

**Joyful Anticipation, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. A3071216**

**Isaiah 35:1-10 and James 5:7-10**

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The twelve- year old boy goes down into the basement, a combination family/play/TV room. There, on a bench is a sight he can't believe he's seeing. There, on that bench in plain sight, for anyone to see, are the Christmas presents that his mother has prepared and wrapped for all the family members. Oh, what a temptation. He tries as hard as he can to watch TV, but his eyes wander over toward that marvelous pile. He forces them back to the TV, but they wander once again to the pile. His feet inexplicably begin moving towards that bench and closer to the marvelous pile. He hesitates, knowing the possible wrath that could befall him, should it be discovered that he has fallen into temptation. But the hesitation is not for long. The feet continue on their inevitable course.

The boy's hands— what are his hands doing? They have lifted a package. His eyes look for a nametag, some indication of its intended recipient. No luck. His arms weigh the package to make an approximation of its mass. They shake the package to see what auditory clues there might be of its contents. No good. The only way to determine the contents of the package is to carefully peel back the tape and lift a flap of the wrapping to see what the box says. Slowly he lifts the tape, being careful not to rip pretty paper. He folds back the paper. He sees the box. Wow! It's a transistor radio kit! Carefully, he wraps it up and goes back to watching TV, knowing what he is going to receive on Christmas morning.

Anticipation is to look forward to, especially with pleasure. Anticipation comes from the Latin, *ante capere* "To take before." The boy had "taken before." He had taken the package and opened it before the intended occasion, and in the process, spoiled his Christmas Day surprise. No longer was he able to anticipate. Anticipation had turned to knowledge.

We joyfully anticipate the coming of Christmas. We anticipate the gifts we might receive from others. We prepare gifts for others and anticipate what their reactions might be. We anticipate gatherings: perhaps family members coming to town or journeying back home to see family members there. We anticipate the greeting cards and Christmas letters we receive from others. We share the stories of the events of our lives during the past year. We decorate our homes in anticipation of the season.

We have driven around to look at the brightly decorated homes. It is a joy to see the efforts to which people have gone to increase the joyful anticipation. Christmas is a beautiful time to anticipate.

Anticipation plays tug-o'-war with patience. James wrote, "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord"<sup>1</sup> Patience is an elusive quality during the second and third weeks of December. Ask any teacher or parent. Children get hyper. My elementary school teacher daughter says that meaningful instruction in her elementary school ends a week before Christmas vacation because the students are so hyper.

Perhaps we do our children a disservice by getting them so excited about what they're going to get. We ask them to write lists to Santa Claus about what they want. We raise their expectations for receiving. In the process, they forget about giving to others, and they forget about God's gift to humanity— a baby born in Bethlehem.

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<sup>1</sup>James 5:7

James continues: “Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”<sup>2</sup> For those who must have immediate results, farming is the wrong occupation! There is no instant profit. Farming requires preparation of the soil, planting seed, fertilizing, watering, and waiting. If the season is dry, the crop might fail. The farmer must begin all over again. It can be frustrating..

Advent is an important season because it teaches us to wait patiently. Let God come in God’s own way. James was writing to an early Christian community that had grown impatient because Jesus had not come back in the way he was anticipated. Members of the community had died even though Jesus’ promise was that he would return before anyone would pass away. In their impatience, the members of the community grumbled at each other.

Have you found yourself grumbling during this most wonderful season of the year? It seems to me that if we find ourselves grumbling at those we love the most, something is amiss. Perhaps we might cut back on some activities. Perhaps we might lower our expectations. Perhaps we might take time out to consider the reason behind our activities.

James said, “Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!”<sup>3</sup> Our churches and our homes are beloved communities: Christ is always standing at the door, and we are to treat each other knowing that he is there watching. Treat each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christmas is not a holiday for the impatient. Joyful anticipation means waiting patiently. Our impatience ruins the meaning of Christmas. In the process, we cram too many things into the season. We get so wrapped up in the trappings around the event, we miss the event.

Perhaps you already guessed that the story about the twelve-year-old boy is my story. Whoever has heard of a transistor radio kit since the 1960's? But, that package that I had opened ahead of time was the wrong package. On Christmas morning, that package under the tree was addressed to my brother. I can’t even remember what I got that Christmas, because I wanted that radio kit so badly. My anticipation that turned to impatience and led to sneaking a peak at Christmas packages turned that Christmas into a big disappointment.

Our culture’s anticipation of a commercial holiday does not match the anticipation of the Christian faith. We need to ask ourselves what we are waiting for and what do we do while we wait? Joyful anticipation means being patient until the proper time. Jesus Christ will come in God’s time. God’s gift will be what God intends for us. We know what the Christmas gift is. It is the gift of God’s presence in the flesh. The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.<sup>4</sup>

The Christmas gift will bring about a new order where healing takes place. Weak knees will be made firm, the eyes of the blind will be opened, The ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The lame shall leap like a deer, Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.<sup>5</sup> Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

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<sup>2</sup>James 5:7-8

<sup>3</sup>James 5:9

<sup>4</sup>Isaiah 35:1-2

<sup>5</sup>From Isaiah 35:3-6