



Sermon Title: Are We There Yet?

Dr. Scott Dudley

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Scripture: Exodus 13:17-18

¹⁷ When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."

¹⁸ So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

Transcript:

My name is Scott Dudley. I'm the lead pastor here. So excited that you are joining us. I want to welcome all of you to our services. So glad that you are here. Let's pray. Lord, as we turn to Your word, ask that You would please lead us through it and help us to understand it, and more importantly, live in light of it. We pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, I heard a new phrase recently called "vaccine FOMO." "FOMO" stands for "fear of missing out," so vaccine FOMO is when you see everyone else getting vaccinated and bragging about a new sense of freedom that they have, but you are unvaccinated and you feel left out and you start to wonder, "Well, how they'd get the vaccine and how come I can't get the vaccine?" and all of that. Okay, for the past couple of weeks, I've had vaccine FOMO because until Thursday, when every adult was eligible, I wasn't old enough to get the vaccine, I didn't have the right job to get the vaccine, other kinds of things. But meanwhile, there are all kinds of people around me, people way younger than me, finding ways to get the vaccine. My kids are vaccinated because they're lifeguards, which makes them first responders, so I had all this vaccine FOMO. But finally, yesterday, thanks to the help of a kind person on our staff, I was finally able to get dose number one, so I'm on my way.

Now, all of that to say sometimes things take longer than we want them to. I don't like things to take a long time, even my sermons, which is why I talk so fast, right? I got to get it over with. You guys got things to do, so let's get this sermon thing done. I know I'm not alone. We do not like delays. We do not like detours. We want to go from point A to point B as fast as we can. We want to arrive at the destination of blessing, but we don't want the journey.

Maybe it's a career goal or a school goal that you're waiting on and it just seems to be taking forever, or a relationship that you want to get better, or maybe you're waiting for a relationship, or to get married, or to have kids. Maybe it's a financial situation that you're waiting on to turn around. This whole year, the entire world has been waiting for this COVID pandemic to be over. We do not like the long way to anywhere. But often, not always, but often the long way is actually the better way, whereas the shortcut short circuits what God is trying to do in our life.

We're doing a sermon series on the phrase, "But God," which shows up all over the place in the Bible. In the text I'm going to read today, the Israelites have been slaves in Egypt, but God calls a man named Moses to deliver them from slavery. But Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, doesn't want to let them go, but then there are 10 plagues and Pharaoh changes his mind and lets them go. The text for today, Exodus 13, says this: "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter, for God said if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt, but God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea." Some versions translate that verse, "So God led them by the desert road," others translate it, "But God led them," which is what the original Hebrew literally says, "But God."

If I ever write a book, one I've thought about writing would be called *The Most Irritating Verses in the Bible*, this would be one of them. God took them the long way. Okay, nobody's choosing this as their life verse, right? At a baptism, no parent is going to have this be the life verse for their kid: "May everything in your life take a really long time," okay? To make it even more complex, it says that "God took them to the Red Sea," wherein a few verses we discover that Pharaoh changes his mind about letting the Israelites go and sends his army after them and traps them at the Red Sea. But then God parts the Red Sea, the Israelites go through, Pharaoh's army pursues, but then the sea closes over them and they are drowned. Then after all of that, the Israelites then wander for 40 years in the desert. It was only about a 200-mile journey. It should have taken them weeks, but instead, it took them 40 years, which by the way, argues for this being a real historical event because their route is too erratic to be made up. You wouldn't make it up.

We hate delays, but God, but God sometimes takes us the long way for our own good. Now, it needs to be said, sometimes it's not God that takes us the long way. Sometimes it is our own stupid behavior that delays things, or other people, or our circumstances, but whether God takes us on the long way or it's just our circumstances that do, either

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way, God uses the long way for His good purposes in our lives. I'm just going to throw out a bunch of observations in the next few minutes and so you just grab onto the one that you like the best.

First thing to remember when something is taking longer than we want is that your position, that the position you're in may be on purpose for a purpose. What if the place you're in and wanting to get away from, what if that isn't meant to be a place of escape, but a place of assignment? What if, for instance, you want a new job, but God keeps you in the one you've got for just a little while longer because there's a person there at your job that doesn't know Jesus and you're the one that needs to introduce that person to Jesus? See, if we think that our position may be on purpose for a purpose, it changes our attitude. We start to see things a little bit differently. It gives us more hope and energy and joy. We start to think things like, "My boss isn't a jerk, he's an assignment, and I'm going to partner with the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purposes in my boss's life and in mine," and then suddenly, that job feels a little more interesting and you can persevere.

