Isaiah 30 *The Waiting Room: The Impetuous Side of Impatience*

***Operation Sneak-a-Peak***My brother was the ringleader. He is the oldest, so I’m going to blame him. He had a toolkit that would have made a master forger jealous. He had the scotch tape dispenser. A paring knife. A straight edge. Some super glue. Even an extra roll of wrapping paper, in case something went drastically wrong.

My sister is the youngest, so she was the lookout. It was her job to sit by the window and raise the alarm if the parents came home unexpectedly early.

And me? I’m not really sure what my job was. Maybe I was just an innocent by-stander.

It was a Friday night in December. The parents were out to supper with some friends. We were left under the supervision of my brother. The Christmas gifts were wrapped and already waiting under the tree. And this was “Operation Sneak-a-Peak.”

Just looking at the size of the presents and speculating about what was in them was not enough. We had picked them up and judged them by weight. We had gently squeezed them and shaken them to determine if there were clothes inside or something more substantial. But we really wanted to know what was inside those presents.

My brother was convinced that he could use a paring knife to cut away the tape. Then he would carefully unfold the wrapping paper until we could peak inside. Then we would refold the paper, put a piece of scotch tape precisely over the top of the cut piece, and no one would be any wiser.

And so, that’s what we did. We peaked at our Christmas presents, then we wrapped them up again and waited for Christmas.

Now, a couple of things. For one thing, my parents were way smarter than we were. So while the presents started appearing under the tree as soon as they were purchased and wrapped, that didn’t include the main present. That gift was apparently held at a secure, off-site location and didn’t appear until the big day. The stuff we peaked at tended to be packages of socks and coloring books. They always managed to keep the big gift secret.

But the other thing is, the couple of Christmases we did peak in advance kind of spoiled the fun. As much as I wanted to know what was in those presents, already knowing meant that when we did open our gifts on Christmas morning it wasn’t as exciting. I already knew, so there wasn’t much anticipation.

***Can’t Wait for Christmas***We are in a series right now we are calling “The Waiting Room.” During the season of Advent, we are talking about how hard it can be to wait for Christmas. This stretch of the church calendar is meant to get us to identify with the saints of the Old Testament and the stretch of time when they waited for the long-expected Messiah.

And along with that, we are talking about how so much of life feels like it is lived in a waiting room. We have things that we are praying for, things that we are hoping for, dreams we want to see fulfilled; but so often God says to us “Wait.”

Our prayers don’t always get answered the way we want. We don’t see quick resolutions to our conflicts. Our dreams are sometimes deferred. We are believing God for better things, we believe His word when He says greater things are yet to come; but right now we don’t see them and we find ourselves waiting.

And that can lead to impatience. And impatience can lead us to make foolish decisions. Just as I regretted the decision to peak at my Christmas presents beforehand, impatience can bring us to grief in our relationship with God.

John Piper writes this:

**Impatience is a form of unbelief**. It’s what we begin to feel when we start to doubt the wisdom of God’s timing or the goodness of his guidance. It springs up in our hearts when the road to success gets muddy, or strewn with boulders, or blocked by some fallen tree. The battle with impatience can be a little skirmish over a long wait in a checkout lane. Or, it can be a major combat over a handicap, or disease, or circumstance that knocks out half your dreams. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/battling-the-unbelief-of-impatience>

We need to battle the unbelief of impatience. Today we are going to look at a story from Judah’s political history that illustrates the two temptations of impatience. When we are impatient with God we are tempted to either run ahead of the LORD, or to bail out on the LORD altogether.

***Shortcuts***First, consider the temptation to **run ahead of the LORD**. When we are waiting, there is a danger that we will attempt to engineer the fulfillment of God’s promises for ourselves. Impatience can lead to taking shortcuts.

Our text this morning is Isaiah 30. Let’s look at the **first couple of verses:**

“Woe to the obstinate children,”
    declares the Lord,
“to those who carry out plans that are not mine,
    forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit,
    heaping sin upon sin;
**2**who go down to Egypt
    without consulting me;
who look for help to Pharaoh’s protection,
    to Egypt’s shade for refuge.

