

Advent: Waiting with God

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. But just before we do that, let's see.

It's always risky me trusting in technology when I'm preaching. But I have got four songs in my little playlist here. And forgive me, my taste in music is renowned in our house for being pretty dreadful. But I think they're pretty well-known songs. So I'm hoping there might be some guesses as to what these songs are called. Or even, particularly if you're Dan Ingram probably, who it is that they're sung by.

And let's see if we can work any of that. And then you can see if you can spot what do they have in common. Okay, the first one. I actually have to be very careful about the timing of it. Because I realise it was a little bit sweary when I first started playing it.

Right, here we go. Okay, I'm going to give you five seconds. Four, three, anyone other than Dan? Two, one. Oh, we've got a couple of people.

[1 : 23] Yeah, what do you think it is? Ah, yes. Okay, well, is that what you were going to say about as well? It was, Dan. Dan, it was what you were going to say.

Yeah, I thought you'd know. Okay, let's see about this next one. Pretty different tone, different pace here. Okay. I particularly like this one.

Oh, actually I meant to play it 30 seconds in, so it could be a long wait. Forgive me. Okay. Ah, here we go. And five, four, three, two, one.

Anyone going to give it a guess? No. A little bit more. I thought this would be the most famous one. I'm totally wrong. Okay, go on then, Dan, tell us. It's John Mayer and it's... Yeah. Ooh. Let's give it...

[2 : 24] You've got John Mayer. John Mayer waiting for the world to change. Okay. Yeah. I mean, I thought it was a classic, but clearly I'm wrong. Okay. This one, about ten years later, half of you must know this one.

Oh, I'm going to leave you in my... Ah, ah, ah, ah. Shh. I will wait. Well done, sure. Very good.

Do you know who it is? Mumford and Sons. Yeah, Mumford and Sons. Okay. Very good. I mean, you're probably spotting the theme by now, but let's have a last one just in case and a particularly favourite album of mine.

I'm ignoring you for a minute, Dan. Let's give the others a shot. Oh, sorry, mate. Jack Johnson. It is Jack Johnson. I love it, Dan. Ah. Wishing.

I was sitting, watching, waiting. Ah, yes. Wishing. Very good. Well done, two of them. Let's give them a quick. Good job. Good job. Okay. Well, you've probably spotted different songs, different styles, the same human experience, which is that of waiting.

[3 : 26] And we are in the Advent season just now, and usually, kind of traditionally held as a time of waiting. We're waiting for Jesus to arrive in the big telling of the story.

We're waiting for the world to change. And, I mean, interestingly, when I quickly asked ChatGPT this morning, because I was aware that they're probably all songs from the noughties, because that's the kind of age I am.

And it said, yes, you're absolutely right. They are all from the same 10-year period, except Mumford and Sons, who just pretended to be from that period. And they said, it said to me, incidentally, as AI likes to do, it said, did you notice that they're all different types of waiting?

Gwen Stefani waiting for fear that has to be confronted. John Mayer waiting as passive social paralysis. Jack Johnson waiting as relational vulnerability.

Mumford and Sons waiting as covenantal commitment. I will wait for you. I'm not going anywhere. And, but all with this theme of waiting. And whether it's Advent or not, I bet you, you know the experience of waiting.

[4 : 28] It's part of the human condition. And I love this quote. I was really gutted to find it was just a random Pinterest quote, okay, when I, because I thought someone, someone clever must have said it.

But it was this. It was, Joseph waited 13 years. Abraham waited 25 years. Moses waited 40 years. Jesus waited 30 years. If God is making you wait, you are in good company.

It's something we feel when we wait. I can see it in my kids. They cannot wait for Christmas. But also sometimes they have to wait on the naughty step. You know, other times they have to wait for a birthday or wait for a relative to arrive.

Or today, Ellen was really excited. I mean, our house has been, has been full of the plague this week. And she was so excited that we were coming to church that it was really beautiful because she was like, my friends are there.

As in, not just my family who I'm sick of by this point. But we know waiting because it gets into our bones. It's not just a sort of theoretical thing or even a time thing. It's a somewhere in our soul thing.

