Waiting Here For You SERMON two

Who You are waiting with

If you have your Bible tonight, we’re going to look at one of the most familiar and most loved Christmas texts of all. It’s found in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament: Exodus chapter 13. That was a joke, so I was hoping you’d laugh, but that’s okay. They laughed at the 12:30, so I’ll just think back to that moment and how great that was. Exodus 13 is a really powerful passage.

And I know it’s not our normal go-to Christmas passage, but you’ll understand because we’re celebrating advent at Passion City Church and in churches around the world. And advent basically means expectation. It means that we’re not fully where we want to be yet. God hasn’t done everything we want to see God do, and we haven’t fully arrived at the destination God has for us. And so, by saying that, we’re saying that **a lot of us understand what it means to wait**. In fact, this series is called *Waiting Here for You*. And I think we all get waiting, right? **How many of you are really good at waiting?**

Anybody that’s like an expert waiter? Thank you so much. We all need to hang out with you. How many of you’re not so great at waiting? Yeah, see, that’s kind of more the normal speed, you know. We just don’t get waiting. You show up at the airport, you got there on time, you got parked, you got in, you got checked in, you did the thing, you get to the gate, you get on the plane. All of a sudden, they close the door, and then the pilot comes on and says, “The little whatever switch thing isn’t working right. They’re going to send somebody over from somewhere. It’s going to take about an hour. We’re going to sit here and wait with no air conditioning on the plane, and nobody can get up out of your seat.”

**And when that happens, our normal reaction, first reaction, is, “Well, praise God. Praise to God who runs the universe and runs my life**. Apparently, he wanted to create an hour of margin for me in this moment. Lord, what do you have for me for the next hour of my life?” How many times has that ever happened? Like never. because we’re not good waiters. We want to move along toward the things that are important to us. And we don’t like stuff like traffic or accidents where they close two lanes, or the freeway, or the plane’s not working, or the restaurant was too full, and now we got to get a little thing that lights up and go stand over in a place where you can’t even stand for an hour before we can get in.

We’re just not good at waiting. **But the problem is God often isn’t in a hurry**. Now, see, nobody’s going to amen that, I know. But I’m going to put a few ideas out tonight that none of us are going to amen on the way by. But later in life, we’re going to come back and give praise to God for these big ideas.

All of us know what it means to be in a place of waiting. In fact, this room is full of waiters right now. And if you just look down your row, your row is filling the stories of waiting. And that’s what advent is. In the middle of this certain reality that Christ did come and fulfill the promise of God, and in the hope of Christ coming again to make everything on earth right, and in the meantime God is working powerfully, but everything’s not as it should be right now. Not in this city, and not in the world, and not in my life.

And not in your life. And we’re waiting. You know, there’s someone sitting in the building right now, and you’re waiting for your son or daughter to come home. And it’s happy Christmas, and everybody had a wonderful time, and we sung some Christmas songs already tonight. But you can’t get too many hours through the day without thinking about your son or daughter because you don’t even really fully know where they are. And you’ve tried to reach out, you’ve tried to encourage, you’ve tried to pray, you’ve tried everything. You’ve tried to work through other family members, you’ve tried everything you know to do, and you’re left with one option. And that is just a cry out to God and say, “Will you reach her and will you change her heart? And will you save her from the path that she is on? And will you bring her back home?” And some of you are waiting, you’re waiting for a son or daughter to come home.

Some are waiting for a spouse to stop running. And it’s agony. Some of you are living under the same roof with a spouse whose heart is divided from you. And you’re still in the same space, but you know there’s something else in their life and you’re just praying to God. You’ve had all the conversations and all the arguments and all the deal, and you’ve been to counseling, and this and that, and you’ve talked to their friend and they’ve talked to your friend, but this is not there. And you’re kind of stuck in that moment. And there’s other people here—I mean, just being real tonight—you know, sometimes we come into church and feel like we can’t be real, but there’s somebody sitting in the building right now and you’re like, “I don’t know where my spouse is right this minute. And I’m not a hundred percent sure who they’re with.” And you’re saying, God, “I need a miracle. I need a breakthrough for my marriage.”

