

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon: I Can't Hardly Wait

Dr. Scott Dudley

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¹ I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;

I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this complaint.^[a]

² Then the Lord replied:

“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets

so that a herald^[b] may run with it.

³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time;

it speaks of the end and will not prove false.

Though it linger, wait for it; it^[c] will certainly come

and will not delay.

⁴ “See, the enemy is puffed up;

his desires are not upright—

but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness^[d]—

Transcript:

Well, hello, Bell Pres. Thank you for joining us. I am Scott Dudley. If you don't know me, the senior pastor here, and we are so excited to have you here joining us in worship today. I want to start with a question. How many of you love to wait? Raise your hand, right? Give you a big old, long line and you are happy. Traffic jams are your favorite. So I'm guessing nobody is raising their hand right now. And if you are with someone who did raise their hand, please seek medical help for them. Because they're sick people. I hate to wait. Even the smallest things just kind of get to me like when I'm at a stoplight, then it turns green, but I'm behind a accelerated challenge driver who doesn't go right away. And I have to be nice because it might be one of you. All right, even that kind of gets to me.

I do everything fast. I drive fast, eat fast walk, fast talk fast. So I've been told like 3,420 times and I work at it. I actually, honestly I work at it. I even watch the videos of myself preaching and I think, "Whoa, Dudley, you're talking too fast, slow down." But then the next week I just speed up again. So get over it, learn to listen faster. To me the world moves in molasses. We're preaching through the Old Testament book of the prophet Habakkuk who sees injustice, he sees violence all around him. And the very first sentence of the book, he says this, "How long or Lord shall I cry for help? And you will not listen. How long do I have to wait?" That is a question the whole world is asking right now, how long till COVID is over and we can go back to normal?

But we also ask it about all kinds of other stuff. How long til I find a spouse or friends, how long til this health problem goes away, students are asking how long til we can go back to school and I can see my friends? People of color have been asking how long until we stopped being treated unfairly on occasions. How long? Habakkuk's question is how long God until you fix the problems I see all around me? And then God's response is he says, "Habakkuk, well, actually you don't have to wait long. I'm about to act. Because see, the Babylonians are going to conquer you. And they're going to take you into exile for 70 years." And Habakkuk is like, "That is not helping. That is not a blessing. That is not you responding."

Now God goes on to say that the exile will strengthen Israel and that he will hold the Babylonians accountable for their sins. But in the meantime they have to wait. So then Habakkuk says this and pay attention to the underlines because I'm going to talk about them in my sermon. Habakkuk says this. "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts. I will look to see what he will say to me. Then the Lord replied, 'write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a Herald may run with it for the revelation, awaits an appointed time. It speaks of the end though. It linger, wait for it. It will certainly come. See the enemy is puffed up. His desires are not upright, but the righteous person will live by faithfulness.'" And this passage shows us the six ways that we can wait with hope, courage and joy even when the thing we're waiting for isn't here yet.

And that's why I said six sermon points. That's right. Not the Presbyterian three, six this time. So y'all are going to have to wait to the end of the day before the sermon is over. Actually not because then you would just turn me off. So some of these will go pretty quickly. Okay? First to wait with hope, courage and joy even when we don't have the thing we're waiting for means to wait humbly. So often we, we think to ourselves, oh man, we're freaking out because X, Y, and Z, isn't happening. And we think,

"Man, if, if it doesn't happen, then it's going to be a disaster." How do you know it will be a disaster? Can you predict the future? It may turn out great. You don't know. I mean, we humans. We're smart. We've done a lot of stuff. We can send probes past our solar system, but we've not yet ever figured out how to merge effectively on the freeway. We don't know everything. And part of waiting with hope, courage and joy is to say, I don't know everything. And this waiting period may be really important for some reason that I don't know. So I'm going to trust God with this. Wait humbly.

Second wait productively, because with Jesus waiting is never a waste of time. He's always doing something in, through, and around us. As we wait, Romans 5 says, "We know that suffering produces." That is it's productive of something "produces perseverance, perseverance, character and character, hope and hope does not disappoint us." Waiting is productive of something. So to wait with hope, courage, and joy means to cooperate with what God is trying to do in your life to transform you. Right? And as the passage in Romans says, that's one of the main things God does when we are waiting. He transforms our character. He makes us stronger. He makes us better people. That's one of the things he does in hard times. How many of you, when you were going through a hard time, how many of you think, "Oh great. This is a chance for me to be the person I've always wanted to be"? yeah. I don't think that either, but it's true. So cooperate with the Holy Spirit is trying to do as you wait and it will produce a transformed character in you, which prepares us for whatever God has in store for us in the future.