[5 : 32] Waiting isn't just theoretical. It's where sometimes even prayers feel unanswered, where silence can stretch on. And when we start asking questions about not only if God is good, but where on earth God is.

Waiting is a place we might often stand and we might often find it quite hard. Joseph knew it.

Abraham knew it. Those different people mentioned there knew it, including Jesus.

And often it feels like something has gone wrong in life when we have to wait. Sometimes it really has gone wrong when we have to wait. But when you read your Bible carefully, you find that waiting appears time and time and time again.

Not just as a problem to solve, but as part of God's plan for shaping us and for conforming us into his likeness. So what I'd like to do today is I want us to look really quickly at three different perspectives on waiting in the Bible.

And we're going to look at Simeon, which I shared with a lot of you. If you read your news email, you'll have seen it. It was in a Practicing the Way devotional a few weeks ago. And I think Simeon is this really beautiful 10-verse story or picture of someone who has waited for Jesus.

[6 : 46] So we're going to look at that briefly in a moment. We're then going to look at Jesus and waiting. And then we're going to look at Paul and waiting. And we're going to do those pretty speedily, just a couple of verses in each one.

And so I would grab your Bible if you want to follow along. Because I've got some stuff on the screen for you, but I haven't got the verses up each time. Although where they are in the Bible will be up behind me and I'll read them to you.

And we are in a moment going to start in Luke chapter 2. In fact, why don't you and I turn to that just now if you have got your Bible on you. So Luke chapter 2, around verse 25 onwards.

So Simeon is a man who knows how to wait for God.

Because what you find in verse 25 is this. It says this. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[7 : 55] And the Holy Spirit was on him. Okay. Israel basically had been owned by the Romans for around, I think around 50 years.

Somewhere between 60 and 50 years at this point. I don't know how old Simeon is. We're not told. Unlike Anna, we don't get to know his age. But we know that he has been waiting. And he's waiting for a saviour to come and rescue God's people from under this kind of other ruler.

And to kind of lead them into the good things of God. And scripture is really straightforward there.

He's righteous and devout. He basically is following God. He's a good Jewish man.

He's waiting for everything to be made well. The consolation of Israel. Basically, it's all a mess.

Please come and sort it out. And he has been waiting.

And he's been waiting with the Holy Spirit. In verse 25, the Holy Spirit was on him. There's a kind of waiting that many of us, I imagine, will know well.

[8 : 55] Which is where we're waiting with uncertainty. We're waiting for things we hope might one day happen. We're waiting for things maybe that are not promises we've had. But are just a sense of, I really hope this thing will come to pass.

Waiting with our fingers crossed. Maybe waiting anxiously. Maybe in a quiet fear that things will not change. Imagine you've had experiences of things like waiting for a job change.

Or a promotion. Or waiting for that house you've been dreaming of. Or that relationship you'd love to see happen. Or waiting for a diagnosis to see what's going on in your body. There are so many different things that we can wait for.

And you wouldn't blame Simeon for being someone who was absolutely fed up with waiting. He could have been waiting all of those 50 years for all we know. He certainly is clearly a picture in the Bible of someone who is waiting.

Who just longs for Jesus to turn up and make things better. The beautiful thing we find in the next few verses, if you look at verse 26, is this. It says this, the Holy Spirit was on him.

[10:03] And then verse 26, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went to the temple courts when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do what was custom to dedicate him to the Lord.

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of the nations.

A light for revelation to the Gentiles. So you're going to shine so people who aren't Jewish will know Jesus and know you. And be the glory of your people Israel. Simeon knows how to wait.

He is not led by his own frustrations. He's waiting with the Holy Spirit. He's waiting, knowing God intimately with him as he waits.

The Holy Spirit had promised him that he would meet Jesus. The Holy Spirit was with him as he waited. And in fact, he could then go and die happily because of this moment.

[11:14] I mean, how mad is that? The positive outcome of this interaction with Jesus is ultimately he just gets to die now. But that's how much he's clinging to what God has promised. And how much he's been waiting with the Spirit, not apart.

Sometimes waiting can feel like the naughty step. I think Simeon shows us it's a walk with God. It's not a way for me, you know, as you wait, says the Lord.

