Psalm 130:5-6 and other scriptures *The Waiting Room: We Can Hardly Stand the Wait*

***Dr. Eisenbarth***As many of you know, I am an enthusiastic but unskillful singer. I believe in the importance of singing joyfully to the Lord, I’m just not very good at it.

And this has always been the case. In Elementary School, I was a very willing participant in our school choir, but I was distractingly bad. This posed a particular problem for our elementary music teacher, Mr. LeRoy Bras. The educational standard at the time was that every elementary student needed to participate in music instruction. And that meant, of course, that every student needed to participate in the annual school concert. But Mr. Bras knew that if he allowed me to sing in the choir, the whole performance would be off, and people would seriously question his teaching ability.

So Mr. Bras devised this clever work-around: our theme that year was songs about careers, and it included a song called *Dr. Eisenbarth*. (I believe the lyrics went like this: “Oh, I am Dr. Eisenbarth/I cure your illness with my art/Tee willy wink boom boom”). Mr. Bras decided that in-between verses we would stage little skits where patients came to Dr. Eisnbarth with various maladies and the good Dr. responded with various Dad Jokes and one-liners. And, in order to avoid having me sing, Mr. Bras cast me as the Dr. So I got to deliver lines like this:

Patient: Doctor, I get heartburn every time I eat birthday cake.

Doctor: Next time, take off the candles.

And this one:

Doctor: I have some bad news and some very bad news.

Patient: Well, might as well give me the bad news first.

Doctor: The lab called with your test results. They said you have 24 hours to live.

Patient: 24 HOURS! That’s terrible!! WHAT could be WORSE? What’s the very bad news?

Doctor: I’ve been trying to reach you since yesterday.

That same concert, we also staged a skit that was set in the Doctor’s waiting room. It started with a receptionist sitting at a desk. Then the first patient walks in and says he’s there for his annual physical. The receptionist instructs him to take a seat.

Then a second patient walks in. She looks like she has a rash, as she’s constantly scratching her arms and legs. She sits next to the first guy, and before long he is scratching at his arms and legs in much the same way.

Then a third patient walks in. He has a cough. He sits down, and before too long the first guy is both scratching his arms and coughing loudly.

Then a fourth patient walks in. She is very obviously pregnant. Immediately, the first guy stands up and says: “That’s it, I’m out of here!”

***The Waiting Room***Nobody likes waiting rooms. I mean, who has ever had a good experience in a waiting room?

You usually find yourself in a room waiting for your car to get fixed, or waiting for the dentist, or waiting for the doctor, or waiting for a job interview. Usually, you are in a waiting room because something has gone wrong. Your tooth hurts or your brakes are bad or you need a job. Hopefully, the person on the other side of the door can do something about your problem. Hopefully there will be good news—your sickness is clearing up, your car repair is minor, you’ve got the job!—but in the meantime, you are stuck in this room with dated magazines and a TV tuned to a channel nobody is interested in and people around you sniffling and coughing—and you just have to live with the uncertainty while you wait.

Nobody likes waiting rooms. And yet, much of life is lived in waiting.

And I’m not just talking about the waiting we do in rooms specifically designed to hold us until an appointment. A lot of life is waiting for answers to prayers, waiting for the resolution of big issues and on-going concerns.

We ask God for clarity on which path to take in an important decision. We pray for the restoration of a difficult relationship. We have deep concerns for dear friends who have drifted away from faith. We have deep longings in our heart for big things: a spouse, a pregnancy, a career opportunity that matches our gifts and abilities, healing from a distressing and chronic disease. We bring things to God, and then we wait for answers.

We can probably all think of things that we have asked God for—good things which it seems like it would make sense for Him to give us—for which we have gone long past the time we thought would be appropriate for Him to answer. Many of us are probably still waiting, right now, for answers to serious requests.

We all struggle with questions like, “How long, Lord, will you ask me to wait? Why me? Why this? Why now?” Much of life feels like it is lived in a waiting room.

Advent is the season of waiting.

Of course, Advent is the countdown to Christmas, and it is so hard to wait for Christmas. Kids can’t wait for Christmas vacation to begin. They can’t wait for the presents to start appearing under the tree. And, of course, everybody gets excited for Christmas morning, when the gifts get opened and we see what goodies we got this year.