And you’re waiting on God. Some people are waiting for a doctor. That’s where our family is, in the middle of chemotherapy, in the middle of some protocol and waiting for a scan, waiting for some test results to come back, waiting for the pathology report. Some of you are waiting. Tomorrow will be the day for some of you. Wednesday is the day you’re looking to, to some of you, some of you’re sitting right in the middle of news. It’s crashed into your family, and you’re waiting for, how’s this going to work? Is regimen going to take? Is it going to be a positive response? Is this going to be able to be an option for us? And you’re waiting, you’re right in the middle of that.

And it’s Christmas time, and everybody’s throwing parties, and there’s a party for this and a party for that, and a party at their house, and celebration here and celebration there, and you’re sort of stuck right in between the fact that Jesus did come and he’s coming again. But you’re waiting right now on God, and you’re waiting for something big. You’re waiting for a miracle. Some of you are waiting for the adoption to work out. It’s been up and down and on and off and back and forth and yes and no. Some of you are waiting for a pregnancy. In our culture, we call it, “we’re trying.” And that feels like what it is. It’s waiting. And we’re trying, we’re hoping, we’re believing, we want this so much.

Some of you are waiting for your parents to resolve, and you’re ping-ponging back and forth between this house and that house and this place and that place. And you heard they might be talking, they might not be talking. Maybe they’re going to get back together. Maybe they’re not going to get back together. It’s going to work out. It’s not going to work out. Somebody, you’re waiting on a judge. You’re waiting on somebody to decide your fate. You know there’s somebody on your row here that’s on parole. Did you know that at church there’s somebody on your row that’s going to be in court tomorrow? They’re waiting on a ruling and it’s going to change things. The praying like crazy and hoping and waiting.

Some of you are waiting for me to get to the end of this list. You’re like, “I know you have a point. Could you just tell us the point? A lot of people are waiting, Louie, we get it. Could you just tell us the point?” Because we don’t like to wait. But somehow in the waiting there’s something powerful happening. Even right now, some of you are waiting on a job and you really need it to come through. Like right now, you need an answer, and you’re looking at your email as fast as you can refresh it and you are hoping that you’re going to see the right address in that box. And when you open it, it’s going to say you’ve got the job. You’re waiting. Some of you are waiting for the fog to clear. You know there’s a way but you can’t see it. You do believe there’s a path that you just can’t see, and you’re waiting for the fog to clear.

Some of you are just simply waiting for someone to ask you out. And all the guys said amen. And that’s the problem. Nothing personal. Some of you ladies are waiting on the guys to understand that that statement wasn’t for them. Can I get an amen ladies? Amen. And you’re waiting for somebody to go, “You know what? I’m going to ask you out. Not on a text, and not on Facebook, and not via Twitter, and not through my friend. I’m going to personally show up and use my human voice that God gave me. And I’m going to look you in the eye, all guts and glory, and I’m going to let it all ride. And I’m going to tell you I want to spend time with you.” It’s advent people. It’s a season of expectation.

Jesus has come and he’s coming again. Don’t lose hope. I love it. Some of the guys are like, “What just happened? I don’t know what happened. She’s not going to text me when she asked me out. Is that what he said? I’m not sure what just happened now.”

Some of you waiting for a dream to materialize. I mean you can see it. You’re just waiting for the pieces to fit. Some of you are waiting for a season of life to end, a season of grief to end, a season of heavy work to end. Some of you been on one of those arcs where you’ve been flying to Cleveland two times a week for the last nine months and you’re like, “Man, this project’s going to wrap up. We’re going to break ground, the deal’s going to be done, we’re going to . . .” You’re just waiting for a season.

Maybe it’s been a refining season, and God’s been chiseling and chiseling and chiseling and you’re like, “God, I know you’re working for good, and I know you’re working for your glory. But man, I need the chiseling to stop for a little while.” We’re all waiting. I mean, come on, who’s waiting? Who’s waiting in this house tonight? Who’s waiting for real? We’re all waiting. **And in the waiting—what? What do we do? What? What? Where do we go in the waiting? And that’s what we see in Exodus 13.**

And before we read the text, I just want to offer an idea that **in the waiting, God is showing us there’s something greater for our lives** than probably what we’re thinking about or what we can imagine. Because you notice how God works. Think about it with me really fast. How did God make the world? Says in the Genesis account that he made the world in six days. And people are going to argue over that. But he didn’t make it in six seconds, and he didn’t make it all at one time. God took time to make the world. He didn’t have to take time to make the world. He just took time to make the world because he decided I’m going to take time to make the world.

