

Waiting In Exile

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Havelock. How are you doing? To say that I'm excited this morning would be a slight understatement. If I were a surfer dude, I would say I am so stoked to be here.

But I tried surfing years ago, and finally I said I need a 23-foot boat with a 150 engine on the back. That's the only way I'll ever do on the water. So now my daughter, Rachel, is here this morning. She's a surferette.

And so now I can live vicariously through her and just say, I am so stoked to be here. When Jesse asked me to come, I just was thrilled because it's been a while since I've had a chance to preach here.

And it does my heart good to see people that I know, to speak into them. And so this morning I would just love to speak into you a little bit about what it means to wait in exile.

We're continuing our series in the advent of waiting in exile. Last week, Alan spoke to you about the historical significance of Israel's deportation and exile in Babylon.

[1 : 04] You know, just as a side note, Nebuchadnezzar is one of the most intriguing figures in Scripture. If you go into the book of Daniel and you just read about how God spoke to him and how God, you know, just directed him, he is a very interesting figure in Scripture, even though Babylon was used to judge the children of Israel mightily.

I mean, he took them over and he took them into bondage. And so, you know, Alan looked at that last week and he looked at the historical significance of it all and how it came to pass.

Isaiah prophesied about it. Jeremiah prophesied about it. And so then all of a sudden God does exactly what he says and he takes them into bondage. This morning we're going to look at what it means to be in bondage, in exile, and waiting for God to move.

And so you're, you know, God has moved in one way. He has put you in bondage. Now you're waiting for him to move again. And so that's what we're going to talk about this morning. In World Magazine this month, Jamie Dean starts off an article about Advent saying this.

Advent season approaches with a world already in waiting. Waiting for a vaccine. That's very true. Waiting for life after COVID. Amen to that.

[2 : 18] Everybody's tired of COVID. Waiting for a new presidential election or a new term to happen. Everybody wants that. Waiting to see how it all unfolds. So we're all waiting.

But then he says this. In the Scripture, God tells us to wait on him. He repeats it often probably because he knows it's especially difficult. Waiting is inevitable.

But how we wait with calm and composure matters to God. So how we wait for God really matters. I think it's probably safe to say for all of us in the room that none of us wait very well.

I am the most impatient man you will ever meet. I'm always on schedule. I have a schedule that I live by. I'm on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

I have to be on time. And so I'm very impatient. And it creeps into my life as a believer because I expect God to work on my timetable. And so sometimes, you know, that's one of the reasons why we struggle waiting for God to answer or to move is because we want him to work on our schedule.

[3 : 27] You know, God, I got these things I want you to do. Do them now, please. I've been waiting long enough. Maybe we just think that God owes us something. You know, I've been going to church, Lord. And I've been obedient.

And I've been tithing my money. And I've been reading my Bible in the morning. I've been doing devotions. I've been doing those things. Now, God, it's time for you to move because you owe me. You owe me.

It's time to move. I think probably the most perplexing one is just the silence of God. You know, the silence of God, when he is silent, when he does not move, it unnerves us.

It unnerves me as a mature believer. I think it unnerves all believers in Christ, when God almost is like you hear crickets and you hear nothing from him. And so, you know, waiting on God can really affect your emotions because you're, you know, you get discouraged.

You get depressed. You get angry. I mean, there's a lot of things that happen to us emotionally when we're waiting on the Lord. Psalms 27:14 says this about how it affects your emotions.

[4 : 33] It says this, wait for the Lord. Okay, so you're waiting on the Lord. And then it says, be strong. So be strong. Man up. Woman up.

I'm not sure woman up is a term, but we'll go with it anyway. You know, man up, woman up. Be courageous. Wait for the Lord. Have courage. You know, wait for the Lord.

And so, you know, there's a psalm that says, you know, you need to be strong in this. You know, and that might come easy to some of us. You know, some men, some women have great faith.

They have great courage in God. And so it's easy for them to just sit and just say, I am going to go through this without blinking my eyes because I have faith that God is going to move.