I called this sermon “We Can Hardly Stand the Wait.” I don’t know if any of you recognize that line, but it comes from one of the best Christmas songs ever. It’s *The Chipmunk Song*. You know, the one with Alvin and Simon and Theodore that talks about “a plane that loops the loop” and “me, I want a hula hoop.” The line goes:

“We can hardly stand the wait
please Christmas don’t be late.”

Waiting for Christmas is one of the hardest things we do every year.

This year, we are going to use the season of Advent to look at the Biblical virtue of waiting. We are calling the series “The Waiting Room.” Because, as I said, much of life is waiting. And God has purposes in our waiting. There are things He desires to teach us and ways He wants to shape us in our waiting

***QWH***The scripture I have chosen for our text today is Psalm 130:5-6. It introduces us to the idea of waiting in the Bible, and it paints a pretty good picture of what waiting looks like. **Here’s what it says:**

**1**Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;
**2**    Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
    to my cry for mercy.

**3**If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
    Lord, who could stand?
**4**But with you there is forgiveness,
    so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

**5**I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
    and in his word I put my hope.
**6**I wait for the Lord
    more than watchmen wait for the morning,
    more than watchmen wait for the morning.

**7**Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
    for with the Lord is unfailing love
    and with him is full redemption.
**8**He himself will redeem Israel
    from all their sins.

This Psalm is a prayer of confession. It begins with the Psalmist crying out from the depths. He is begging for mercy.

We don’t know the exact context. We don’t who wrote the Psalm or what events prompted it to be written, but it is pretty clear that the author is in a mess of his own making. He has made a choice, or a series of choices, that has left him drowning in guilt and despair.

And so, he turns to the LORD and begs for mercy. He has no merit of his own to argue, but he throws Himself upon the compassion and forgiveness of God.

And then He waits. Like so many of us, he prays to God and then has to wait for an answer. And here, in verses 5 and 6, is where we learn something about waiting.

The word translated as “wait” here is a really cool word. It comes from the Hebrew word **Q-W-H**. Pronounce “Qavah”. (Ancient Hebrew had no written vowels, most of its words come from a combination of 3 consonants). And QWH is a pretty cool word.

When I was in seminary, I took an Old Testament class where the professor asked us to do a word study on QWH. We had to look up every occurrence of this word—it appears approximately 33 times in the Hebrew Old Testament—and then write up a report of what it means. And what we found is that QWH describes **a tough, persistent, resolute longing**. That’s what waiting looks like in the Bible: a tough, persistent, resolute longing.

One of the first things we learned in our word study is that QWH was a word originally used to describe the way a rope is bound together by twisting. Sort of like a three stranded rope that gets stronger than the sum of its parts the tighter it is pulled together. Scholars believe that word picture was applied to the concept of waiting because of the tension that is experienced when we are waiting for something. The need to hold tightly, even when the future is uncertain.

A good example of this—and one of the most well-known scriptures that uses QWH—is **Isaiah 40:31:**

**31**but those who hope in the Lord
    will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
    they will run and not grow weary,
    they will walk and not be faint.

The word translated as “hope” in the NIV is our word QWH. The King James Version uses the word “wait.” And the picture is one where we are meant to imagine a giant eagle, and we are meant to picture ourselves riding that eagle like a horse. In fact, the King James Version, instead of saying “soar” says “they will mount up with wings like eagles.” If you can imagine yourself riding on the back of an eagle, can you imagine the way you would cling to it? Can you imagine how strong your grip would be?

That’s what this word is getting at. A tough, persistent grasp. Clinging, if you will, to the Lord. No matter what, it is a commitment to not let go. Like a braid of rope being stretched to its limit, it means getting stronger the more tension is applied.

Let me give you a few more instances of the way this word is used. **Job 7:2** says:

**2** Like a slave longing for the evening shadows,
    or a hired laborer waiting to be paid,

Both “longing” and “waiting” are the same word. QWH.  A slave is working real hard in the heat of the day, sun beating down on his back, sweat is making is eyes sting.  And he can see a tree over there.  And he just knows that there is a cool breeze under it.  And if he could just go sit over there, when the sun goes down--ohh how nice that would be.  Can you feel his longing?

