” for the consolation of Israel? If not, what adjustments need to be made; what priorities need to be shifted around, to get back on track, brethren? May God give us the grace to be honest with ourselves, and to be among those who are truly “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ!” And may this be reflected in very tangible and active ways, in our dealings with sin, in our pursuit of holiness, in our serving Christ and His church, in our concern for the unsaved, and in the overall working out of our salvation. [To the unbeliever, what ultimate hope do you have, as a dying sinner, who will soon stand before God, to give an account? The Gospel!]. Amen!!! Jude 1:24-25