And so that can happen. And that's a gift from God because faith is a gift. And he gives extraordinary faith to some that he may not give to others. In Psalm 37, 7, it says this, be still before the Lord.

[5 : 32] Now, now he's getting nasty. Be still, all right? Be still and wait patiently for him. And so God says, all right, there's times that you just need to sit very still and you just need to be patient and wait on God.

And none of these are easy. For some people who have maybe not as strong a faith, I think sometimes waiting on God quietly is a little bit easier for them because they're not, you know, energized to just step out and be tough.

They're kind of more energized to just sit quietly and say, Lord, I don't know what you're doing, but I'm waiting for you. But either way you fall, if you fall with strength or you fall with a quiet spirit, questions will often arise in our hearts.

Why is God taking so long to work? You know, why is he not moving? That's a question that will come very quickly. Or why is God not listening to me?

Does he not hear what I am saying to him? Does he not hear my prayers? Does he not see my soul? Does he not understand that I am discouraged? Why is he tarrying?

[6 : 40] Is he not hearing what I'm saying? And so the real issue that we have is that sometimes we do not fully understand what it is that God is doing in our lives at the time because his ways are often sometimes very mysterious to us.

We believe in him. We trust in him. But he still is a very mysterious God. And so this morning we just want to see what God does when he puts us maybe in a situation where he says, wait for me. So the first thing I would say to you this morning is this. God is okay with you and he's okay with me experiencing helplessness. Now I want to talk as a parent this morning because that's what I am. I have four children and I have a little bit of experience in it. One of the things as a parent that we most normally do is we try to protect our kids from ever having a sense where they are helpless or they are experiencing any kind of helplessness in their lives.

So we try to protect them from everything foreign and domestic. I mean we put up a shield and we say we're going to protect our kids from doing anything or having anything happen to them.

[7 : 46] And I mean we go root hog or die in this. We say we're going to stop them from ever having any bad issues. When I was around 14 years old I wanted to take my father's Harker's Island skiff out into Boat Sound by myself.

It was a sweet boat. It was like 23 foot long. It had a beautiful bow on it. This big flared bow. It had a Chevrolet engine inside. It was keel cooled so you could, I mean it just was a sweet ride.

And you could take it and go anywhere. And so this brought up a great discussion in my house. My mother and father were discussing. I would say they were arguing but I wanted to protect them because they were, I mean it was heavy duty discussion.

What my mother saw was he's going to kill somebody. He's going to run over somebody in the Sound and kill them stone dead and we're going to be responsible for that. And that's all she could see.

That's all my mother could see. My father saw experience. And he says, you know, nah, I think he can go. But finally, I kid you not, my dad just looked at my mom and he says, Norma, the boy's going.

[8 : 50] He's going. And so they took me down, dropped me off and I ran aground all over Boat Sound. I mean I was, I mean I was, I was terrible. But hey, I learned a lot.

And see God is a lot like that. God knows that we learn not from having everything taken care of in our lives. We learn best when we go through times of great stress.

And when we go through times of great hurt. I mean he knows this. And so he's, he's very apt to just, you know, let it happen sometimes. I mean things like, you know, pains will come and testing will come.

But in Jeremiah 27, 14, the false prophets in Israel were saying to the Jews, look, your time under Nebuchadnezzar is coming to an end.

It is over. God is going to break his yoke and he's going to take him off of you. You're going back to the land. This is what God says to them. Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, you shall not serve the king in Babylon.

[9 : 48] And who are saying you shall not serve the king of Babylon for it is a lie and they are prophesying to you. I have not sent them, declares the Lord, but they are prophesying falsely in my name with the result that I will drive you out.

And so God says, no, I'm driving you out and I'm driving your prophets out who keep saying that this is not going to happen. And so God does not speak comfort to them. He speaks with authority and he speaks with judgment.

He says, no, do not pay attention to what they're saying to you. I am going to drive them out. Now, all of us, all of us in this room, all of us everywhere, want our pain and our misery to be over very quickly.

We want it to end quickly, no matter what it is. And when God doesn't respond quickly, we begin to question, you know, why he does this and how long it's going to take.

