

For approximately two thousand years, God’s people have been waiting for the triumphant return of King Jesus. This has been a test, to say the least. I don’t even like to wait two minutes to speak to the next available associate. Two thousand years is a *wait*. A long wait is a struggle, and that struggle will reveal character, one way or another.

There’s a story I heard once that speaks to this point. A young man felt a calling to become a missionary and serve God overseas. So, he contacted a mission organization responsible for training and sending missionaries, and he told them about this feeling of calling, and wondered if he could come in for an interview. He was told, “Sure, come in for an appointment. Be here at 9 o’clock sharp.”

So the day arrived and the young man got there well before 9, just to make sure. He was shown to the waiting room, and there he sat. 9 o’clock came and went. So did 10. And then noon.

Inside the walls of the mission organization, an office manager peeked out through the blinds at the young man. “He’s still there,” she said. “Does he seem bothered yet?” asked her boss, the executive in charge of training and sending missionaries. “No,” she said, “He seems pretty content. He’s been doing some reading, but it doesn’t look like he’s upset.” “That’s a good sign,” said the executive. “This is nothing compared to the delays he will face in the mission field. If he’s still here in a half hour, send him in for his interview.”

A long wait is a struggle, and that struggle reveals character, one way or another. The Church of Jesus the King has been waiting for a couple thousand years for His return. What has our wait revealed about our character? What have we been doing with the time allotted to us? What *should* we be doing?

These are crucial questions to address as we observe the state of the world. What should Jesus’ Church be doing in the face of social upheaval, political posturing, natural disasters, wars and rumors of wars? The Bible has multiple answers to this line of questioning, and those answers harmonize with one another. The answers I’d like to concentrate on today come from the Epistle of Jude. Here they are, starting at verse 20:

*<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*

What should Jesus’ Church be doing with the time we’ve been allotted? Jude says, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; and show mercy to others by ‘snatching them out of the fire.’ These are such wise, practical words. If you and I apply ourselves to them, we’ll have no shortage of things to do while we wait.

First, Jude reminds us that, as we wait for our King, we must tend to ourselves. Again, starting at verse 20: *“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”* Jude calls for direct and clear action. Build yourself up in your most holy faith. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourself in the love of God. Wait for the mercy of Jesus that leads to eternal life. The great temptation for people who are waiting, as we are, who are waiting for the length of time we are, is to become distracted, or bored, or worst of all, to stop believing that the King has plans to return. Knowing this, Jude says, “Tend to yourselves, believers.” Now that you have received the beautiful gift of faith in Jesus, nurture it. Feed and water it. Give it the time and attention it deserves. One of the ways to do that is named here. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you into communication with your heavenly Father, by way of His Son. When you pray, everything else is set aside, and you take hold of God. You’re reminded His love for you is absolute. You have your Father’s ear, with every other blessing, because Jesus paid for your sin with his death, and opened the lines of communication with his resurrection.

As we wait for our King, we are to tend to ourselves, but that’s not all. Jude says it like this: <sup>22</sup> *And have mercy on those who doubt;* <sup>23</sup> *save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.* Once again, Jude calls for clear action, this time directed at others. And it begins with an attitude: having mercy on those who doubt. We live in an age of skepticism and cynicism. The way to respond to those who doubt God’s truth is not to argue with them, according to Jude, but instead to have mercy on them. That describes a spiritual attitude which chooses to love anyway, and serve despite the reception we might receive. An attitude of mercy toward others results in the action described rather dramatically in verse 23: *“...save others by snatching them out of the fire...”* This “snatching” is a matter of showing mercy and telling of Jesus. As some of you have heard me say numerous times, the church is at its best when it is doing both showing and telling. When we show mercy and tell of Jesus, we’re throwing people a lifeline. Our message is not that sin is OK, just the opposite, it is a deadly fire, but the fumes can be escaped by trusting in Jesus. He loved the sinner so much that he jumped into the fire of judgment to trade places, allowing us to live. Knowing this, Jude says, “Tend to this work of rescue.”

Remember that story I told you about the young man at the mission office? Right now, God’s redeemed children—the church that Jesus has saved—is in the waiting room. What are we doing as we wait for our appointment with the King? God’s servant Jude calls out to us: Tend to yourselves, and to the work of rescuing others. Show mercy and tell of Jesus.