God took time to release Israel from the captivity of the Pharaoh in Egypt. They were in for 400 years. He could have released them after four days, couldn’t he? Four hours, four months, four years, but 400 years until he released them. Between the Old and New Testament, 400 years of silence before Jesus was born. Maybe it could have just been four hours of silence, and then Jesus would’ve been born. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, but he lives on earth for 33 years before he does what he came to do.

You would think Jesus would just do like a touch and go. Sometimes when you’re learning to fly, you just come down, the wheels touch, and you pull right back up. That’s what Jesus should have done because he came from heaven, from his throne to earth.

You’re thinking, “I know he has to come. He has to do it. Only he can do it. But he doesn’t have to hang around on earth in a human body for 33 years to do it.” And then he goes to the cross, and Jesus hangs on the cross for six hours. From nine in the morning till three in the afternoon he suffers agony. And you’re thinking, “I know he had to be nailed to the cross to pay the price for our sin and shame. But couldn’t he have just been nailed there and then died and have it ended? Why did he have to stay up there six hours and then they buried him? And when it would have worked out a whole lot better if his crucifixion had been in the morning and his resurrection had been about sundown.”

Why do we need three days to celebrate Easter? What if it’s all a big day, it’s good Friday-Easter. It’s yay, in the morning he died, and in the evening he was raised from the dead. But no, Jesus was dead and in the tomb for three days, in the depths of the earth fighting on our behalf to free us from the bonds of sin hell and death. And then he was raised from the dead. And then Jesus ascended into heaven and he went with a promise, “Hey, I’m going to give you the spirit of God, but I want you to know I’m coming back. I’m going to give you a mission on earth, but I’m coming back and I’m going to set everything right.” And he is going to do that. He is going to fulfill that promise.

But since he said that, it’s been over 2000 years. And I’m not the smartest guy in the room, and I’m not the smartest guy I’ve met, but I’ll tell you this, I’m starting to get the idea that **God isn’t necessarily in a hurry**, But we are. And I’ll tell you why. Because God has bigger and higher plans for our lives than we do, and that’s why God’s not in a hurry. The Westminster Catechism, the shorter version of it, says this: **“The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”**

And that’s what God is thinking about for your life and my life. It says—a little backstory before we jump in the text—but that’s what God’s thinking about for your life. Can I say it again? From the 1600s, the shorter Westminster Catechism, simply summarizing our faith in this statement: “the chief end of man.” So can I say the chief end of me and the chief end of you is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever?

In fact, **that’s what the angel said when Jesus was born**. “Glory to God and the highest and peace on earth among men on whom God’s favor rests.” So God gets glory. People get the favor of God and get to know God. God gets the glory, we get Jesus. And he said that’s the purpose of your life. And we’re living in a world where there’s a whole different set of values in American culture, particularly. Not the rest of the world, where they’re trying to figure out how to get clean water and if they can sleep indoors and how to live past 17 years of age. That’s a lot of the world. In fact, that’s most of the world.

And yet in America, we’re living in some sort of Disneyland of values. And in America, the only two things that really matter **are *how do I feel* and *how can I get what I want when I want it****.* Those are the two predominant themes of American culture. *How do I feel* and *how can I get what I want when I want it.* That’s why the drug culture in America is so huge, because people don’t like the way they feel. That’s exactly why addiction is so strong because people don’t like the way they feel.

And so I’m going to take something to make me not feel the way I feel or I’m going to take something to make me feel the way I wish that I felt. And so there’s a whole lot of feeling-driven culture in us and in the conversations that arise. “Well how do you feel? Well how do you feel? How do you feel today? Well how’d you feel about that? Well, how do you feel? How do you feel? How do you feel? How do you feel?” And feelings are important. We all have them but, but our whole life isn’t to be driven by them.

And the goal of life isn’t to feel better. The goal of life is to glorify God. The chief end of man is not to feel great about everything. The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Jesus forever. To glorify God, enjoy him forever, not to get what we want and get it right. Now, if you’ve got kids—some of you’ve got kids, and they’ve already told you what they want for Christmas. Either they want the guy, if you believe in him at your house, or they want you, or whoever they know toys are showing up from somewhere. And they’ve very specifically told you exactly the model number they want.