You know, how long will it take for me to go through this time of great testing or this time of exile? And in Psalm 2 or Psalm 6 verse 2 through 6, David says this.

[10 : 56] I want you to listen to how David couches all this. He says, be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing. Hear me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.

My soul is also greatly troubled. But you, O Lord, what does he ask? How long? How long is this going to happen?

Turn, O Lord, deliver my life. Save me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of you. In Sheol, who will give you praise?

In other words, God, I can't praise you if I'm dead. I can't praise you in Sheol. I am weary with my moaning. Every night I flood my bed with tears. I drench my couch with my weeping.

You see, David understood what it meant to wait on God, and his question was, God, how long are you going to tarry in this? How long is this going to be? And this cry resonates within us, you know, because we don't understand why God would delay.

[12 : 04] We just don't, in our finite minds, we don't understand what would make God delay coming to us in times of great exile or times of great pain. Why does God not come to us?

But, you know, God will often delay because he, in order to test our faith. I mean, God will often delay because he wants to see if our faith in him is real.

In fact, Jeremiah 12, 3 says this, But you, O Lord, you know me, you see me, and test my heart towards you.

And so sometimes we can look at God and we can say, God, I don't understand what you're doing, but his silence may be a testing of our faith in him. Is it really steadfast?

In fact, Jesus said that when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth? And so when the Son of Man comes in his glory, will he find people who are waiting for him in faith?

[13 : 03] And so God wants to test us. So when we go through testing and we go through trials and we go through exile, so to speak, you need to trust in the providence and the wisdom of God.

You have to rest there because he is a mysterious God. His ways are not our ways. And his thoughts are not our thoughts. They're not.

And so we have to trust in his wisdom and his divine providence and how he works in our lives.

Secondly, I think, and this one's going to hurt a little bit, in our waiting, sometimes things get worse before they get better.

Now, I've been singing a song in my head now for about three weeks. Joan Jett. I mean, if you don't, who knows who Joan Jett is? Raise your hand.

All right, I've got a few people in here. Okay, so I'm not speaking to myself. You know, Joan Jett has the song, The Light of Day, and at the end of the last verse in the song, she's talking about her brother. And her brother had wrote her a letter and said, man, down in the Gulf is the place to be. [14:11] And so she says this in her song, I hope that he was not lying when he wrote me that letter. Things are getting bad and they surely got to get better. No, it's not.

There is no promise that God is going to make everything just disappear. He's not going to do that. And so in Jeremiah 29, 8 through 10, he says this.

Now, listen, the children of Israel are looking for redemption. They're looking for Nebuchadnezzar's yoke to be broken. But listen to what he says to them. For thus says the Lord of hosts, God is speaking, the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie they are prophesying to you in my name.

I did not send them. Declares the Lord. For thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise to bring you back to this place.

And so God does not speak comfort to them. God does not even work. What he says to them is you're going to be here 70 years. Now, that is basically almost two full generations.

[15:27] And in that day, a man probably lived to be 45, 50, maybe 60 at the most. Their lifespan was very short. So that is a two full, you know, families, really.

Family stay in a place where they were under the yoke of a leader. And he says it's going to be 70 years. Now, the primary reason that God does this is because the children of Israel had sinned against him and not letting the land rest.

When they went into the land and took the land, God said this to them. He said, look, when you plant, you can plant six years. On the seventh year, you are not allowed to plant.

And you need to trust in God that I'm going to provide enough for you for a year. And so they were given this directive by God that you are going to do it six years. You may harvest. At the end of that six year, you don't plant.

You don't harvest anything. It's a year of Sabbath for the land. And so the reason why it's 70 years in Babylon is because they had never given land a rest.

[16:35] They had never listened to him. And he says, for all the years that you did not give the land a rest, you're going to stay in Babylon. And so God had said, this is what you're going to do.

And they had not done it. And so that is the primary reason, I think, that they stayed so long under the king's exile. I mean, they were there because God said, you're going to stay there until the land gets all this rest.