It's be with me as you wait because I've got good things ahead. Simeon knows the Holy Spirit with him as he waits. It's important to know that it is possible to wait apart from the Lord.

To carry our longings quietly, maybe in hurt or vulnerability, but not let him be involved in those. To let them grow without ever bringing them to him.

And allowing him to shape them and form our longings and our hopes and the things that we're waiting for. I was reminded of this last year. I think it was last year, although if you're anything like me, birthdays merge into one over the years.

[12:20] But I think it was last year that the night before her birthday, Ellen announces, forgive me, I'm suddenly worried this is factually inaccurate. If you look at my social media, you'll see which cake we gave her, either last year or the year before.

Ellen announces, I think it was the night, maybe two nights before her birthday, that she was longing for a rainbow cake. We had not planned a rainbow cake. We had planned, we bake cakes for our kids every year.

Or did we this? Yes, we did this year. Every year we bake cakes for our kids as part of the Roush tradition. And we had it all planned because she told us about a month before what she wanted.

And we had it all sorted. And at the last minute, there was a sudden change to a completely different cake.

And Jill and I look at each other like, oh no! She's completely set her heart on this thing that she's waiting for. She's counting down to this cake and this birthday. And we had no idea.

There were two options for us. One was a very busy night of baking, which is the option we went for. Or the other one was for her to wait and be deeply disappointed. Because she could have waited apart from the people who had the power to change things.

[13:25] Or the power to help her realize that the thing she's waiting for was unreasonable. It wasn't. It could have been if she told us she wanted a five-tier, I don't know, chocolate cake. She would have not been getting it. But I guess the thing I see in Simeon that I want to share with you today is this.

He knew how to wait with God. He allowed the Spirit to shape his hopes. He could have hoped for many things before he died. He hoped to meet Jesus. And he waited responsive enough.

So when the Spirit said, yes, now, he was ready to go. He could have been anywhere else that day. But instead, he met the Messiah. And you see him rejoicing in that song.

Simeon knows how to wait well. And to wait well is to wait with God, not apart from him. And let him shape the things we long for as we wait.

Next, let's turn to Jesus. And I'm going to invite you to turn with me to John chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. And I want you to have a look at this next story, which is Jesus and waiting.

[14:32] And what we find here is basically this is the first miracle Jesus is about to perform, that he has only just about to start his kind of public ministry.

And he's at a party. It's probably quite a well-known story where his mom comes and hassles him to turn water into wine. Or at least that's how Jesus is hearing it. And I'm assuming he's right because he's Jesus.

But mother and son things can often end up miscommunicated. So let's have a look at these verses together. So Jesus and his disciples had been invited to the wedding, verse 2, chapter 2 of John.

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine. Then we'll carry on a little bit. Verse 4. Jesus knows that he wants to be totally in sync with his father.

He says elsewhere, I only do what I see my father in heaven doing. That's what he's waiting for.

He's waiting for his dad to say, Go. Now is the time.

[15:42] Now, I wonder if she was just asking if he had any other wine. But he says, I'm not doing a miracle yet. Basically, he actually then does it. He does it very discreetly. I love the story.

You can read the rest another time. But he does deliver. He quietly turns water into wine. The party continues. And then the next chapters, all the way up to the next verse I want you to read, are just story after story of him doing his father's will, moving towards the ultimate will of the father, the cross.

So if you now turn on to chapter 9 with me. Lost my note suddenly. Here we go. Sorry, no.

Not 9. John 12, 23. Quite a bit further. Here's what we have next.

Is Jesus then gets to a point just before he washes the disciples' feet and then he moves on to eventually go to the cross.

[16:48] He says this in 23. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. So right there with his mommy saying, Hang on, it's not my hour yet. And right here he's saying, Yeah, this is the beginning.

This is what's going to happen. Jesus has spent roughly 90% of his life in obscurity, living until we think sometime around the age of 30, growing, working, praying, waiting, not because he's unsure, but because he's certain that he can trust his father's timing more than the urgent needs in front of him.