And they’ve texted you the web link to the one they want. Not that one but this one. Not that color but this color. Not that model but this model, specifically. Dad, don’t mess this up. I want this one and not that one. And you’re going to get it for them because you love them and it’s going to be an amazing moment. But in your mind, you already know they’re going to put that in a plastic bin in two months and put in the basement. How many you got toys in plastic bins in the basement? Come on. I mean, and it was the most amazing thing. And the craziest part of it is, when they get that at eight in the morning, and then their cousin comes over at 4:30 with something else, and as a parent you’re like, “We’re hosed. Why didn’t we get that?” Because that’s all they want now from eight o’clock to 4:30.

And it’s so much easier to talk about them than me. But God knows that about you and me, and he knows most of the stuff we want right now is stuff that’s going in a bin two months from now. Because we’ve never been satisfied by one thing we’ve owned, and we’ve never been able to manage our feelings to feeling good enough about life. And God is saying to us, “Please follow me. I’ve put so much more potential in you than you’re reaching for. You were created in the image of Almighty God, and you have a very brief window of time on planet earth. Very short opportunity. And in that window, you have the chance to use your life to bring glory to God and to fall in love with Jesus.”

And here’s the deal. If you get what you want, when you want it, most often neither one of those things are going to happen. But in the waiting, that’s where God gets glory. And in the waiting is where we learn that Jesus is really all we have and all we need. You with me?

And so we don’t want to wait. I know we don’t. I don’t. And you don’t. But we do need to wait, because in the waiting is where the good stuff happens. In fact, the great stories of this house are stories about waiting. Everybody’s best story is a story about waiting. And that’s the story we find in **Exodus 13**. So look at it with me, if you will, beginning in verse 17. It says, “When Pharaoh let the people go.” So Moses has come called by God, he’s gone to the Pharaoh, and all of Israel now is being released from centuries of in Egypt. So this is what the story unfolds in verse 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. So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle,” verse 19. “And Moses took the bones of Joseph.” We’ve talked about Joseph many times here. He took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He said, “God will surely come to your aid.” I want you to hear that Joseph was a man of faith. Remember, he’d seen God take him through all the lows of life, all the disappointment of life, and then take him in an instant from the prison to the palace where he was the second in command of Egypt. We’re back to Egypt again now. And he was saving his nation and his family from famine because God had put him in the right place at the right time and he believed in God.

**And so when Joseph died, he knew at some point that God was going to deliver his people into a land of promise.** And he said, “I know God’s going to come through, and I know God’s going to come to your aid. So promise me when God comes through, you’ll carry my bones with you because I’m going to make it to the promised land with everybody else.” And that’s great faith on his part. He was just saying, “God’s going to come through. He hasn’t come through in my lifetime physically on earth because I’m dying now. But in my last dying breath, I tell you he is going to come through. And when he does come through, make sure my bones make it into the promise land.” And so here comes, you know, Moses and he says, “Yeah, get the bones of Joseph, because we made a promise, and God’s coming through now, and even the bones of Joseph are getting the benefit of the faithfulness of God.”

How cool is that? And so it says in verse 20, “After leaving Sukkot, they camped at Ethan on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” Now, this is beautiful for advent because in this text we see why it is that we end up waiting. And we learn how to wait better in the meantime, between what God has promised and what he is going to do in our lives.

And a couple of things come out of this text, I want to talk about him briefly. **Number one**, I want you to see that sometimes God leads us the long way so that he can show us his sufficiency in our lives. Two amens on that one. I know nobody wants to say that, but it’s true. It says God did not lead them the short way. So, if you want to put it in geographic terms—some of you may or may not see how this works—but as they’re coming out of Egypt. They could have gone along the Mediterranean Sea, and people say it would’ve been with 2 million people, families, kids, and all their cattle, that it would’ve been a ten-day to two-week journey from Egypt to the promised land.

But that’s not the way God led them. God led them the opposite way into the wilderness and into the desert. And he actually not only led them into the desert land, he led them into a dead end. It says he led them toward the Red Sea. Now, if you’re devising an escape plan for people, you don’t typically look for an option that takes you up to an uncrossable body of water. But God said, “Moses, this is the way we’re going to go lead the people this way.”

Now, can you imagine all the chatter that was happening in 2 million people and their kids and all the wives? “You got to get up there and tell them that this isn’t going to work. We’re going out into the desert. There’s no water, there’s no food, there’s no shelter, there’s no place for the cattle to graze. This is not kid friendly. This is not going to work. And I think there’s a Red Sea out there. And if Pharaoh changes his mind and decides he wants to come after us, we’re going to be really hosed out here in the wasteland. You got to go tell Moses.”