The historical situation being referred here is in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah. These are the last days of the northern kingdom, when Assyria is being used by God as an instrument of justice against Israel. At the same time, Judah is also being threatened by Assyria. And, in response, Israel is looking to make an alliance with Egypt as protection against Assyria.

It is not a good decision. As verse 2 says, these plans are not the Lord’s plans. This alliance is not set up by God’s Spirit. It is “heaping sin upon sin.”

This is a move of impatience. Rather than trusting God in the midst of this crisis, Judah’s leaders are scrambling to make an alliance with the closest available superpower. They think that Egypt can come in and do their fighting for them.

But it’s not going to work. In 2 Kings 18, which tells the history of this period, Egypt is described as a “splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man’s hand and wounds him if he leans on it!” In other words, depend on Egypt and you are going to get hurt! **Here’s how Isaiah puts it:**

**3**But Pharaoh’s protection will be to your shame,
    Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace…

**5**everyone will be put to shame
    because of a people useless to them,
who bring neither help nor advantage,
    but only shame and disgrace.”

**7**    to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless.
Therefore I call her
    Rahab the Do-Nothing

Egypt is utterly “useless.” If Judah puts their hope in Egypt, they will receive nothing in return but shame and disgrace.

This is meant as a warning for all of us. When our way is blocked, and the Lord says wait, we better trust him and wait; because if we run ahead without consulting him, our plans will probably not be his plans and they will bring shame on us, rather than glory.

Another striking Biblical example of this is the story of Abraham and Hagar. Maybe you recall the story: God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, that his descendants would bring blessing all over the earth. But there was a problem: Abraham and his wife Sarah didn’t have any children, and at this point they were well past child-bearing years. They got impatient, waiting for God to fulfill His promises; so they decided they needed to engineer a solution on God’s behalf.

Their solution was Sarah’s Egyptian maid-servant Hagar. Sarah thought it would be o.k. if Abraham and Hagar had a baby together, and then she’d just adopt the child as her own. She thought she wouldn’t be jealous of Hagar. She thought they could handle the family drama. She was wrong.

Hagar had a son with Abraham named Ishmael. Abraham hoped God would see Ishmael as the child of promise. But that’s not what God had in mind. All kinds of grief came to Abraham’s family because of this impetuous decision; and we continue to see a legacy of conflict between Jews and Muslims to this day.

Impatience can lead us to take ill-advised shortcuts. A 2010 NPR article entitled “Impatient Nation” cites 3 different academic studies that make a connection between impatience and increased hypertension, increased obesity, and increased debt.

They quote one researcher:

People have tried to look at a lot of reasons why Americans are getting so overweight. But nobody has thought about the idea of connecting it to impatience. If you are willing to forgo present satisfaction for future benefits, you are patient. If, however, you want your satisfaction right now, then you are going to have that extra dessert and that extra ice cream and you are not going to be able to forgo the pleasures of today. <https://www.npr.org/2010/12/06/131565694/impatient-nation-i-can-t-wait-for-you-to-read-this>

In the same way, impatience leads us to take on ill-advised loans, make short-sighted credit card purchases; and spend way more than we save. We are a microwave society. We want results now.

Impatience leads us to take shortcuts. And sometimes, it leads us to run ahead of God. Think of those who make ethically questionable decisions to further their business interests. Think of those who become sexually promiscuous rather than waiting for marriage. Think of those who rely on earthly pleasures to make themselves happy rather than finding their joy in the Lord.

Impatience tempts us to be impetuous, hasty, impulsive, or reckless. It leads us out of step with what God is doing. We rush into some ill-advised detour to try to beat the system.

***Leaving the Path***Or, it tempts us **to bail out on the LORD entirely**. That’s the second temptation of impatience. When we are waiting, there is the danger that we will decide to forget about God entirely. Impatience can lead us to give up on faith.