But there's another reason, I think, primarily. And it's because while in exile, they have an opportunity to stay on mission. They have an opportunity, just like we have an opportunity, to stay on mission.

The church's primary mission is to make much of Jesus and to preach the gospel. That is what the church's mission is. It is to make much of who Jesus is, and it is to preach the gospel.

And that is how the church is built, and that is how the church flourishes, is when the church is on mission and it stays on mission. And it says, we're going to preach the gospel. We are going to make much of who Jesus is.

[17:40] And this is pretty basic level stuff, right? I mean, this is not anything that you haven't heard from him or from Bear or from anybody else here. You're hearing that, hey, we need to be on mission. But there's something, I think, that we need to understand.

In Jeremiah 29, 4 through 7, it says this, Thus says the Lord of hosts. I mean, God is speaking a lot to the Jews, and he's speaking a lot even to us this morning. He says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Build houses, live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce, take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters.

Multiply there and do not decrease, but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for its welfare, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Is that not interesting? In its welfare you're going to find yours. Now let me ask you something. Do you understand that's your position here as One Harbor Havoc is you are to be on mission and you're to stay on mission.

[18 : 58] You are to live here as long as God keeps you here. Some of you transfer in and transfer out. I get that. And so as long as God has you here, you are on mission and you're to have families and you're to have kids and you're to give your kids in marriage and you're to live for Jesus and you're to pray for this city because in its welfare as God blesses Havoc, He blesses the church.

And so I would encourage you with that this morning. God wants you to be on mission. Now I do have to confess. This is a time of great confession this morning. I took Donnie Griggs hunting a couple weeks ago up in Hertford County.

I'm a member of a club up there. And so we left my house early. I left. I picked him up at 3 so we were underway. And we were coming through Havoc at about 3.15 in the morning.

I didn't see a car anywhere in sight. Not even the cops were awake. I think, I mean, nobody was awake but Donnie Griggs and myself. And so we're driving through Havoc and I get caught by a stoplight right back over here at 3 o'clock in the morning and there's nobody out.

And so we sit there and we sit there. And I'm just looking at that red light. And so finally I just said, look, I just said, doesn't that just chap you? And so Donnie didn't say a word. And so anyway, we go hunting.

[20 : 17] We have a good time. We're coming home late in the afternoon. And from Tucker Creek, which is right there, to Smithfields, which is way down there, I got caught by every stoplight in Havoc.

I mean, every stoplight in Havoc I got caught by. I might have missed one. And it might have been the one I got stuck at early in the morning. And so when I get to the light at Smithfields, I said, they cannot bypass this place quick enough for me.

And Donnie goes, oh, snap. You've got to repent. You've got to repent. You're preaching in Havoc. And you've got to love the city, baby. You've got to love the city. And I went, Donnie, I didn't say he loved the city.

I said, I hate to stop icing this place. So anyway, he tore me up all the way until I dropped him off at his house. He wore me out. So I mean, I know what it means. I mean, it's hard sometimes to pray for the city that you're in.

But, you know, your welfare as believers is tied to the welfare of your city. And this is something that I think my wife and I have learned late in life. Because we had never really considered that as young parents.

[21 : 21] We never had considered that we should be loving Moorhead City and be worried about where it is. It is that it's something that is new to us. And so God has been showing that to us.

And finally, I think I will say this. And I'm going to run out of time. I would say take comfort in your trials. Take comfort in your exile.

Because God has a plan. You know, God does have a plan. You know, even though there are times that we think that he doesn't know what he's doing, God still does have a plan.

And we think that sometimes. We think that, God, you just don't understand where I'm at. God, you just don't understand what's going on. God, you just don't understand what hurts I have.

But he does. He does have a plan for you. In Jeremiah 29, 11, it says this. For I know the plans. See, God says, I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord.

[22 : 15] Plans for your welfare and not for evil. To give you a future and a hope. Now, these verses have been taken completely out of context by some. What they say is that God would never put you through any trouble.

That you're going to be wealthy, healthy, and wise forever and ever. Amen. They have been taken completely out of context. And so you cannot rest in the fact that what they're saying is that God is always going to bless you and you're never going to go through pain.