And Moses is like, “Hey, this is the way that God leading us.” Well, how do you know that? Because see, the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud, they are leading us this way. And sometimes God takes us the long way, not the short way, because God’s not in a hurry. God is about making us into people who at the end of the day can say, “My life mattered for the glory of God, and I really knew Jesus on earth as the most valuable thing in my life. And that’s the goal for you and me.”

And so sometimes God says, “Man, you know, the short way looks like a little easier path for you, but you’re not going to understand how great I am if you go the short way, and you’re not going to fall in Jesus in love with Jesus going the short way. So this time we’re going to go the long way.” And in going the long way, God proves himself and he comes through for us. How did he do that for Israel?

Well, he said, “If we go the short way, the Philistines are going to be there. And I know you’re all dressed for war, but you hadn’t fought anybody in 400 years. You’ve been making bricks for 400 years. And so the Philistines, they’re great fighters. And so you’re going to get there, and they’re going to see you coming with your kids and your cattle and grandma and everybody, all piling in together. And they’re going to send a couple of chariots out, and they’re going to wipe out some of you guys. And as soon as it gets really awful, you’re going to go, ‘Wow, we weren’t ready for the Philistine army.’

“And what you’re going to do is you’re going to turn and run right back to your oppressors in Egypt. You’re going to turn around and say, ‘Man, I don’t know. The promised land sounded good, but we didn’t think there was going to be any bloodshed. We’d rather go back and make bricks in Egypt than to have people losing their lives.” And God said, “You’re not ready for that yet, because you don’t know who I am yet, and I need to show you who I am so that you’ll be ready for all the battles that you face.”

And so, if you read further in the next chapter 14, I’ll tell you what it says. So they ended up dead-end into the Red Sea. Pharaoh has changed his mind by now, and the horses and chariots are breathing down on the people of God. And the people started freaking out. They were saying things to Moses like, “What, they didn’t have enough graves in Egypt, so you had to bring us out here for us to die? We were happier back there and the comfort of our brick making than we are going to be out here getting torn apart by Pharaoh’s army.” And so Pharaoh is coming, breathing down.

And Moses looks up and he says, “What are we going to do?” And this is the way God spoke to Moses. He said, :Here’s what you’re going to do. You’re just going to stand here, and you’re going to watch me bring salvation to you. You just stand here and you watch, and then I’m going to do something amazing.” Let me tell you what God did. God took the angel in front of the people. There’d been an angel along with the cloud and the fire leading them. The angel went around behind the people, it says in chapter 14, and the angel of God stood between the people of God in the pursuing army. And all through the night, the angel kept a distance between the two people. And when they came, God said to Moses, “Stretch out your staff, you’re rod.” And he stretched the staff out, and God brought wind and opened up the waters, dried the ground, and the people of God went through the Red Sea.

All the Pharaoh’s armies were so bold. They thought, ‘We’re going in after them. They poured in after them. And as soon as Israel got through, the waters came back over and completely wiped out Pharaoh and all of his army. And standing on the other side, Israel is a whole different group of people. They have a whole different mindset than they had before. And they’re like, “You got to be kidding me. We just stood and then God saved. We stood and God delivered. All we could do was stand. God did all the miraculous work.” And they were like, “Praise be unto God. Now we’re ready for the Philistine army. We know no matter what it looks like, God is going to come through for us.”

And they didn’t know that a few days before, but now they knew that God was their defender from behind, and he was their deliverer moving forward. They knew that God would put an angel behind them to protect them from their pursuers and God would open away before them, miraculously delivering them in a great salvation. And they learned that by going the hard way. And then you turn the page to the next chapter, they’re like, “We don’t know how to eat.” And he said, “How about manna for breakfast? And how about quail for dinner?” Everyday manna. Everyday quail. It’s a pretty good catering gig right there. I mean, where are you going to prepare that, right?

And all of a sudden, God is just providing for his people. All this is pointing to Jesus, so that we in this building tonight, all these pages later, celebrate the fact that all we could do, faced with our sin and shame, was just stand and watch Jesus open the way with his life, death, and resurrection and win the day for us. That we could walk through his salvation, his forgiveness, on dry land and be saved permanently in the love and the grace of God. It all points to Jesus so that we know that even in a desert, Jesus himself said, “I am the bread of life. Come down out of heaven. Whoever eats of me will live and not die.” The whole time God is just showing them that he is sufficient for them in the desert.

