Isaiah 64:4 *The Waiting Room: The Help Available Sign*

***Help NOT Wanted***A big part of Christmas is the waiting. For the last couple of weeks, we’ve been talking about how hard it is to wait for Christmas. And we’ve made a connection between that and something I think most of us can relate to, the times in life where we feel like we are waiting: waiting for a situation to change, waiting for an illness to get better, waiting for a relationship to improve, waiting for a prayer to get answered.

So we have been calling our sermon series leading up to Christmas “The Waiting Room.” We’ve kind of imagined the stable over here as a sort of waiting room, like waiting to get into the doctor’s office. And we’ve been talking about the Biblical virtue of waiting. We’ve been talking about how the Bible calls us to trust in the Lord with a tough, persistent, resolute longing when it feels like we are stuck in life’s virtual waiting room.

And today, we are going to look at this foundational Christian truth:

**God helps those who wait for Him.**

The Bible is very clear that God is not seeking people who do-it-themselves or who are self-reliant. Rather, He delights to show Himself mighty for those who trust in Him.

John Piper puts it like this, in a sermon that gave me the outline for my message today:

God’s greatness is not magnified by His gathering workers to work for Him; but rather His greatness is magnified by working for His people. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-works-for-those-who-wait-for-him--2>

Let me put it like this. I’m sure you’ve all **seen signs like this before:** “Help Wanted.” Places of employment, often restaurants or convenience stores, will have these in their windows. In fact, I know there are some manufacturing concerns that pretty much permanently have signs like this outside their building. Maybe it will be on their electronic marquee, or it will be a big sign in their yard that says “Now Hiring.” Some employers are constantly looking to fill out their workforce.

Except, sometimes they’re not. Sometimes employers will have everybody they need, but instead of taking down the sign, they’ll **do something like this**: “Help NOT Wanted.” “Not Hiring.”

And what I want to say to you today, is that the second sign is much closer to what God would have hanging outside of His place of business: “Help NOT Wanted.” That’s the gospel.

You see, God never hangs out a “Help Wanted” sign. Sometimes we think that God needs us to follow Him and do His will if He is going to get anything accomplished on this earth. We think God is desperate to sign people up so that He can get anything done. But that’s not the message of the Bible. God doesn’t say: “I can’t run my business if you guys don’t show up.” He never does that. The gospel is: Help NOT wanted…Help Available!

God is a God who works for us. God helps those who wait for Him.

***Isaiah 64:4***Here’s our scripture passage for today, Isaiah 64:4. We’ll look at a few verses today, but this verse is the main one. This verse is the “Help Available Sign.” This is the verse that I want to imprint on your hearts and minds today. **Isaiah 64:4**:

**4**Since ancient times no one has heard,
    no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
    who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

God doesn’t have a Help Wanted sign hanging in His window. He doesn’t measure His greatness by the number of people He has working for Him. Rather, He measures His greatness by the help He gives. He has a Help Available sign.

There are three things to observe from this verse. My outline—borrowed from John Piper—is 1) the Uniqueness of this God, 2) the Competence of this God and 3) The Condition of His working for us.

***No God Like You…***First, let’s consider **the Uniqueness of this God**. This is really the focus of the verse. God is utterly unique from any other “god” on earth. Christianity is not like other religions. Look at the verse again, the first two lines:

Since ancient times no one has heard,
    no ear has perceived

When the people of the earth meet up—I imagine caravans meeting out in the desert, nomads bumping into each other—when they meet up and they sit around the campfire at night and they start telling stories about the different gods they believe in, Isaiah says nobody ever heard a story about a god like the God of Israel. All the stories are essentially the same: they believe in this god or that idol, but all the gods are alike, they need people to serve them. They are looking for people who will do their bidding.

But Yahweh is different. “No eye has seen any God besides you.” Yahweh is unique.

And what makes the God of the Bible different? He “acts on behalf of those who wait for him.” God is in a class by himself. The uniqueness of the God of the Bible is that He doesn’t ask people to work for Him. He works for them, and all of their service is dependent on His service. He works for us before we work for Him. He loves us before we love Him.