A few verses on, **Isaiah 30 says this:**

**9**For these are rebellious people, deceitful children,
    children unwilling to listen to the Lord’s instruction.
**10**They say to the seers,
    “See no more visions!”
and to the prophets,
    “Give us no more visions of what is right!
Tell us pleasant things,
    prophesy illusions.
**11**Leave this way,
    get off this path,
and stop confronting us
    with the Holy One of Israel!”

In verse 1, Isaiah calls the people of Judah “obstinate children.” Now he calls them “deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD’s instruction.”

The problem is that they have stopped listening to the LORD’s prophets. In fact, they’ve actively started telling the prophets to shut up. They say, in so many words, that if the prophets aren’t willing to say pleasant things to them—to make up illusions that tell them that everything is just fine—then they don’t want to hear from the prophets at all.

Again, remember the setting: Assyria is this big, bad superpower that is threatening their national security. God is telling them to trust Him, to stay faithful. But they can’t handle that, the threat is too great. So they do an end around on God and run to Egypt for help.

Along comes Isaiah and the other prophets to tell them that’s not going to help. Egypt isn’t the superpower it used to be, it is no match against Assyria, it’s not the solution God has in mind for them. But they don’t want to hear that either. So now they tell Isaiah to shut his mouth. They announce that if God isn’t going to bless the things they are doing, then they are going to be done with God.

Verse 11 illustrates this temptation of impatience so well. “Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with Holy One of Israel.” They don’t like waiting for God. If God isn’t going to give them answers sooner, then they’re just going to bail out on Him.

The story of Job is a story of waiting on God. Scholars are mixed on whether Job was a real, historical person or not. It’s possible that the whole book is an extended parable meant to teach us about God and suffering. In a way, I hope that is true, because the things that happen to Job are really, truly terrible:

First, he loses his oxen and his donkeys, and then all of his servants who were working with them. Carried off by Sabeans or put to the sword. Then he loses his flock of sheep and his shepherds in a lightning storm. Then the Chaldeans come and take away his camels. In short order, the very wealthy Job loses all of his earthly assets and most of his employees.

But that’s not the worst of it. His children are all together celebrating a holiday when a wind storm rips through the desert and knocks down the house they are in. All inside the house perish, save one servant who survives to tell the tale to Job. Just like that, Job loses his children and his wealth. But he stays faithful to God.

So then, Job himself is attacked. He is afflicted with a horrible, debilitating disease. We don’t know what it is, but it appears to be very painful and disfiguring, with open sores all over his body. Even then, Job does not sin by cursing God. He continues to say: “I know my redeemer lives… I myself will see him with my own eyes.” (Job 19:25 & 27) Job commits to wait upon the Lord.

But not his wife.

Keep in mind that Job’s wife has suffered just as terribly as he has. She is a mother whose children all died at once. She too has seen all her earthly possessions ripped away. She may not be sick the way Job is, but she is left to care for him and nurse him. So it’s hard to blame her when she says: “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 1:9)

She’s had enough of waiting for God. She’s ready to shake her fist at God and walk away. She’s done.

And that temptation comes our way as well. When we find ourselves in the Waiting Room of life, when things are not going the way we hoped or want, the temptation is for us to blame God, to curse God, and to walk away from God. We might think: “Well, if God isn’t going to do things the way I want, then I’m going to have nothing to do with God.”

Leave that path. Stop talking about God.

Impatience tempts us to bail out. If there’s going to be frustration, and opposition, and difficulty, then… just forget it. I won’t keep this job, or take this challenge. I won’t raise this child or stay in this marriage. I won’t live this life anymore. I’ll just walk away, give up, turn away from God.