God's timing is always two things. It's always slower than I want it to be. And it's always on time. God plays the long game and sometimes God's not answering what we want answering our prayers the way we want, or he's not giving us what we want right away, because we're not ready for it yet. And in the end, you'll thank him for the delay. Thank you God that you didn't give me this sooner because I wasn't ready for it. I'd just have messed it up. Thank you, God that you didn't give me a spouse sooner than this. My character wasn't ready to be married yet. I would have just messed it up. Thank you, God that you didn't give me this great job sooner because I didn't know how to handle this much responsibility back then. I would have just messed it up. I wasn't ready.

God says to Habakkuk the vision will come in its appointed time. Appointed time, right? The right time. So see, there's a blessing God has for you out here, somewhere in your future, waiting for you where God has appointed it to be in the future, right? Somewhere out there. And the blessing is out there in September, 2020, or March 20, 21 or 2025 or whatever. And you're here in July and God is moving you toward that blessing he has in store for you through pandemics, school problems, health problems, relationship problems. God is using all of those to prepare you to be ready for the blessing he has appointed for you out there, somewhere in the future. Right? And here's the thing though. If you were to look at this blessing now, from here in July, you probably wouldn't think it's a blessing, but by the time you get there, God will have changed your character so much that you'll say this is an awesome blessing, because see, more important than what we wait for is who we become as we wait. More important than what we wait for is who we become as we wait. And the point in life is not to get somewhere or to get something, but to become someone, to become like Jesus, a diamond after all is just a lump of coal that has responded exceptionally well to pressure over a long period of time.

Wait humbly, productively. Third, wait actively. God says to Habakkuk, "Write down the revelation so that a herald may run with it." That is while Habakkuk waits, God has given him something to do. Write the message down and proclaim God's promises, right? That waiting was because he's got something to do because waiting with God is never passive. It's active. It's like a waiter in a restaurant. Have you ever wondered why they call them waiters? Because they're not waiting around. They're running around. And if they just waited by the side of your table, that'd be super creepy. Right? That's how we wait. We wait

like a waiter in a restaurant. We wait actively. It's what I call naming the animals. And some of you have heard me say this before.

What I mean by that is in Genesis. After God made Adam, God says "It's not good for the man to be alone. So I'll make him a partner." And then right after that, the very next verse, the very next verse, God tells Adam to name the animals. And it's weird, because it's a non-sequitur. It doesn't flow. It doesn't follow. Right. You got to picture the scene right? When God says to Adam, "I'm going to make you a partner." Adam was probably going like, "Right on. That's cool. Partner sounds good. I like that partner thing." And then the very next thing God says is name the animals. And Adam's like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. What happened to the partner? Right? Like how did the animals get involved in this? I mean, you're breaking up the narrative thread, god, I don't get it. What's this have to do with my partner?" Everything, everything, because naming the animals was a way for Adam to use his gifts and his skills and understand who he is and how he's different than the environment around him.

Naming the animals was a chance for him to grow in his relationship with God. All of which prepared him to be the right person for Eve when God made Eve at the appointed time. He waited actively. When's COVID going to be over? I don't know. When am I going to get that job? Where do I find that spouse? When do I get into that college? I don't know, name the animals. In the meantime, as you wait, name the animals. Do the things that God has given you to do. Pray, scripture, community, do school, do your job, be with your friends, be with your family. And as you're doing those things, God will mold you into the right person to receive that blessing that he has appointed for you out there in the appointed time.

Wait humbly, productively, actively. Fourth, wait persistently. Habakkuk says, "I stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts." That's a fancy Bible word for tower. And the reason cities have towers is so that the watchmen can go up in the towers and look out to see what's coming particularly to see if an enemy army is coming. So it's an image of being a watchman. And here's the thing. Watchmen don't stand in the tower for an hour or two and go, "Oh, I'm getting sick of this. And I don't see an army. So I'm going to bed." No watchmen don't leave their posts. They wait persistently. The vision that God gives Habakkuk is going to take 20 years to unfold. And it's tempting when we're waiting for a long time, it's often very tempting to just give up, just quit, leave our post. Right? But then you miss the blessing.

It's why I don't like leaving baseball games early, right? Even if my team is trailing, which they almost always are. Right? But there's been so many times where I've I've, I've left the baseball game only to get to my car, to hear this loud cheering in the stadium and turn on the radio and find out I missed a grand slam. Hate that feeling. If you walk away, if you give up, if you grow weary of waiting, you will miss the blessing. The problem is we live in a now culture, don't we? We want everything now. When I was in high school, I used to be a waiter and there was these three women that came into the restaurant every single day. And they'd always say the same thing. They'd always say "Young man, we want our coffee and we want it fresh. We want it hot. And we want it now." And I always wanted to say to them, "Well, go to the back room, stick your head into the coffee pot and you'll have it fresh. You'll have it hot. You'll have it now." I never said that. I just thought that, but that's kind of the culture we live in. I want it now. We don't teach people how to wait persistently.