A couple of chapters earlier in Isaiah there’s a fun passage where Isaiah compares God to the Babylonian deities Bel and Nebo. They are kind of like the Zeus and Mercury in the Babylonian pantheon. And one of Isaiah’s favorite things is to compare the idols of the surrounding nations to the LORD God. Here’s what he says about Bel and Nebo, **Isaiah 46:1-2:**

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low;
    their idols are borne by beasts of burden.
The images that are carried about are burdensome,
    a burden for the weary.
**2**They stoop and bow down together;
    unable to rescue the burden,
    they themselves go off into captivity.

Basically, Bel and Nebo only exist as statues. They are wooden carvings. Or, maybe, if you are a little more uptown, they are figures cast in silver or gold. But they are burdensome. If you are going from one place to another, and you want Bel or Nebo to go with you, then you need to strap them to an ox or a camel. You have to fix up a little cart for them, like Baby Yoda’s bassinet.

The point is that Bel and Nebo need to be carried. They can’t carry themselves, let alone carry their followers.

Now, contrast that with the God of the Bible. **The next two verses are God Himself speaking to Israel:**

“Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob,
    all the remnant of the people of Israel,
you whom I have upheld since your birth,
    and have carried since you were born.
**4**Even to your old age and gray hairs
    I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
    I will sustain you and I will rescue you

God says: “You’re not carrying me! I’m carrying you!” I think there is an allusion to the Exodus here. In the Old Testament, the great salvation event is God taking the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. That’s the great preview, if you will, of what is going to happen with Jesus and the cross. And in Exodus 19, right after the Red Sea, when God addresses the Israelites He says: “I carried you on eagles’ wings.” So these verses are looking back to that, and God is reminding Israel: “You didn’t carry me! I carried you.”

And notice the repetition. Notice the emphasis. 7 times in these verses God says it: 1) I have upheld you, 2) I have carried you from birth 3) even to gray hair I will sustain you (that’s a good verse for some of us!) 4) I have made you, 5) I will carry you, 6) I will sustain you, 7) I will rescue you.

Bel and Nebo, what are you doing?! You’re making your people carry you on carts while the God of the Bible is out here carrying His people on wings like eagles!

No other religion is like this. No other God. In every other system of belief the gods are a burden rather than burden bearing. Every other religion is a religion of works. The system is set up so that if you work hard enough, keep the rules enough, you’ll make it. Follow the rules, perform the acts of obedience, do more good karma then bad, then you are in.

That’s not Christianity. We have a God who works for us. We have a God who says: “I will do the work for you. You cannot save yourself. You cannot cancel your own debt. You cannot pile up more good than bad…so I will do it for you.” That’s what Christmas is all about! That’s why Jesus came into the world.

Listen to this, Mark 10:45. One of the most important verses for understanding Christmas. One of the most important verses for understanding why Jesus came. **Mark 10:45:**

**45**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus says: “I’m not here to be served. I’m not looking for servants in my mansions or slaves on my plantation. I don’t want you to measure my greatness by how many people I have in my employ. That’s not why I came.

“I came to serve. I came to give. My greatness is in my gift. The gift of my life.”

That’s the New Testament version of Isaiah 64:4. Who has seen a God who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him? Mark 10:45 is Isaiah 64:4 written in Jesus’ blood. Who has ever seen a God like this, who not only works for those who wait for Him, but does the hardest, the most painful, the most despised work there is, namely, crucifixion?

Show me. Come up to me after this service and name me any savior, any god, any deliverer, any person, any deity like that. There isn’t one. No religion. Not Islam, not Hinduism, not Buddhism, not New Age psychology, or secular self-improvement, has a god like this. Only Christianity has a God who sends His Son into the world and says: “This is what Isaiah 64:4 meant: I’m coming not to be served but to serve. I’m coming lay my life down for you. There’s nothing you can do to save yourself. Nothing you can do to work for me. I’m going do it all, and all you need to do is wait. Can you do that? Can you trust me? Can you have me as your God or are you going to insist that you’re going to do the work yourself?”