Because scripture does not say that. In fact, Jesus says, they hated me. They're going to hate you. So there is the promise to the church is they hate me.

So, you know, think about this, guys. They're going to hate you too. But think about this. You know, in many ways, we just have to rest in his plans.

We have to sit there and say, Lord God, I don't know what you're doing. I don't know what you're trying to do in my life. I don't know why you're delaying. But I know that you will do what is right.

[23 : 15] See, God will do what is just and he will do what is right even when we don't understand it. Even when we think he's completely off his rocker. I mean, and that is a real thought process we go through.

Sometimes we just think he is off of his rocker. But God's plans are good and they are just. Even, even if his plans include judgment.

Even if it means that you might be put in a foreign land under a foreign king. Or even worse, death. I was reminded this week of the verses in Revelation where it's a picture of the throne of God.

And under the throne of God are the martyrs who have died for the faith. And the martyrs are crying out to God. Oh God, righteous and true. How long before you avenge our blood?

And God says, you just wait a little bit longer. And when the number, the number of martyrs has been met. So there's more to come. There were more martyrs who were going to suffer for Christ.

[24 : 15] He said, when that number is met, then I'm going to move. And so we have to trust that God's working in us. Even if that is happening to us. Even if we are in exile and we are struggling to understand any of it.

We have to trust that his plan is good. In fact, Paul says this in Romans chapter 11, 34 through 36. For who knows the mind of God? Or who has become his counselor?

Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen. And so as the band comes up, this land is playing. Just got a few minutes.

If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus, the Advent is a time that points to one individual in history.

[25 : 17] It is pointing to Jesus. It is pointing to the need for salvation to come because of the darkness of sin. And this world is broken. And so Advent is saying we need a Savior.

And it points exactly to Jesus. Our culture would tell you to put your confidence in economics. It's telling you right now to put your confidence in government. It is telling you right now to put your confidence in what you have or what you can buy or what you can do.

It has made this Advent and even Christmas a purely economical thing. That's all it's about.

Economics. That's all it's about. God the Father sent his Son as a redemptive act of grace.

He sent him to redeem. And if you don't know who Jesus is, I would love a chance to talk to you about the redemption that you can have in him. Because he is the only one who can redeem.

He is the only one who can save. And I would love a chance to talk to you. If you are here and you're following Jesus, waiting on God can be very hard. It's hard for me.

[26 : 20] I'm sure it's probably hard for you. We are time-bound beings. And I think that's the biggest issue we have. God is eternal. And we are finite. And that is where the rub is.

Because we do not understand the mind of God. But wait on him patiently. Remember, you can wait with him in strength. And you can wait quietly for him. But just wait in him and rest in him.

And finally, know that your waiting is not in vain. We do have a future hope, right? Our future hope is not this world. Our future hope is in the presence of the Most High God.

In his presence forever and ever. And seeing him as he is face to face. And so what we go through here, the exile that we go through here, pales in comparison to what we have for us in eternity.

And so just wait patiently for him. And know that you're not waiting in vain. There is an end coming. You know, I think probably I said, I was running the other day.

[27 : 22] And I got to hush. I was running the other day four miles. And I was, and all of a sudden I said, Lord God, you could come right now. And it would be it. That's it. You could return right now.

And so we should be waiting and looking for that return in patience. All right. Let me pray for us. And then we'll have communion. All right. Lord God, you are a gracious God. You are a mighty God.

And Lord God, we thank you that scripture tells us that we are to wait patiently for you. And scripture tells us that we need to be sometimes silent before you because we are so wound up and bound up, Father, in the exile that we're in even right now as a country, as a church, as a nation, Father God.

But help us to rest in you. Father God, I thank you for redemption. I thank you for Jesus who redeems. I thank you for the cross. I thank you for the birth of Christ who you took on flesh.

You became a man and you died for us, Father God. And so, Lord God, just help us this morning to love you, to wait patiently for you. And we'll give you all the praise and glory for it.

[28 : 24] Amen and amen.