The **second thing** that God did in the desert, and the thing he does for us in the desert, is he just convinces us that he’s with us in the desert. And this is the big game changer for us. The series, it’s called *Waiting Here for You*. But you know, we could change that easily tonight. And we really could say, *We’re Waiting Here for You with You.* You see how that’s kind of crazy? It doesn’t sound like—like, it makes sense, but it makes perfect sense that in reality, we are waiting on God for a lot of things we mentioned and a lot of things we didn’t. We’re waiting for God to come and make the world right again.

But while we’re waiting, we’re not just sitting here alone waiting on God. People say that all the time. “Well, we’re just waiting on the Lord to do this and we’re waiting on the Lord to do that. And we’re waiting on the Lord to come through over here.” But we’re not just waiting on the Lord, we’re waiting with the Lord. And that’s the beauty, that in the desert and in the wasteland and in the waiting, God is with us. That’s what he says at the end, after leaving Sukkot, “Aren’t you glad you didn’t?”

Don’t live in Sukkot. You know, that’s just not a great place to be from. Where’s your house? That Sukkot where we are? Just Google it, man, and come on down. It’ll be exciting.

After leaving Sukkot, they camped at Ethan on the edge of the desert. And by day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night a pillar of fire to give them light so they could travel by day and by night. Now, this isn’t a promise for us, that we’re going to going to get a cloud in the daytime and fire it the nighttime. We got it way better than that.

This is a promise that it’s at some point in time as history unfolds, Jesus is coming, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is going to take up residence in our lives. And the story is now going to be God is with us, and he is so great with us. We can travel in the darkness and in the light, we can travel at night or high noon. We can take the high road, the low road, the tough road, the joyous road. It doesn’t matter the circumstance because we’re not just waiting on God. We are waiting with God. And Jesus is with us in the waiting. And this is the message we’re celebrating at Christmas.

This is the message of Christmas. We went to the Atlanta Symphony last night. Anybody been to the symphony lately? Anybody here? Anybody? Any symphony goers here? Okay, awesome, that’s encouraging. If you’ve ever been to the symphony, you’ve never felt better about yourself than when you went to the symphony. I know we got a younger crowd here, so don’t boo or throw things at me, but this is a different speed, okay, than going to Justin Bieber show. This is like the most brilliant minds writing the most brilliant music being performed by the most brilliant musicians. And when you walk in the door, you feel smarter than you did before you got there and you start acting smarter.

Yes. You know what I’m talking about, don’t you? You’re standing in the lobby going, “Yes, that’s wonderful.” We also were. “That’s fantastic. Yes. Oh it’s wonderful, yes. So nice to see you as well. Oh, welcome. You know, it’s so good. Very good.” I mean, you feel cultured, refined, superior. You—none of you raise your hands. So maybe you don’t know what I’m feeling right now, but you feel good. You got on your suit, you’ve got on something cool, you got on red at Christmas time and you’re at the Woodruff Fine Arts Center at the peak of culture last night in the city.

And all of a sudden, the concert master comes out. First there’s the violin. He’s the last guy out. And when he comes out, they don’t even need cue cards to go, “Quiet please, in the audience.” Everybody just goes. And he stands and faces the orchestra. There’s the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra chorus, there’s the Morehouse Glee Club. Come on. That’s worth the price of admission. There’s the Gwinnett Young Singers, there’s a 75-piece orchestra, the 300 people on stage.

And he does a “hmm.” And he sits down, conductor comes out, everybody’s like, and he’s like, and then he gets ready and he turns to them. Have you been there before? You know what I’m talking about? You didn’t say you’d been there. Now you’re nodding along. And he kind of gets, he’s like, I don’t know what he looks like. I’ve never seen his face, but I’m thinking he is going, and it’s just this big pregnant moment and everybody’s completely leaning in. This is last night, 300 of the most talented people in the city and some in the world. And he goes, and they start. And the first words are the words that were in our journey today. I was so excited. And I got up this morning and read the meditation.

I’m like, the very first words of the top of the top of the top of the top of the hoy toy culture of the city. All of us sitting up feeling good, you know, “Emmanuel and ransom, captive Israel that mourns and lonely exile here until the son of God appear, rejoice, rejoice. Emmanuel shall come to the oh Israel.” And that’s when every refined core puzzle in your being is holding the arm rest of the chair. And you’re going, because you want to go, “yay.” I’m sorry ma’am. I know I just scared you really, really bad.