There is no God like this.

***I Will Do…***That’s first. The uniqueness of this God. Now, second, let’s consider **the competence of this God.** When God works on your behalf, it is effective. **Let’s put the key verse up again:**

**4**Since ancient times no one has heard,
    no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
    who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Here I’m focusing in on just two words: “who acts.” God acts. Or it could be translated “works.” God is a God who works. The idea is: when God decides to do something, it gets done.

As humans, incompetency is something we have to deal with all the time. I don’t like incompetent work. If I hire somebody to do something, I want it done well. I don’t want to have to call back again and again. And yet, incompetency plagues us. You wouldn’t want me to come over and help you with a home improvement project, because I’m incompetent. I’m going to get paint on your trim. The faucet is still going to leak when I’m done. The picture is going to get hung crooked. I’m incompetent. But not God.

Think about some of the reasons we see incompetency in our world. One is, there’s just no zeal. A worker might not care that much. You go to a fast-food restaurant and you order a sandwich, and then it comes and it looks nothing like the picture on the menu. It’s sloppy and the lettuce is brown and there’s only one tiny pickle. And then you look at the kid behind the counter and you realize why. That kid doesn’t care. For him, it’s just a paycheck, his parents said he had to have a job. But it’s not his name on the restaurant sign, he’s got nothing at stake.

God, on the other hand, cares. Again and again in the Bible He says: “For my name’s sake…for my name’s sake. My glory I won’t share with another.” (Isa. 48:11) God has a zeal for the company. He is zealous for the name of the company called God. He will not ever settle for doing anything but His best work.

But that’s not the only reason for incompetence. If I come and mess up your home improvement project, it might not be that I don’t care, it might just be that I don’t know. I don’t know how to do most of those projects. I lack the requisite knowledge.

But that never happens to God. His understanding no one can fathom (Isaiah 40:28). His wisdom is beyond measure. God always knows everything, so He can’t be incompetent because He has the know how to get things done.

Or, one more reason people are incompetent is because they don’t have enough strength. They don’t have ability. I can watch all the YouTube instructional videos there are, but that still doesn’t mean I’m going to be able to drive a nail straight. It’s just not something I am good at.

But God is infinitely able. His mighty right arm never grows weary or tired. **Isaiah 46:9-10** says this:

**9**Remember the former things, those of long ago;
    I am God, and there is no other;
    I am God, and there is none like me.
**10**I make known the end from the beginning,
    from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, ‘My purpose will stand,
    and I will do all that I please.’

God never fails to accomplish everything He sets out to do. His work is always totally competent, well done, well timed, and you can bank your life on it.

We have a unique God. That’s point number one. We have a competent God. That’s point number two.

***Those Who Wait for Him***Now, third, **the condition.** God works for those who wait for Him. That’s the last line in **our verse.** That’s our big idea:

no eye has seen any God besides you,
    who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

The Help Available sign is posted for those who wait for Him.

Here we are again, in the waiting room. This is the same thing we’ve seen the last two weeks: we are called to wait for God.

We’ve defined waiting as a tough, persistent, resolute longing. It’s the willingness to trust in God even when the situation is not what we would prefer. It’s the confidence that God has something better for us than our current circumstances. It’s the faith that the long-term benefits of obedience to God are better than the short-term benefits of doing our own thing.

The first week I gave you four things you can pray for while you wait. Last week we talked about the temptations to be avoided. Today, let me give you three steps for Biblical waiting.

First, **pause and pray**. Too often, when we find ourselves in a situation we don’t want to be in—when we first enter the waiting room—our first instinct is to panic. Things aren’t the way we want, we don’t know how things are going to work out--oh no! what do we do?—we panic.

And then we try to fix things ourselves. We talked about this last week, right? We get impatient and we start creating our own solutions. We get on the phone with Egypt, making bad alliances. Sarah starts setting her husband up with Hagar. We panic.

And what we should do is: pause and pray.