***Where it Led***The people of Judah found themselves in a situation where they no longer wanted to wait for God. And the temptations—both of which they indulged—were to run ahead of God or to bail out on God. But here’s where it led. **Verses 12-14:**

**12**Therefore this is what the Holy One of Israel says:

“Because you have rejected this message,
    relied on oppression
    and depended on deceit,
**13**this sin will become for you
    like a high wall, cracked and bulging,
    that collapses suddenly, in an instant.
**14**It will break in pieces like pottery,
    shattered so mercilessly
that among its pieces not a fragment will be found
    for taking coals from a hearth
    or scooping water out of a cistern.”

It’s a vivid word picture. Isaiah imagines Judah as a high wall. But it is a poorly constructed one.

A couple of weeks ago, there was a news story about a Hard Rock hotel they were building in New Orleans. Some engineering mistakes were made—either out of negligence or just poor planning—and suddenly the building just collapsed. There was surveillance footage from down the street that showed the hotel tumbling down.

That’s what Isaiah says is going to happen to Judah. This high wall is going to crack and bulge and then, all of a sudden, it’s going to collapse. And it is going to collapse so thoroughly—it’s going to be “shattered so mercilessly”--that in the rubble not a fragment will be found big enough to scoop coals out of the fire or for spooning water out of a well.

In other words, as long as Judah’s impatience leads them to ignore God or rebel against God, they are in for a disaster.

***What Should be Done Instead***What should be done instead? Here’s where waiting comes in. Here’s where we need to talk about Biblical waiting, as we talked about it last week. **Isaiah 30:15:**

**15**This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:

“In repentance and rest is your salvation,
    in quietness and trust is your strength,
    but you would have none of it.

In other words, if you rest in God, if you look to him instead of dashing down to Egypt, if you trust Him, then He will give you all the strength you need to be patient, and to handle the stresses where you are. And **verse 18:**

**18**Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you;
    therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.
For the Lord is a God of justice.
    Blessed are all who wait for him!

Here is the word—QWH—that we did a word study on last week. Tough, persistent, resolute longing. Clinging to God. It’s the same word that describes those who wait on the LORD and mount up on wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31). The same word that describes those who wait for the LORD more than watchmen wait for the morning (Psalm 130:6). In fact, the word is actually in this verse twice. The Revised Standard Version **shows that more clearly**:

**18**Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you;
    therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
    blessed are all those who wait for him.

The Lord waits to be gracious to you…blessed are all those who wait for him. Just as persistently and resolutely as we are called to hang on to God, so resolutely and persistently is God committed to be gracious to us.

This is the way to battle the unbelief of impatience. We must preach to our soul with warnings and promises. We say: look what happened to Judah when they acted impatiently and went to Egypt for help instead of waiting for God. They were shamed and humiliated. When they refused to wait for God but instead shook their fists at him in defiance, they were “shattered so mercilessly.” We must take warning.

And then we preach to ourselves God’s promises. We say to our souls: God promises us strength and salvation if we will rest in him and be quiet and trusting. He says He will bless us if we will wait for Him. We remind ourselves that God longs to be gracious to us. That as we wait, He’s also waiting to show us mercy and compassion.

We battle the unbelief of impatience by using the promises of God to persuade our hearts that God’s timing, and God’s guidance, and God’s sovereignty are going to take this frustrated, boxed-in, unproductive situation and make something eternally valuable out of it. There will come a blessing, a strength, a vindication, a mounting up with wings like eagles.

So long as we do not run out ahead of God and engineer His promises for ourselves.

So long as we do not bail out on God and shake our fists at Him in defiance.

***But I…***As I have been working on this series about waiting a scripture that has popped up quite often is Psalm 13. I talked about it Wednesday night during our prayer time. In fact, I had Lori print up some bookmarks with Psalm 13 on them. They are available at the Information Desk if you want to grab one. This is what **Psalm 13** says:

**1**How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
    How long will you hide your face from me?
**2**How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
    and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
    How long will my enemy triumph over me?

**3**Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
    Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
**4**and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
    and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

This is a Psalm about waiting. It’s a Psalm that is written in the middle of the wait. Right in the waiting room.

