

“POSTPONEMENT” OR “PROPHETIC WAITING?”

DELAY OR TARRYING?

(A MATTHEW 24-25 SERIES)

PART 10

Introduction

Jesus has just notified His followers of a “forever separation” risk from family and/or friends if not living expectantly for His return.

“Watch therefore” is His repeated counsel (Matthew 24:42).

- The imperative “watch” does not simply mean “looking for” but denotes “constant readiness.”¹
- This suggests an active, urgent response to Christ’s grace.
- As Jesus ends this discourse, the reason for that elevated directive is given (25:14-46; cf. I Corinthians 16:13; I Thessalonians 5:6; I Peter 5:8; Revelation 3:2-3, 16:15).

Though, by now, the eschatological issues might seem complete, Jesus chooses to illustrate further the importance of full readiness.

“But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.... Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:43-44; cf. Luke 12:39-40).

It is easy to miss Christ’s “punch line.”

- A homeowner experienced a breakin – but that is not the focus – it was anticipated:
 - If he had known **when** (which three-hour watch) that would have occurred,² he would have been prepared to deal with this “intruder.”
 - But – he didn’t know – he was surprised.
 - The assumption is made that a robbery would occur sometime that night – but which “block of time” was unknown. That theft led to loss (implied).

The imagery simulates concern relative to Christ’s Second Coming.

- You know He is returning – He is to physically break into planet earth’s domain.
- Prophecy permits one to know **when** it is very near.
- Since the actual hour (which segment of time) is unknown – continual “watching” – “being always ready” is vital!

¹ Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers), vol. 33B, p. 720.

² Nolland, John; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 995.

- **Or else** – He will come like a thief in the night and one would be lost (cf. I Thessalonians 5:2; II Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3, 16:15).

The heartaches of being forever lost are once again intimated.

In the previous separation illustration the individual left behind will never see his friend/family member again. Here, the homeowner could have watched. He wasn't willing to be constantly "on guard." *It was too time or effort intensive.* He will never see heaven.

The implied message goes deeper: He might not know the exact time – but all "anticipatory evidence" would have helped him know that it was imminent. He could have been ready!

Jesus Presses the Issue Further

Another homeowner/master/householder – obviously wealthy – had slaves/stewards.

He puts one of them in charge of meal preparation (general provision – Psalm 104:27) for his servants. Then He asks a rhetorical question:

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?" (Matthew 24:45; cf. Luke 12:42-46).

- Who then do you think the master considers faithful/wise/thoughtful enough to be in charge of His place?
- He asks this that we might assume it could even be us.

Intriguingly, what Christ has taught to this point (in the whole apocalyptic narrative) was generally for everyone. Now – He is addressing the leaders, the ministers, the teachers, His witnesses! His concern echoes the failure of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 23).

- Those spiritually "in charge" have greater responsibility than anyone to finish the gospel work at the end (Luke 12:41-42, Hosea 4:6-9, James 3:1, I Peter 5:1-4).
- Perhaps more specifically, He is alluding to the eschatological church (Matthew 25:2, 4, 8; cf. I Corinthians 4:1, Titus 1:7, I Peter 4:10, I Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 1:25).
- *"Who do you think I will choose to help me at the close of history?"*

The steward's faithfulness doesn't relate to his "power" – but his service.³ What service do you think the Master really wants?

- He defined that faithfulness by his care of others.⁴ Luke even defines him as a "ruler," intimating the award of great responsibility.
- The spirit of caring brings honor to the master of the house.

³ Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke*, vol. 2 (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI – 1996), pp. 1178-1179.

⁴ Green, Joel B.; *The Gospel of Luke* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 505.

The Faithful Servant

Christ now presents ways that the good steward might respond. This is especially oriented to us at the end.

“Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods” (Matthew 24:46-47).

- The ruler who is faithful to his leadership commission pleases the Master.
- A blessing is given him by granting ***greater authority*** within his household – His “kingdom” (Matthew 13:43, 16:27, 19:28-29, 25:21, 23, 29, 34).
- When the Master returns unexpectedly, the ruler’s service continued unchanged, still completely reliable.

“The moment of truth is when the master comes.”⁵ Then the loyal service to the master moves from being temporary to permanent (eternal).⁶

- He will even give him a share in his own power and wealth.⁷

The Loyal Servant (Summary):

- Follows the Master’s directives/commission carefully
- Watches for His return
- Is always prepared for that event
- Cares for the needs of others – those he shepherds
- Waited and didn’t label that a time of “delay!”

He is rewarded with “more” authority when the Master returns

The Unfaithful Servant

Lest there be any misunderstanding of Christ’s lessons – he moves from a positive analogy to a negative case in point:

“But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming ...”
(Matthew 24:48; cf. Luke 12:45-46, 21:34-36).

- This introduces significant eschatological warning.
- Clearly this evil steward is not concerned about his master’s return. Through this allegory Jesus addresses the “***delay***” issue!

*“My Lord ***delayeth*** his coming”* (cf. Ezekiel 12:22, Habakkuk 2:2-3, II Peter 3:4).

⁵ Nolland, *op. cit.*, p. 998 (emphasis supplied).