Waiting is absolutely not weakness. We see it in the life of Jesus. What we want is we want to be doing the thing God wants of us at the time he wants it.

And that often, if your life is anything like mine, isn't when we might think straight away. Jesus here is close enough to the Father. He's attentive enough to his will to see when not yet becomes now. Jesus teaches us that waiting is an act of trust, choosing obedience over urgency, choosing what God wants over what we might see a need of right in front of us.

[18:04] And it doesn't end with him. Okay, final one. I know I've taken you through quite a few of these, but Titus 2. To keep going, if you're struggling to find Titus, as I usually do, you find it just after 2 Timothy and just before Philemon and Hebrews.

So see if you can jump to chapter 2 for me just now. We're looking at chapter 2, verses 11 and 13. And it says this. I'll read this a couple of times for us. And this is Paul writing. Paul writing on where we currently are and where the believer currently kind of lives in the Christian life.

It says this. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We live between two appearances. Titus is laying out there. And Paul in the book of Titus is laying out there for us. Okay, we've got our first appearance, which is Jesus arriving.

[19:33] The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. Verse 11 is talking about Jesus, saying Jesus has arrived. He's offered God's goodness, not because we're good enough, not because we can obey the law, not because we live righteous lives, but because he's really, really loving and good.

And salvation has been offered to us at the point of Jesus and then Jesus dying on the cross. And now we live in this waiting point before one day he will appear again.

That's the two appearances of Jesus I have heard them called. It says this, we wait in this present age for, verse 13, the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

You and me, we live in between two great things, Jesus arriving, living and dying and rising again. We live here and we're waiting one day for him to appear in glory, for us to get to see him as he really is, to know him fully, to love him and to be made perfect.

I mean, I cannot wait for that day, but I have to, because this is where I live. I live here, you live here, in between those two appearances.

[20 : 48] And Paul's not flippant about what that's like, because otherwise, we've just read a couple of verses about two appearances, and what's the bit between the two that he points out to us?

We need to learn, and we're taught to say no to our godliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. Waiting can be so hard, but we're called to be a people.

It's not by accident, it's not by mistake, it's by design that you and I are called time and time again to wait. Wait for the promises of God to become a reality in our lives. Wait for Jesus' death on the cross to become fully active in our life when he comes back and everything is made good.

Waiting is not life on pause, it's life being formed. Not on the naughty step or distant from the Lord, but him wanting to walk with us and grow us in grace.

Paul reminds us that as we wait for Christ's return, grace is at work in our lives, shaping us, but we do live between these two appearances. If you find yourself in the battle of waiting, whether that's waiting for, as I said before, a job or diagnosis, a relationship, a hope, a hurt to be healed, a relationship to be restored, we've got two things that we can do there and one is look back at the grace of God.

[22 : 24] Just look back at how good he has been in Jesus. Look at Jesus and see how wonderful he is and all the good that he has done in that moment by sending his son to rescue you and by calling you into that relationship.

And the other is to look forward to what God has promised and we can be sure of those, some of those deeply personal, we know the Lord's laid stuff in our heart, some of those true for all of us that one day he will return, one day all the wrong will be made right in the world, one day all the death and sickness and dying and decay will be gone and he'll wipe every tear from our eyes.

But we're right now called to live in this middle ground, the place awaiting between the two appearances, Jesus who was, Jesus who is and will be, but we don't do that alone, he's at work with us.

Simeon shows us how to wait with him, not away from him. Jesus shows us how to wait for what he wants, when he wants it, not rushing in our own, with our own kind of sense of oh now because I'm so frustrated.

Paul shows us awaiting us by design, it's, we grow in our walk with him and we hopefully meet with him in that when we choose to realise it's by design, it's not an accident, it's not a glitch in the system.

[23 : 49] And for those of us waiting without the end in sight yet, thinking what will happen in this area of my life, how will this ever be made good, he wants to meet with you and be with you.

The Holy Spirit is God applied to us, God who meets with us in our deepest hurts and sometimes our loneliest places and he's right there for us.

He's not distant, not away from you but available when you turn to him and invite him into whatever you're waiting for. If you're waiting, you're in good company, he's with you. you're up to you. you're up to you.