I mentioned earlier that the Exodus is the pivotal salvation event in the Old Testament. Let’s use that to help illustrate these steps for waiting. It’s right after the first Passover, right after the Israelites have marched out of Egypt. But then Pharaoh changes his mind and sends the army after them. They find themselves with the Red Sea on one side and an angry mob of chariots on the other. And what do the children of Israel do? They get mad at Moses and they get mad at God. They panic! **Exodus 14:12:**

**12**Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

This is not waiting. But far too often, this is our first reflex. We panic. We start to problem solve. When the first thing we should do is pause and pray. John Piper writes this:

One of the reasons we forfeit much divine engagement in our lives in remarkable ways is that we just rule it out from the start. We go straight after our own plans and our own designs how to fix the problem in our life and we don’t get on our faces and linger for just a few minutes…

The first [step] of waiting is to pause in prayer and consult your God. This is simple. A six-year-old can do this and a sixty-five-year-old can do this. It’s not complex, but it does require a God orientation to your life. (Ibid)

This is simple, but it’s not automatic. I know. I believe this. I preach this. I’ve been preaching this way for almost 22 years. And yet, far too often, problems come my way and I panic and I rush ahead and I forget the most simple step of just stopping, and talking to God.

Second, **be quiet and still.**

So what comes next? We start to worry and fret. We begin to stew in our problems and we build them up in or heads until they become so big in our minds that not even God Almighty Himself can do anything about them. Listen to what Moses says to the people, **Exodus 14:13-14:**

**13**Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. **14**The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.

No ear has heard, no eye has seen, a God like you, who works on behalf of those who wait for Him. Moses says: “Why are you panicking? Why are you fretting and worrying? Be quiet. Be still. Watch what the Lord will do for you. He’s going to act. He’s going to fight for you.”

You can think of situations in your life right now where you are waiting…Maybe it’s family related. Maybe it’s in the life of your children. You’d like to see some things change, you’ve tried everything you know to bring about the change, and it hasn’t happened.

And maybe God is saying to you: “Stand still. Lay it down. I will work for you. Trust me. I work for those who wait for me.” That’s the second step.

Then, third, **get going as you wait.**

This is wild. This is something I never saw before until it was pointed out at a meeting of pastors last week. The very next thing in the book of Exodus—the very next thing after Moses tells the people to be still—**is verse 15:**

**15**Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.”

Moses says be still. God says get moving! And I don’t think this is contradictory. God is going to fight for them. He’s going to throw back the sea. All the people need to do is walk forward in obedience.

So now, this is the third step in waiting. Get going even as you wait. God works on behalf of those who wait on Him. But that doesn’t always mean sitting around doing nothing. Sometimes that means moving forward in obedience, and continuing to trust God even as you do the things that need to be done.

It means continuing to wait on Him, and trust in Him, even as you pick up that phone and make the call that might be the first step towards reconciliation. It means continuing to lean into His strength even as you begin to take the night classes that are going to help you qualify for your dream job. It means trusting in Him, and keeping your eyes focused on Him, even as you get that second opinion and try that new treatment plan for dealing with your illness.

Waiting doesn’t always mean doing nothing. But it means even as you get moving you are trusting in Him.

***Review***Let’s go **back to the main verse** one last time. Let me just give a quick review:

**4**Since ancient times no one has heard,
    no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
    who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

This is our utterly unique God. This is His Help Available sign. This is the meaning of Christmas. Jesus didn’t come into the world to recruit workers for His cause; He came to serve us. He came to give His life for us. To do for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves.

And He’s good. He’s competent. He has the zeal for His name and the infinite knowledge and the almighty strength to accomplish all that He sets out to do.

So what do we do? We wait for him. Tough, persistent, resolute longing for the Lord. We commit to waiting. We resist our first instinct to panic and instead we pause and pray. We set aside our worry and our fretting and we become quiet and still. And then, we get going as we wait. Even as we lean into God we do the things in obedience that we know we need to do.

All the while knowing, God helps those who wait for Him.