Growing up my kids, we had to do lots of long drives, when my kids were growing up to the Bay area to see Christina's family, lots of long drives starting from the time they were babies. And we didn't have a video player so they couldn't watch the movies. Sometimes we'd listen to books on tape, but they hated that. And so to amuse themselves on these long drives, they would quote scripture to each other. That's right. My kids are holy, super holy. Because they're mine. Holier than your kids. In fact, they would even

quote Habakkuk. "How long, oh parents, until we get there?" And we would say, "14 hours. So find a way to amuse yourself, draw on your inner resources. This is a life skill. Best you learn it now." We were teaching them to wait persistently.

This week, I was in a meeting with some African-American pastors and they were talking about how they've been waiting their whole lives for people to believe them when they say that sometimes they still experienced being treated differently because of the color of their skin. Where it shows that sometimes, just by the way, sometimes things take a long time not because of God, but because of our sin. And that's not the kind of waiting I'm talking about. That's not the kind of weighting we should put up with. We need to deal with that instantly. Immediately. We need to get on that and act quickly. But in spite of their long wait, they have not given up on God and they have not given up on this country. That's waiting persistently. And I would add courageously.

Wait humbly, productively, actively, persistently. Fifth, wait expectantly. Psalm 130 uses the same images of a watchman that Habakkuk uses. Psalm 130 says this. "I wait for the Lord more than a watchman wait for the morning." Okay, how do watchmen wait for the morning? Are they like, "I wonder if morning's going to come." If you ask them is morning going to come, you know what they'd say? They'd say, "The sun'll come out tomorrow. Bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow ..." Everyone. You all know the song. That's how we wait. On our toes. Curious, excited, expecting that God is coming and going to do something just as surely as the morning is coming. It's like a dog following its owner on a walk. You ever notice how the dog is always looking up at the owner?

Like, "Where are we going? Where are we going? We're going to the park? After that where are we going?" Right. The dog is following their owner, watching their owner, expecting the owner to take him somewhere. That's how we wait. We wait for God expecting that God is going to take us somewhere because he always does. And often, I know often, we wait through some very difficult things and for a very long time and we wait for a not yet, that feels like a not ever, but even in those awful situations, when we're down to nothing, God is always up to something. And he's always doing something in, through, and around us.

So wait humbly, productively, actively, persistently expectantly, and finally wait Christ-centeredly. The phrase that we've been using in this sermon is waiting on the Lord, not waiting on the Lord's things, not waiting on what the Lord can give me. Not waiting on getting the answer I want, waiting on the Lord himself. Now it's okay to start out, going to God for the things that he can give you and for asking for those things, it's okay to start there, but you don't want to stay there. Because when you move past wanting God for the things he can give you, to wanting just God himself and his presence, then all those other things start to matter a little bit less. And you find more peace, hope, strength, courage, and joy. And I think especially in times of trouble, such as we're in right now, times of trouble are a great opportunity to turn your self-interested, exploitive relationship with God into real love. Times of trouble are a great chance to turn our self-interested, exploitive relationship with God into real love to seek his presence.

Like Anthony talked about last week, to pray and then listen for 30 minutes or more for God to speak and to hear what he has to say. And if 30 minutes seems like a long time, 15, 10, just start. Just start wanting God's presence. Not what he can give you wanting his presence. This week I was praying, which I often refer to as worrying in Jesus' presence. I was praying about some challenges here at work, challenging season for all of us. So I was praying through some of those challenges, AKA worrying in Jesus' presence. And all of a sudden, I just kind of got this thought that said, "Scott, I got it." And then I started

thinking, "All right, was that me? Or was that Jesus? Did I make that up or whatever?" And then I heard him say it again. Only this time sounded a little irritated. He said, "Scott, I got it. Got it. Okay. I got it." I don't know if he was really irritated with me or if he just made it sound that way. So I know it was him because that's not the kind of thing I'd make up, but I trusted that it was real and that he had those things I was worried about. And then those things seem smaller so that my courage got greater for a while. Which is why we have to keep going back to him over and over and over again. I didn't get the Lord's things, I got the Lord and that helped. And this is part of what it means in this chapter where it says the righteous shall live by faithfulness, right? It means to trust in God to have faith in God and to act on his promises.