Now, sometimes we really do need to make a change, quit the job, or change something up in our life, and so all of this requires discernment and constantly checking in with God: "Lord do I need to stay? Do I need to go? Is this the long way? Or is there a shorter way that you want me to take?" Right? We always constantly need to be checking in with God and it requires discernment, we need to get advice from other Christians, but sometimes we need to linger a little longer where we're at, because God has a purpose for us there, which brings me to the second thing to remember when things are taking longer than we want, and that is to savor the detour, because the thing about detours is they often have lots of interesting sights along the way that we never would have seen if we had taken the short route.

Now, that's not always the case. Some delays are bad and are not to be savored. The Israelites were slaves. That is not to be savored. That is evil. That is to be remedied. But in other cases in our life, sometimes we are so intent on getting somewhere or getting through some difficult season that we miss the good things that are happening along the way. I mean, even COVID, as we've said, there've been some blessings in this. Here at church, we have seen the creativity of this amazing staff just flourish in COVID. You saw some of that in the worship, right? Some of you have had more time for God or for family. We've learned to appreciate things we took for granted prior to the pandemic.

Next week, we return to in-person worship. I'm so excited about it, so we'll be live streaming next week down from the floor of the sanctuary down there and I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to seeing people again. But I also have to say, I'm going to miss my little spot here. I've gotten to know our awesome AV team a little better up here than I normally would. There's been blessings in this COVID time, too, but I am excited to get back to in person.

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Yes, the Israelites took 40 years to complete a two-week journey, which was actually their fault, their stupidity, their sin caused that, but even still, along the way, God was doing good stuff. They were seeing miracles like the parting of the Red Sea. They were forming a culture and a community. It was scary, but it was also exciting.

A while back, my daughter, who is now 21 years old, my daughter said to me, "Just think, Dad, when I was growing up, there was a time you picked me up for the last time and neither of us knew it was the last time." Oh, drive a spear through my heart, why don't you, right? I said, "Well, I could pick you up now," and she said, "No, that'd be weird." So much of the time my kids were growing up, I was focused on raising them and on doing my job here that I didn't savor the moments enough. I mean, I did some, but not enough. We never know when it's the last time for anything. Savor the good in the delay.

Third thing to remember when God has taken us on the long road is that He may be protecting you. The text said, "God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter, for God said if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." That is, there was a danger up ahead that the Israelites couldn't see, but God could see it. That job you didn't get, you may have dodged a bullet. Maybe that company was going to do layoffs in a few months, or maybe it's a toxic work environment. That relationship that didn't work out, maybe that wasn't the right one for you, the right relationship.

What the Israelites don't know is that Pharaoh is going to change his mind and chase them and if they had gone the short route, they'd have had the Egyptians behind them and the Philistines in front of them and they would have been crushed, and even if they did manage to defeat the Philistines on the short route, they'd still have the Egyptian army pursuing them all the way to the promised land. Their enemy would have haunted them for decades and it seems counterintuitive to take them to the Red Sea where they'll be trapped, but God is going to part the Red Sea so they can go through and then the Egyptian army will follow them and the sea will close and the Egyptian army will be drowned, which means the Egyptians cannot chase them. It is a more thorough deliverance than the short route would have given them.

By going the long way, God delivered them in a way that meant that their past can't keep haunting them, their bondage can't keep pursuing them. It has a more thorough deliverance than the short route would have given them. Their problem, the Red Sea, becomes the thing God uses to deliver them by drowning the Egyptian army. Often freedom doesn't come from getting around our problems, but by going straight through our problems. Sometimes the only way to there is through there. Often we want a relationship to get better, but we want it to get better easily and we want it to get better quickly, but we don't want to look at the ways that we've contributed to the problem, right, which is a longer, harder route to look at the ways we're part of the problem, but it leads to a greater deliverance.

