

Battling the Unbelief of Impatience

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of battling impatience with the word of God, specifically by preaching to ourselves with the Bible, in order to trust in God's timing and guidance.

Duration: 28:18

Scripture: Psalm 130:5, Isaiah 30:18, Matthew 6:33, 2 Timothy 2:24

Topics: "Faith And Patience", "Trust In God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of faith and patience in the face of challenges and opposition. He uses the example of Charles Simeon, a patient man who served as a pastor for 54 years. The speaker emphasizes the power of the Word of God in fighting against impatience and unbelief. He encourages listeners to preach to themselves using Bible texts to strengthen their faith and trust in God's promises.

Transcript

Our scripture text this morning is Isaiah 30 verses 1 through 5. Woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, who carry out a plan but not mine, and who make a league but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin. Who set out to go down to Egypt without asking for my counsel, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.

For though his officials are at Ruan, and his envoys reach Hanes, everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that bring neither help nor profit but shame and disgrace. Impatience is a form of unbelief. It's what begins to rise in your heart when you begin to doubt the wisdom of God's timing or the goodness of his guidance.

It springs up when the road to success gets muddy or gets boulders on it or a big tree falls across it and blocks it and cuts you off from where you thought you should be or when you thought you should be there. And the battle with impatience can be as small as a little skirmish in a slow checkout lane at the store, or it can be as big and massive a combat as when you have a handicap or a disease or a circumstance that cuts off half your dreams. The opposite of impatience is not a glib, superficial denial of frustration.

The opposite of impatience is a deepening, sweetening willingness to stand in the place that God has appointed or to move at the pace that God has appointed. Maybe that'll help you remember. The opposite

of impatience is the willingness to stand in his place and go at his pace.

Now, when you plan your day out or plan your life out and it gets cut off in the middle or slowed or bogged down, the temptation of impatience moves in two directions. Depends partly on your personality, which way you go, partly on circumstances. Let me describe the two directions that that impatience can push you.

One is to give up, to throw in the towel. So if if this situation is going to be this hard, if I'm going to hit this many obstacles and have this much trouble, then you can stuff it. I won't keep teaching this class.

I won't rear this kid. I won't stay in this marriage. I won't keep this job.

I won't live this life. You just give up. That's one way.

The other way is almost exactly the opposite, but it's the same thing. It's the same impatience, namely rash counter moves, impetuosity, blundering ahead without consulting God. You run into a traffic jam, you got two choices.

You can say, I'll never make it. I'll go home. Or you can go wheeling off onto the shoulder and zip up illegally and onto the exit ramp, try to find another route and do something ill-advised.

So you can go in either way if you're an impatient person. But the point this morning is to battle that impatience is to battle unbelief. That's the root of it.

And it's real serious business. It's not just a personality issue. You know, there's a lot of thought today that Christian virtues, you can list off the ones that we've been talking about, like envy.

I mean, the opposite of Christian virtues, envy and lust and covetousness and anxiety and bitterness and so on are just kind of relative personality issues, more or less this or that, as though nothing really great were at stake here. Consider these verses from the Bible's standpoint of what's at stake in the issue of impatience. Luke 21, 19, By your patience, you will gain your lives.

Romans 2, 7, To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. Hebrews 6, 12, Do not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. This is not a personality issue here.

This is vital for life, for promises, for inheritance. Patience in doing the will of God is not an optional Christian virtue because faith is not an optional Christian virtue. And patience is the fruit of faith and impatience is the fruit of unbelief.

And therefore, the warfare against impatience is no minor skirmish in the Christian life. It's a life and death issue. And since it's an issue of faith, the chief weapon is the word.

And I want to show you that from a verse before we go to Isaiah 30. So, if you want to keep your finger in Isaiah 30 and go to Psalm 130, I'd like to point out a verse that I think captures the relationship between the promises of God and patience. And the verse is number five, verse five of Psalm 130.

It says, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word do I hope. Now, waiting for the Lord is the Old Testament equivalent of patience. It's the opposite of impatience.

Waiting for the Lord is the opposite both of throwing in the towel. If you throw in the towel and quit on some assignment God's given you to do, you're not waiting for the Lord. Or if you're rash and make impulsive counter moves without consulting him, you're not waiting for the Lord.

Waiting for the Lord is not giving up and not surging ahead, but looking to him for the next move. Staying in your appointed place, going at God's appointed pace. Now, how did the psalmist manage to do this? Where did the strength and composure and peace come from to live like this? And he tells us very plainly in the second half of verse five, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, so you underline word, I hope, and you underline hope.

So the strength that sustains waiting or patience is hope. And the power behind hope is the word. And we all know, I hope, that the word hope is simply faith in the future tense.

They aren't two very different things. Hebrews 11 one says, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, which simply says faith is hope. They overlap.