If I say I have faith in the structural integrity of a bridge, but I refuse to cross it, I really don't have faith in that bridge. So to have faith in God needs to act on his promises and act on his commands as though they are true because they are. And then to look to Jesus who died to pay the penalty for our sins. And if we just put our faith in him, then we are forgiven and we are cleansed. We are saved by faith, not by our own good works. That's part of what it means when it says the righteous shall live by faithfulness. To live by faith means to look to what God has done for us in and trust his redemptive purposes in our lives. And instead of looking at our circumstances and having them affect us, we look to God and what he's done for us in Jesus. And having done all of that, will he not also meet us in times of trouble? A man I know was a vice president in a large tech company, made a ton of money, but hated his job. 80 hour weeks. Plus he was constantly having to do unethical things like lie about the company's earnings, which he hated. And when he complained to his boss about it, the boss would always just say, "Well, everyone's doing it. So just do it." And when he'd come and then he'd come home and to a family that didn't know him, and have a few drinks and numb out the pain. And he was just exhausted all the time. Finally, he started praying, "God, you take over, I can't do this. You take control. Show me what to do." Well, the first thing he knew that he needed to do was stop the unethical behavior. So he stopped doing that, which really irritated his boss.

And from then on boss had it out for him, which made his job even worse. For the next three years he looked for a job. Three years, but it never worked out. Couldn't find anything. And he was praying through that whole three years, some real honest prayers, like, "God, where are you? I don't see you in this. I'm trying to do things your way. And it just keeps getting worse and worse and worse. Where are you?" And then one day he says he was just, he was walking to his office and in his words, he was tackled by the Holy Spirit. God, just the presence of God just showed up. And he said, "Lord, is that you? Are you back?" And he heard God say, "I never left. You just can't see what I'm doing right now." And then he felt God telling him to quit his job. Even though he didn't have another one, it felt God telling him to quit his job. And he said, "Lord, that doesn't make any sense at all. To quit my job when I don't have another one. So I need confirmation. If that's you, could you please confirm it?" So a few days later, his boss walked into my friend's office and said that their Texas plant had screwed up an order. And so he said to my friend you're fired and my friend said, "Well, I don't oversee that Texas plant. That's not my plant." The boss said, "You're fired anyway." So that sort of answered my friend's prayer. God is that you wanting me to quit my job? Yeah, it was God. It took him almost another year to find another job. But in that year, as he was waiting, he used that year to reconnect with his family, to get rid of the alcohol finally and forever. He started building homes for Habitat for Humanity, to do some serving and some ministry. And finances were tight, but they kept managing to make it work, cobble stuff together.

And in that year he had a sense of courage, hope, and joy because he felt the presence of God. And then eventually he did get another job. But the only job he could get was to was managing, running a used car dealership that was an hour and a half commute each way. So three hour commute every day

to manage this used car dealership. And when he told me that part, I just winced. It's like, "Oh, that's a long commute." He said, "Uh-uh (negative). It's the best part. I got the Bible on my playlist. I listen to it when I drive, I pray. Jesus has never been more real to me. I'm getting a home at 6:30 every night, which is way better than the old job." And even though some people would view the new job, selling cars as less prestigious than the old job. And it certainly paid less, he liked it better.

Liked being able to run a company with Christian values, liked the people he worked with. He could see, he realized God's redemptive purposes in his job. God's redemptive purpose was that he was helping people fix their transportation problems so that they could live their lives and to do that ethically and fairly and that was noble work. He spent a total of four years, four years waiting for a resolution. And the one he got used car salesman with a three hour commute, would not have looked like a blessing four years earlier, but God, but he waited. He waited humbly and knowing that God knows best productively letting God shape and refine his character, actively naming the animals, doing the things God has given him to do, go and do his job. Building homes for Habitat for Humanity, persistently expecting that God was going to do something good. And in the process found not what Jesus could give him, but found Jesus himself, which was more than enough with plenty leftover. And the thing that would not have looked like a blessing for years prior ended up being something that he called one of the greatest blessings of his life.

So what are you waiting for? And how can you wait with courage, hope and joy, trusting that God knows what he is doing with you and with his whole world. And that more important than what we wait for is who we become as we wait. God never moves without purpose or plan. And when we are tried and purified, we will come forth as gold. So Jesus, in all the places we are asking, how long? The relationships, the pandemic, the violence in our world, in all the places, Jesus that we are asking, how long? Meet us there. Help us to wait with courage, hope, and joy, trusting that you know, where you're taking us expecting that you are working in us and taking us to our future that you have in store for us. Lord, help us to wait in your presence. Not for the things you can give us, but you, because your presence makes everything small because you are so big. Lord, we give our waiting to you and ask that you help us wait with your courage, hope, and joy. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please read Habakkuk 2:1-4

1. Habakkuk says he will station himself on the ramparts (tower) to see what God will say. What does that metaphor of standing on the ramparts imply about how we relate to God in times of trouble?

2. How do you feel about God responding to our prayers at the "appointed time" (verse 3)? What

does that mean? Is that comforting or frustrating or both to you?

3. What does Habakkuk 2:1-4 tell you about God? What does it tell you about you? What does it tell you about waiting on God?