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You can't get free of an addiction quickly and easily, whether it's a substance addiction or shopping or worry or whatever, and that is an addiction, right, by avoiding it or by downplaying it. You can only get there by dealing with it, looking at root causes. It is a longer road, but it leads to a more thorough freedom, which brings me to the fourth thing, another thing to remember when we are taking the long road, and that is not only may God be protecting you, God is also preparing you. He's not just protecting you. God is also preparing you. You're not ready for that place of blessing yet.

In life, we're like little kids, right? "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" But God is more interested in who we become than where we end up and how fast we get there. If you're on the long road, it may mean you are not ready for your promised land yet. God isn't just protecting you on the long road, He is preparing you. Maybe your character isn't ready for the promised land. Maybe there's a skill that you don't have.

The Israelites are not ready for their promised land. They have no army. They have no government. They have no legal system, all things that they develop in the desert, as they wander for 40 years, all things they are going to need in order to be a nation state, they didn't have it until they took the long road. On the long road, God is preparing you for whatever he has for you in the future. The long way give the Israelites the tools they needed to be a great nation, so if you feel stuck, remember: The process is paving the way for your purpose. The process of getting there is how you get ready to be there.

I think of folks in this church who have gone through difficult marriage problems and they've come out the other side and that usually takes a very long time, but in the process, they had to heal deep wounds from their path that was causing them to behave in certain ways, they had to become more courageous and more honest with their spouse. The long way matured them, gave them tools that they needed for their future, and some of that just cannot be hurried.

I think I've said this before, but it's like going to Ballard from the east side, so whenever I have to go to Ballard, and I try not to have to go to Ballard, but whenever I have to go to Ballard, I always try to think of the quickest way there, right so let's see, "If I do I-90 to I-5 to the 45th. No, no, no. How about 520 to Mercer and then over to Fremont? No, no, no, no." I always arrive at the same conclusion: There is no fast way to Ballard, which would be a great title for a book, No Fast Way to Ballard, or a band, a Norwegian band, as a matter of fact.

Some things, like fine wine, just take time, and so often the people who have the most interesting stories, the people we admire, the people we want to hear from, the people who have wisdom are people who have had to struggle and often struggled through a very long season. I mean, have you ever noticed how people who never suffer are insufferable? I mean, you kind of don't want to be around them. Especially if you're suffering, who do you want to talk to, someone who's never suffered or someone who has? See, God is much more interested in developing us into whole and holy people

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who know His power and His joy than he is getting us to some destination we think we need to be at because if you learn to have joy in all circumstances, you don't need to get to some job or some relationship or some bank account in order to be happy. You've learned to be content in all circumstances.

When we are on the long way, Jesus is preparing us for what lies ahead. One of the most important things we discover on the long way is we discover just how big God is, a bigger God. That's what the Israelites discovered. See, back then every ethnic group had their God and if your ethnic group was a mighty nation, then the assumption was your God must be a big, powerful God. But if you were slaves like the Israelites, the assumption was your God must be small and weak. This story proves that to be a lie because in this story, God is not just showing the Israelites, He's showing the Egyptians, too, that He's not just one of many gods, He is the one and only God, and He is mighty to save.

If the Israelites had taken the shortcut, they never would have seen how big God is, never would have seen that He was big enough to part the Red Sea. Had they gone the shortcut and faced the Philistines, and even if they won the battle, they might've attributed that to their military skill, but parting the Red Sea, man, that's something only God can do. No confusing that. It gives them more confidence than a battle that they thought they won on their own efforts. This becomes the foundational story of Israel. Centuries later, the Psalms are talking about the parting of the Red Sea and it's giving people courage and hope centuries later. Some long-forgotten battle with the Philistines that would have happened on the short route, that wouldn't do that. See, it's in the detours that we learn to lean on God and see how big God is, which gives us confidence in the future when we face times of trouble.

On the long way, remember: Your position has a purpose. Savor the journey. God is both protecting and preparing you and you will see just how big God is. The long road can be a blessing if, if, if you have the right guide to get you through. The text says, "But God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea." God was the one that was guiding them, not themselves. God was guiding. This is key because it is not always true that hardship molds our character and makes us better people. Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Thank you, Nietzsche. No. Sometimes what doesn't kill you makes you bitter and angry, right?