When you're trusting something in the future, that's called hope. And so what this verse says very plainly then is that faith or hope is the power to wait rather than give up or surge ahead. And the strength or the source of power to hope or trust is the word.

And since it's talking about hoping, it must mean promises in the word. That's what gives you hope for the future. And so in that one verse, Psalm 130 verse five, you have the whole point of these 13 messages.

The word is the chief weapon by which we win the battle to believe and in believing all of the tree of the fruits of the spirit, including patience, grow. Now, this is a clear illustration of the kind of war that we are in every day. And I hope that when you're tempted to throw in the towel and something God's called you to do or stumble ahead impetuously without consulting him, you will realize that no minor issue is at stake, but faith is the issue that's at stake and the weapon to wield at that moment is the word.

Now, let's go to Isaiah 30 and watch what happens first when Israel doesn't do this. So we'll try to learn negatively what not to do. And then later in the chapter, Isaiah will tell us what we ought to do in place of what Israel did.

First, a little background. In Isaiah's day, you know that Israel had enemies around. And during Hezekiah's kingship, one of the big enemies was Assyria.

It was a big threat to this little country, just like we are little and there are big threats. And every time the threat came, God would send a prophet to say how to respond. What's your next move? I've thrown this massive boulder in your way to success.

Now, what are you going to do? And God sends a prophet. The prophet might say, surrender, or the prophet might say fight, or the prophet might say, wait. Well, in this case, the people got very impatient.

The odds of winning against the Assyrians were very, very small and the threat was very imminent. And so they took a detour, cut off on the shoulder, went down to Egypt to make a pact and a treaty. Let's read about it in verses one and two once more.

Woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, who carry out a plan but not mine, who make a league but not my spirit, not of my spirit, that they should add sin to sin, who set out to go down to Egypt without

asking for my counsel to take refuge in the protection of a Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt. Now, that's the opposite of waiting on the Lord. Israel became impatient.

God had not delivered the goods when and how they thought he should have. There's a great source of impatience. We have the idea of how God ought to solve our problems and he generally isn't on our wavelength with his timing.

Therefore, it's an issue of faith of whether we will be like Israel and head for Egypt or whether we will wait for God to give us the next move. If he tells us to go to Egypt, we go to Egypt. But we wait and consult with the Lord.

We don't make plans that aren't his plans or establish a treaty that isn't his treaty. Notice the key words in verse two. They set out to go down to Egypt without asking for my counsel.

If that's not an illustration of the besetting sin of most of us Americans, we are an impetuous lot. We know how to solve everything. Just give us action.

And so the warning to us this morning is, are you like the Egyptians all day long? You come to the end of the day and you say, oh my. I did pray this morning, I think, before I left for work. But I haven't tuned in to God since then.

I haven't checked in on any of my decisions. I haven't consulted him at any of the key turns in my day. I didn't talk over any of the conversations I had.

I didn't commend to him any of the meetings that we were going to have. And then the warning is given in verse three. Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, turn to your shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.

In other words, the things that we do impetuously without consulting God are very likely to backfire on us. Now the world, of course, will have a different assessment of things. If you make a quick judgment and it pays off in the market or in business, they'll say, whoa, you have really got savvy.

You're smart. And God is not impressed. God will be consulted in order for blessing to come.

So there's a warning to us here that we can bring a lot of shame, a lot of frustration upon ourselves by not consulting God. And we may have to live with decisions for a lifetime. That we didn't consult God about.

Now what should they have done? What's the alternative of hitting the shoulder, taking the cutoff, and heading for Egypt? The answer is given in verse 15 and verse 18 of Isaiah 30. Let's read these. Verse 15 says, Thus says the Lord God, or thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest you shall be saved.

In quietness and in trust shall be your strength. And then verse 18. Therefore, the Lord waits to be gracious to you.

Therefore, he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice. And here comes the promise.

Blessed are all those who wait for him. So now what do we have here? In the first five verses of Isaiah 30, we have a negative lesson of how not to act. That is a lesson of impatience and impetuosity.

In these two verses, we have the flip-flop positive incentive to draw us into restful patience and waiting. Look at them. Verse 15.

In quietness and trust shall be your strength. This is a great promise for faith, to stimulate your faith. In quietness and trust shall be your strength.

If you rest in God, if you look to God, if you trust in God, then he will give you strength. It will look weak to the world very often to just wait like Hezekiah should have waited trapped in Jerusalem. It'll look weak and they'll mock you and say, don't think that the Lord God can give you strength enough to handle this problem of Assyria.

Of course, it'll look weak to the world. God is in the business not of glorifying our strength. But the promise is if we wait in quietness and trust, we will have strength.

And there's an issue of faith. And then the next one is verse 18. It says, blessed, blessed by God are all those who wait for Him.

So the promise is clear again. If you wait patiently to seek His guidance and His help and His counsel, instead of surging ahead without Him or throwing in the towel, if you wait, blessing will come. He'll take this frustrated, boxed in, unproductive moment that is so aggravating.