How about the hired man waiting eagerly for his wages?  It's been two weeks, and he's out of money.  He knows that today at 4:30 is pay-day and he's already spending that money in his mind.  He can't hardly wait–he longs for it.  But he has to hang on a little longer until he gets it.  Can you feel his expectancy?

Or, change the situation, same word:  **Psalm 56:6**, David writes about his enemies:

**6**They conspire, they lurk,
    they watch my steps,
    hoping to take my life.

David imagines his enemies preparing for an ambush. He describes the anticipation they must feel. Those of you who are deer hunters, who spend time in a deer stand, maybe you know how this feels. Waiting, watching, trembling with anticipation of the moment your quarry comes around the corner. Do you get a sense of how intense this word is? Do you get a picture of how persistent and resolute it is?

So let’s go back to **Psalm 130**. Here is perhaps the most vivid use of this word, and the most descriptive picture of what Biblical waiting feels like:

**5**I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
    and in his word I put my hope.
**6**I wait for the Lord
    more than watchmen wait for the morning,
    more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Imagine being a night-watchman in Israel. Your job is to stand on the wall and watch over the city until daybreak. And you know that if you fall asleep, you’ll be reprimanded by your commanding officer at best, or the city may fall under attack at worst. Your job is to protect your city, to stay vigilant, to stay alert.

But it’s so hard. As anybody who has ever tried to chaperone an all-night event can tell you (talk to the people who did the traveling lock-in a few weekends ago!) it is so hard to stay awake in those early morning hours. As they say, it’s always darkest right before the dawn. Those are also the hardest hours to stay awake and alert.

So imagine it: you are standing there; you haven’t slept all night; everything is quiet; it’s as dark as it has ever been; your heartbeat is slowing down; it’s cool; you’re so relaxed; it’s so quiet…

You shake yourself awake. You do another lap around the walls. You gulp down some coffee (I don’t think they had coffee). You do everything you can to stay alert. And you are just silently begging for the sun to come up. You’re longing for the dawn to break, and the sun to rise; because then your shift will be done and the city will have been kept safe for one more night.

And you know the sun is going to rise. It always has. It’s never failed to come up before. But right now it just seems like it is taking forever.

So right now, you just throw yourself into the waiting. You stare at the Eastern horizon and you cheer the sun on. “C’mon, c’mon, c’mon. Is that the first ray of light? Is that the breaking of the dawn?”

You put your whole being into the waiting. I love that this verse repeats that line: “More than watchmen wait for the morning. More than watchmen wait for the morning.” I think the repetition is meant to emphasize the intensity of feeling. This is what it is like to wait. Tough, persistent, resolute longing. The kind of waiting that involves everything you’ve got.

***In the LORD***And that feeling, that yearning for the dawn to break, is something I think we can all relate to. We have all been in seasons of waiting—like I said, maybe you are in a season of waiting right now—and we need to just hold on, keep hoping, hang tough.

A lot of life gets lived in these moments of waiting for the morning. In the Waiting Room.

Now, I want you to notice what the Bible directs us to wait for. This is not necessarily a promise that our earthly circumstances will always get better. When the thing you are waiting for is physical healing; or the restoration of a relationship; or the salvation of a dear friend; there is no blanket promise that those things will happen. Rather, we are directed here to wait for the LORD. To put our tough, persistent, resolute longing in the LORD.

Look at **verses 7 and 8:**

**7**Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
    for with the Lord is unfailing love
    and with him is full redemption.
**8**He himself will redeem Israel
    from all their sins

That doesn’t mean our earthly circumstances will always get better. But it does mean the LORD will do what is best.

The focus of our waiting needs to be in the LORD. As Isaiah 40 says, it is those who put their hope (QWH) in the Lord who will renew their strength. These people are the hope-filled.  And they run without wearying and they walk without fainting.

And it is among them that I want to be.  God as my cool shade in the evening.  God as my wages after waiting and working so long.  God as the prey that I wait around the corner to nab.  God as the coming of the sun at the end of my watch.

I want to hope in the Lord.  Patiently, actively, expectantly, resolutely trusting in what He has promised.  Trusting in our incomparably awesome God and everything that He is.