We know it is a Psalm by David, but we’re not exactly sure when he wrote it. Maybe it was when he was on the run from King Saul. Maybe it was when he was on the run from his own son Absalom. Maybe it was at some other point of crisis in his life.

But he is clearly waiting. And you can hear how hard the waiting is in his question: “How long, Lord?” “How long?” It feels to him like God has forgotten him. That God isn’t even paying attention anymore. How many of us have wondered the same things? Have felt as though God has left us to wrestle with our thoughts, to feel sad day after day after day.

And this Psalm doesn’t pull any punches with God. Look at verse 3. How many of us would have the courage to talk to God like this? “Look at me God! Look at me! Give me an answer!” David is frustrated. He’s sure that this situation is about to end in his own death and his enemies gloating over him.

This Palm is a pitch perfect description of what it feels like to wait.

But then **comes verse 5**:

**5**But I trust in your unfailing love;
    my heart rejoices in your salvation.
**6**I will sing the Lord’s praise,
    for he has been good to me.

It’s almost hard to believe that this is the same Psalm, and that it is written by the same person. Two verses ago David was practically screaming at God, now he reaffirms his commitment to wait on the Lord. More than that, he declares his intention to sing the Lord’s praises. He says, about the same God he has just accused of abandoning him: “He has been good to me.”

What’s going on? I think this is an illustration of battling the unbelief of impatience. Instead of running out ahead of God and doing something rash, and instead of shaking his fist at God and bailing on Him entirely; David demonstrates tough faith. Tough, persistent, resolute longing for God. He’s going to wait.

People who have been around Hope Church for a while know that two of my favorite words in the Bible are “But God…” There are frequent times in the Bible where we are given bad news, usually some description of our hopeless and sinful condition; and then the whole passage will change with the words “But God…” When our situation is hopeless and helpless, God is the answer. “But God…” is the prelude to good news.

Here, though, the phrase is “But I…” While God is still the source of good news, it is the words “but I…” that indicated David’s commitment to cling to God. In spite of all evidence and circumstances that seem to indicate God is absent, David says “but I…will trust in your unfailing love.”

***Behind a Frowning Providence***On Wednesday I also told the story of **William Cowper**. It looks like “COW-per” but it is pronounced “Cooper.” I don’t know why. William Cowper was a poet who lived in England in the 1700s. He was a contemporary of Benjamin Franklin, who was familiar with his poetry and gave his first published volume a favorable review. He also suffered from terrible, debilitating depression.

Cowper believed in Jesus and belonged to an Evangelical church. And yet his depression—at a time when mental health was little understood and there was no such thing as psychology or counseling—often threw him into fits of despair. He often doubted his own salvation, and had a hard time believing God could truly love him. Much of his life was spent in the figurative waiting room—waiting for these dark clouds to lift and searching for some hope. Several times he attempted to take his own life and he was at times committed to mental hospitals. As a poet, he left a long literary record of his struggles with melancholy and mental breakdown.

He was good friends with John Newton—the slave-trader turned preacher who served as Cowper’s pastor at a church known as Olney. As a form of therapy, Newton challenged Cowper to write hymns. Together they collaborated on what is known as the Olney Hymnal. Newton contributed 200 songs, including “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds”, “Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken” and, of course, “Amazing Grace.” Cowper contributed 68, including “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood” and “God Moves in A Mysterious Way.”

There is no evidence that William Cowper’s depression ever fully went away in this life. It would appear that he spent most of his life waiting for things to get better. And clinging to faith was at times, very difficult. The temptation to despair was always with him.

But in his songs, and in his poetry, there is also evidence of a tough, persistent, resolute longing. A fierce declaration—as expressed by the Psalmist—“But I will trust in your unfailing love.” Here are some of the lyrics **to one of his most famous songs:**

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Waiting is hard. Our own impatience makes it even harder. But resist the temptations to shortcut or give up on God. Preach to yourself the promises of God’s mercy and grace. And then resolve to hang in there with tough, resolute, persistent waiting on God.