And if you roll it onto Him, wait patiently, seek His counsel, blessing will happen. He will take it and make blessing out of it. He promises He will.

It's an issue of faith. Now, what this shows is how to do battle with the unbelief of impatience, namely by preaching. Everybody should be a preacher.

You should preach to yourself with the Bible like this. So here's the way you preach to yourself. You stand outside yourself and you look back at your soul.

I'm just getting this from the Psalms. This is the way David does it all the time. You stand outside yourself.

You look back at your soul and you say, soul, did you see what happened to Israel when they were impatient and went down to Egypt seeking help? They went to shame. It backfired. Soul, you don't want that, do you? And the soul says, nope, don't want that.

And then you turn to the positive side and you say to your soul and soul, did you read on in the chapter? Did you see what God said would come to those who have quietness and trust as they wait for God's next step? Did you see what was promised? It said they'll have strength. Do you believe that soul? And if the soul doesn't answer, then you go down to verse 18 and you say, and did you see what he promised in verse 18? He said that if you wait for the blessing, do you believe that soul? And if the soul doesn't answer, you go to Isaiah 49, 23 and say, soul, did you see what he said over there? That everyone who, who waits for the Lord will not be put to shame. You believe that? And if he doesn't answer, you go to Isaiah 64, 40.

He says, do you see what it says here? No, I have seen a God like you who works for those who wait for him. Do you believe that he'll work for you if you wait soul? And if there's no answer, you go to Isaiah 40 verse 31. Soul, those who wait for the Lord will Mount up with wings like Eagles.

They'll run, not be weary. They'll walk and not faint soul. How much does God have to say to you? Don't you believe? And soul says, I believe that's the way you fight against impatience.

You fight the fight of faith with the word of God. It's the only weapon that will slay the dragon of unbelief. That's got all these horns like impatience.

Let me close with an illustration about a man who lived and died a very patient man. His name was Charles Simeon. I've mentioned him before.

He's one of the people I love to read about. And I just found a biography of Simeon in a used bookshop last September. And so I'm just full of this man's godliness.

He became the pastor of Trinity Church in Cambridge in 1782. He was pastor for 54 years in that church, which says a lot about patience. And the amazing thing about his pastorate is the way it began.

He was appointed to be the pastor of this church by a bishop against the will of the congregation. They didn't want him, not because he was a bad preacher or a bad man, but because he was an evangelical. He preached the Bible.

He believed it. He preached conversion and holiness and world missions. One of his students, by the way, was Henry Martin, a great young missionary.

And they didn't want him. And so you know what they did? They did the two things that they had power over. They used against him.

Number one, for 12 years, they would not give him the Sunday afternoon lectureship, would correspond to our Sunday evening service. They assigned it to someone else because the church had the right to do that. And number two, they locked their pews and didn't sit in them and boycotted the Sunday morning services for 12 years.

And he preached to people, visitors in the aisles. That's all for 12 years, 552, 12 years. Now that's patience personified.

How does a man with great gifts like Charles Simeon tolerate that kind of abuse and opposition and win them and last for 54 years? Here's what he said. In this state of things, I saw no remedy but faith and patience. Notice the two words.

The passages of Scripture or the passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was this, the servant of the Lord must not strive. Now note the weapon that he used, the word. It was painful indeed to see the church with the exception of the aisles almost forsaken.

But I thought that if God would only give a double blessing to the congregation that did attend, there would on the whole be as much good done as if the congregation were doubled and the blessing limited to only half the amount. This comforted me many, many times when without such a reflection I would have sunk under my burden. Now where did Simeon get the confidence that blessing would come in that measure upon his patient preaching? And the answer is he got it from Isaiah 30 verse 18 and a hundred other texts like that which say blessed are those who wait for the Lord.

54 years he was later, he was dying. It was October 1836 and his dying drug on and I've seen that happen to many saints at Bethlehem. It drags on and on in the hospital bed or in the nursing home, it just drags on

and on.

And I can promise you that some of the greatest battles with impatience happen on the deathbed. Why won't you take me? October 21, three weeks before he died in that long downward spiral of his health, they were standing by his bed and they heard him say this, infinite wisdom has arranged the whole with infinite love and infinite power enables me to rest upon that love. I am in a dear father's hands, all is secure.

When I look to him I see nothing but faithfulness and immutability and truth and I have the sweetest peace. I cannot have more peace. Now how did Charles Simeon die like that? What was the secret? I want to die like that and you do.

The secret was a 54 year habit of battling impatience with the word of God. That was the secret. A 54 year habit of battling impatience with what he calls here the infinite love, infinite wisdom and infinite power of God to take a circumstance that looks impossible and bring peace.

And so my closing admonition is simply this, in the words of Hebrews 6, 12, be imitators of Charles Simeon. Actually what it says is be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

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