⁶ Marshall, I. Howard, *The Gospel of Luke* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI – 1978), p. 541.

⁷ Schweizer, E.; *The Good News According to Luke*, (translated by D. E. Green, Atlanta: John Knox – 1984:213-214), as quoted by Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1180.

Was Jesus preparing His disciples for a ***long interval*** until His coming, was He reinforcing constant watchfulness while ***awaiting*** His anticipated return or was He addressing our spirit of anticipated hope?

- The consistent imagery in Christ's discourse always invites a ***sense of imminence***.
- Yet the issue of a perceived "tarrying time" cannot be avoided.
- From the amazing prophecies in Revelation there is a unique narrative that addresses our "waiting" understanding:
 1. *"And swore by the one who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, and the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, "There will be no more delay!"* (Revelation 10:6 – NET) (immediate future implied).
 2. The revealed eschatological signs have culminated to a point in time when Jesus can emphasize that the last prophetic period is about to begin.
 3. Shortly, ***the waiting time for that terminal prophecy would end*** (addressed as a "delay" in this translation).
 4. Contextually, He announces the ***pending onset*** of a final three and a half years (42 months – 1260 days) (Revelation 11:2-3).
 5. At its end (both cover the same period) the saints/witnesses hear "a great voice" – "Come up hither" (11:12).
 6. Shortly thereafter Christ's eternal kingdom has begun and the 24 redeemed elders sing His praise (11:13-18).

The end of time was not "put off" (the most common intimation of a "delay") – but a "tarrying time," a "waiting time" within the prophecy, was almost ended! "*There will [soon] be no more delay [wait]*" (10:6 – last part – NIV).

- A tarrying time is ***part of*** the "prophetic structural plan" within God's future narratives.
- That "***wait***" is contextually expected.
- It is not to be "promoted" as God putting off His plans. That might lead to careless living.
- It is not a postponement of prophecy.

Contextually, that spirit would foster:

- "My master is taking his time to return."
- "I, therefore, have time to 'let my hair down.'"⁸
- "I will have time later to get ready."

"But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming ..." (vs 48).

The setting of this verse surrounds the little Greek word *ean*, which means "if." Jesus has just been describing a good servant with a sudden switch to an evil servant. The latter is still the head of other servants. But through this "putting off" spirit:

- He abuses those under his charge.
- But – he insultingly still calls his master "My Lord."
- He is also careless in his personal life.

⁸ Nolland, *op. cit.*, p. 999.

Any neglectful thought or lifestyle that suggests there is still time to change is fatal. When the master returns, judgment comes to this servant. The subliminal warning is to **never function** as though the coming of Jesus is **postponed!**

Does that mean it could be “put off?” No! God works on precise timing schedules. It is important to note that Jesus gave this parable after telling us ***timing prophecies*** and ***events*** that would inform us that “His coming is near.” The “how” and “when” are open information. **A spirit of postponement is a denial of expectant prophecy.**

Peter, reflecting on truth that had already been “***spoken before by the holy prophets, and ... of us the apostles,***” said: “*Knowing this first [the foundational principle], that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?*” (II Peter 3:3-4).

- These scoffers ***concluded*** that Jesus’ coming was “put off” – “delayed.”
- Scoffers also include those who marginalize end-time issues.

The imagery states that those who declare “the Lord delays His coming” are sinners! Then God makes the profound observation that deity operates within its own timing sphere: “*A day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day*” (vs 8). He can do as He pleases with time.

- ***Yet, through prophecy, He reminds us that He has entered our timing realm – and that can be predictably understood.***

To the godly, Paul provides the context of how God’s timing occurs: “*For yet a little while [a small space of time] and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry*” (Hebrews 10:37). The anticipated wait will be over when the tarrying time ends.

Soon, He’ll return. Most conclude that “soon” could be years or it could be one day. But, again, Jesus does not operate in the sphere of the vague. There is specific timing information that He gave, found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. He outlined two distinct ends of time that we are to focus on – one for the Jewish people within the apostles’ day and one for the end of the world at the Second Advent. They are spelled out with great detail.

For the *end of time era* the “rest of the story” is found in Daniel (Matthew 24:15). Jesus stipulates that those end-time prophecies would each be fulfilled within one generation – or – approximately 40 years (which we are now in). In addition, he completes redemptive history 6000 years after Adam and Eve’s fall. That is expectant!