***Advice for the Waiting***Let me wrap up this first sermon in the series by giving you some coaching for the waiting. I found an article online by a guy named Scott Hubbard. In it, he offers some prayers for the waiting. Here are 4 things we can pray for while we wait: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-prayers-for-those-who-wait>

**1. Strengthen me to wait patiently.**

One of the greatest barriers to waiting on the Lord is our own impatience. Our culture and our media (especially our social media) have conditioned us to desire ease, comfort and instant gratification. So when God tells us to wait far longer than we expected for marriage or for children or a job or some other dream, we have a tendency to become like the Israelites in the wilderness and begin to grumble against God.

In Colossians 1, Paul shares **what he prayed for the church:**

**9**…we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will… **10**so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord… **11**being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

We need God to strengthen us with *patience*. Patience is not the weakness of people who have no power to get what they want. Rather, patience is the power to press on through difficulties, discouragements, and detours with a heart full of faith and a mouth full of praise.

Patience enables us to look at all our frustrations and detours, and say to God, “I don’t know what you’re doing, Father. I don’t want to be in this place. I never thought I’d be in this place. But you are wise and good, and I trust that you are working something wonderful. Strengthen me to wait patiently.”

**2. Awaken me to today.**

Waiting can pressure us to live in two places at once. Our bodies are present in the here and now, but our hearts have long left this present moment, packed up their bags, and pitched their tent in the fantasy land of a future life. We continue to go through the necessary motions, but we expect today to bring very little worthwhile.

We must be careful that we are not so caught up in our desire for something to be different that we miss the blessings and opportunities that are right before us. **Psalm 118:24 says**:

**24**The Lord has done it this very day;
    let us rejoice today and be glad.

We need God to awaken us to today. Today, God’s mercies came up with the sunrise ([Lamentations 3:22–23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam%203.22%E2%80%9323)). Today, the heavens sing of his beauty ([Psalm 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2019.1)). Today, God rehearses the story of his love ([Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%205.8)). Today, we have a cross to pick up ([Luke 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%209.23)). Today, we have people to listen to, serve, and forgive ([Colossians 3:12–13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%203.12%E2%80%9313)). Today, we have good works to walk in ([Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%202.10)).

No matter how mundane, and no matter how far off from the world of our dreams, today is the day that the Lord has made. It is a gift, even if a different gift than we expected. It is possible, even as we wait, to rejoice and be glad in today.

**3. Make me want the future you have for me.**

One of the biggest lessons to be learned in waiting, and often one of the hardest lessons for us to swallow, is that the thing we are longing for and desiring so badly may not be the thing God has judged to be best in our lives.

But just because the future we dream of may not be the future God plans for us, that doesn’t mean our future will be less than. **1 Corinthians 2:9 says:**

**9**However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,
    what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
    the things God has prepared for those who love him—

We need God to help us want the future he has for us — the future He has written as the Ultimate Author of history. Seasons of waiting train us to relinquish our role as the author of our own story and take up our role as characters in His story.

The God who saved the world through a cross and an empty tomb knows how to take our failed stories and turn them into something beautiful. Our role is to trust him and glorify him, even when we can’t see the ending.

And finally, our prayer should be:

**4. Remind me of what I’m really waiting for.**

In this world, we always wait for something: a spouse, a job, a child, a prodigal, release from depression, financial freedom. But for Christians, the tremors of something greater rumble beneath every one of these good gifts. We are waiting for something better than this world can give.

We are waiting for a new world, where righteousness bursts through air and sky ([2 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Pet%203.13)). We are waiting for a new body, finally delivered from death and decay ([Romans 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.23)). We are waiting for a new power, when sin will lose its last hold on us ([Galatians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%205.5)).

But most of all, we are waiting for our King, Jesus Christ ([1 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%201.10)). **Isaiah 25:9** says:

**9**It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (ESV)

One sight of his face will banish sadness forever. One note from his voice will swallow every disappointment in this life. One moment in his presence will cast all of our pain into the depths of the sea.

We need God to remind us of what we’re really waiting for. Underneath all our waiting in this world is a hope that cannot disappoint. One day soon, our King will come. And no one who waits for him will be put to shame ([Psalm 25:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2025.3)).