The difference is Jesus. A lot depends on the lens you view your detour through. If you know the long way has a purpose, you can savor the moments along the way, trusting that God is protecting and preparing you and that you will see how big God is. The difference-maker is Jesus and the way we access His courage and His hope and that right lens to view things through is to remember when He's helped us in the past. That gives us confidence in the present to worship, to read Scripture, to listen to other people's experiences.

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One of the reasons I tell stories in my sermons is every story is an experience of God's faithfulness that someone has encountered and I tell them to encourage all of us that God is real, that He is alive, that He is working and He is working for our good. Then one of the most important things you can do when you are on the long road, one of the most important prayers you can pray is, "Jesus, what are you doing in this journey? Show me so I can participate," and keep checking in with God to make sure that you are following Him where He's leading in His timing, whether it be fast or slow.

When I was growing up, there was a lot of tension in my parents' marriage. They were very different people and that caused a fair amount of conflict. My dad was very adventurous, wanted to travel the world. He was an extrovert with a capital E, always wanted to have lots of people around. My mom, on the other hand, was an introvert, didn't want to travel, didn't want a lot of people around, so they were often at odds, but God, but God took them on a long journey toward a better marriage. In fact, my siblings and I got to see, and it left an impression on all of us.

It started when my dad began to examine his life, his mistakes, some of the choices he'd made. He remembered that he used to follow Jesus when he was younger, but he hadn't followed him for years and years and hadn't gone in a good direction, and so he recommitted his life to Christ. My parents went back to church. They started to make friends they had in common and my dad discovered my mom was more willing to have friends in our home if they were people that she felt comfortable with, something he hadn't really noticed or recognized before. He also realized my mom was willing to do some travel with him as long as it was to places that she felt comfortable going with people that she knew really well.

Then my mom changed a little bit, too, because when my dad wanted to go somewhere my mom didn't want to go she said, "Have fun, dear," right, and he'd go with a friend, but she didn't resent him or try to stop him anymore from doing that. They started to serve together. My dad was a high school track coach and they'd have all of his track kids over for big spaghetti dinners just to love the kids and my dad would brag about my mom's hospitality and affirm her, which is something he hadn't really done a lot of in the past. Slowly, they began to realize that the thing they had spent years trying to change in the other person was actually the exact thing they needed to be whole people selves and the thing that had irritated them about the other person was actually one of the greatest gifts the other person brought them.

One time when I was an adult, my dad told me, "Your mom anchors me and I resented her for years for doing that, but I'm realizing that without her, I would dissipate my life in a thousand different places with a thousand different people, have no meaningful roots anywhere, make no meaningful impact on anyone's life, no meaningful community. I resented her for years, but she anchors me, and I need an anchor." Then a couple of months after that, unconnected, my mom said, "Your dad, he always wants to have all these people around, he wants to travel and see the world, and that has frustrated me for years, but I realize I've seen so much more, I've done so much more, I

know so many more people than I ever would have known without him. He expands my world and I need someone to do that for me."

Now, everything wasn't perfect after that. They still had arguments, but the heat was dialed way down and there was a sense of love and appreciation for the other person. All of that took years. It was a very long road because that's not the kind of transformation that can happen overnight. They needed the long way to be able to face some of their own brokenness and some of their own mistakes, to learn to appreciate the differences over time that they had resented in each other. But month by month, year by year, God used the conflict to make them their better selves, and all of us, including my siblings, got to see the power of God.

Where do you feel like you are on a long road? If Jesus is with you, and He is, it may take time, but you will grow and He will protect and He will prepare you and you will see the power of God and He will lead you home. Jesus, help us to follow You and whether the route be long or short, Lord help us to keep in lockstep with You, trusting You, knowing that even on the long road, You are protecting and preparing us, that we will see how big You are. Lord, help us to savor the journey because Lord, we're doing it with You. We pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Opening Question

- Icebreaker: If you could relive one vacation, which one would it be and why?
- Introduce yourself to your group. Share your name, area you live in, and why you decided to join an All In group this spring?

Scripture Reflection Questions - Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions

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- In light of the fact that in the next chapter God parts the Red Sea so the Israelites can escape the Egyptians, make a list of some reasons God may have taken the Israelites the long way rather than the shorter route?
- Where do you feel like you are taking the long way? How might this story affect what you think, feel and/or do in response?

Closing Question and Application

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?