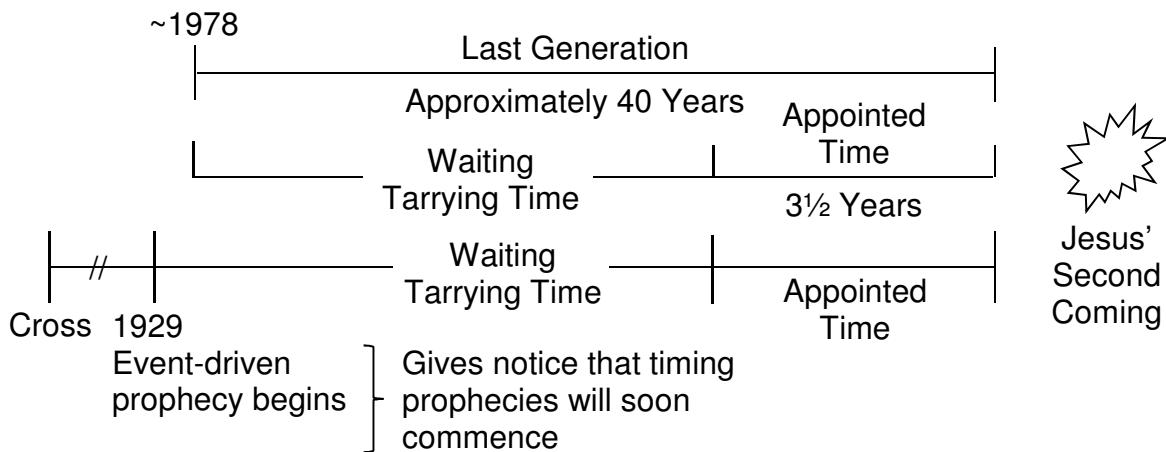
When Jesus told the inquiring disciples that “*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath in his own power*” (Acts 1:7):

- He never said it was going to be delayed.
- Nor did He say it would come with mystical suddenness.
- Nor did He say it would never be known.

Jesus already gave detailed signs related to when it could be declared that “the season” has arrived, “*even at the door.*” The “*beginning of sorrows*” became the signal for the “official onset”

of the timed end-time prophecies. The February, 1929, Lateran Treaty began an “event-driven notice” that final timing periods could soon be anticipated (key observation)!

What then did Jesus allude to in Acts 1:7? This is vital to grasp! Looking forward in time, one cannot predict when the consummation of events will begin – that was in the Father’s hand. But – ***when the predicted developments do begin to occur***, it’s going to happen within revealed timing prophecies. When looking at Daniel, God’s timing refinements reveal a terminal three-and-a-half year, *appointed-time* setting!



Within the timing structure of those prophecies there are built-in *waiting periods*. God does not want us to call them delays! He has given us permission to call them ***tarrying times***.

There are ***many*** tarrying times, such as:

1. Between the two end times noted in Matthew 24
2. *Within* the timing of one generation to the three-and-a-half-year appointed time
3. Before all prophetic times that still must be completed

A notable example of this was recorded by Habakkuk: “*And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*” (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

The vision is tarrying – the prophecy has a built-in wait before its fulfillment. But wait for it, it really will come to pass, and then it won’t appear to tarry any longer. Thus a specific prophecy can tarry *within* the greater framework of God’s fixed time. There simply are times when we must “wait” them out.

We will see this principle unfold in the parable of the ten virgins.

That evil servant’s reaction to his assumed “***postponement***:”

“And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken”
(Matthew 24:49).

- The “delay” notice was from a wicked heart: “saying in his heart.”
- That expression is characteristic of those who oppose the divine purpose.
- That “conviction” led to horrible loss.
- The issue for this evil servant was more an “absence” problem than a “delay” excuse.⁹
- Risk?

“The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:50-51).

- To the unrepentant, Christ’s coming will be as a thief.
- To the “children of light,” it will be expected (I Thessalonians 5:5-7).

Those leaders who exploit the flock for their own selfish interest will be damned (II Peter 2:3, Micah 3:11-12, I Timothy 6:5).

- The final end is horror – a night that never again sees a dawn.
- The evil servant was depicted as living carelessly and
- Reacting violently to those under his charge

In a great principle called *lex talionis* violence will be his end also.

- *“He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (Revelation 13:10).*

Summary of Evil Steward

1. The appointed leader had knowledge of his master’s wishes. That placed an onus on the exercise of his authority.
2. Lack of fidelity to his commission led to eternal loss.
3. God never reveals a postponement or delay in redemptive history. It can be accurately anticipated through precise timing prophecies.
4. With prophecy, there are, however, many “waiting periods.” The Bible calls them “tarrying times.” They are not delays. His arrival will be “on time.”

Postscript

“The Lord has a controversy with all men who by their unbelief and doubt have been saying that He delays His coming, and who have been smiting their fellow servants, and eating and drinking with (working from the very same principle as) the drunken; they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. Satan has controlled their reason, and they know not at what they stumble.”¹⁰

⁹ Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1181.

¹⁰ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 78.

"Because Christ's coming has been long foretold, they conclude that there is a mistake in regard to this doctrine. But the Lord says, 'If the vision tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come. It will not tarry past the time that the message is borne to all nations, tongues, and peoples.' Shall we who claim to be students of prophecy forget that God's forbearance to the wicked is a part of His vast and merciful plan, by which He is seeking to compass the salvation of souls? Shall we be found among the number who cease to cooperate with the Lord, and who are found saying, My Lord delays His coming?—Letter 131, 1900, pp. 2, 3. (To Brother Daniells, October 14, 1900.)"¹¹

Franklin S. Fowler, Jr., M.D.

Prophecy Research Initiative – non-profit 501(c)3 © 2013-present
EndTime Issues..., Number 149, February 1, 2013

¹¹ White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, pp. 182-183.