And you’re like, “Yes. That’s why there’s music, that’s why there’s art, that’s why there’s culture. That’s why there’s beauty on earth. That’s why there’s a song to sing. That’s why there’s hope. That’s why we’re all celebrating. That’s why there’s Christmas. That’s why there’s a season, because the prophet Isaiah said a virgin will give birth to a child and they will call his name Emmanuel.”

And let me tell you about Emmanuel. Emanuel means God with us. And so, 400 years of silence is broken by the cry of a baby. And Jesus appears, God in human skin, God now dwelling with men and now by the power of the spirit. We know this Jesus, we love this Jesus. We have been joined and united with this Jesus, the one who did come and is coming again. Now we’re stuck in a waiting game where God does work powerfully, but everything’s still not all right And in the waiting, this is the hope.

You’re not just waiting on God, you’re waiting with God. You’re not just waiting on God to come through, you’re waiting with Jesus while you’re waiting on God to come through. Because Jesus is in the waiting with you. You see, it’s not about a journey to the promised land. That’s not the deal. The journey is to the promised one and with the promised one. And we sang when I was growing up in church, “I’m bound for the promised land.” And I am. And we are. But we’re bound for the promised land, and on the way we’re going with the promised one. They didn’t even have a clue. They’re like, “Man, I wish I lived back in the time of Moses and I could see that pillar of fire going at night.”

And we’ve got it way better than a pillar of fire. You have Jesus. I mean, look how far back in the story they lived. They didn’t know God was coming down in human skin in a manger. They didn’t know that the plan all along was for him to take your sin and shame and mind and give his life in death on a cross. And they didn’t know that when he ascended, raised up from the dead, that he would give the Holy Spirit so that each one of us could be brought to life again forever and be joined as sons and daughters of God with Christ forever. And they didn’t have the promise and they didn’t have the indwelling Christ. But you know what they did? They still worshiped in the desert. And that’s the last thing I’ll say about it.

The reason why we have a desert is so that we can learn that **God is enough**. And the reason why we have a desert is so that we can come to recognize the presence of God. So if you’re going to chemo this week, I’m telling you you’re not just going with your friend, your neighbor, or your family member. Jesus is going to sit in there with you. If you’re going to mediation, I’m telling you, you’re not just going into mediation with your counselor or your lawyer or your friend or attorney. You’re going into mediation and Emmanuel is going with you. If you get incarcerated and you get put behind bars, and that has also happened to some people who’ve been in this room with us very recently, you have the hope of knowing that when you get incarcerated, Jesus is going in with you.

And all the time you’re going to do it, he’s going to do it with you, because he said, “I’ll never leave you or forsake you. And I don’t check my holy robe at the front door of the prison. I will go with you the whole way club by day, fire by night. My name is Jesus and I will be with you and end you the whole way. And I’ll be enough for you when there is nothing else, I will be man of for you in the desert. And I will make a way for you in the dead end.” And when those things are true, the desert becomes the place where our songs are born. And I know that sounds crazy but trust me, you know this to be true.

Our great anthems are not born on the mountaintop. They are born in the valley. Our great songs of hope are not born on our best day. They’re born on our hardest day. And the stories of life that we tell are the stories of waiting, dreaming, everything crashing and burning everything almost completely collapsing. Us being within an inch of total devastation, and somehow miraculously God coming through for us. Those are the stories we tell. That’s the ones our coworkers lean into. That’s the ones our neighbors say. Could you tell me that one more time? Not all life’s great, God’s wonderful, we’re Christians and everything so happy and our world. No, the stories are, we had a plan, we had a dream, we had a hope and everything crashed and everything burned and then God came through and we made it through the Red Sea by the power of Almighty God.

And when everything else was gone, Jesus was enough. And not only was he enough, we came to love him so much because we had nothing but him. And we learned more than ever, he is the most important person on this planet. And his love is what we were made for. And our love for him is our greatest gift in life, and in in the desert is where the songs are born.

Let me just try this idea, and I know I got to wrap up and I will, but let me just try this idea. So we all trust Jesus on a Tuesday, and then we die and go to heaven on Wednesday. Isn’t that a better plan actually? And an angel shows up to ask you for sure. “Are you really, really sure you’re saved?” I’m really, really sure. “Okay, you’re going to heaven today.” Boom, you’re done.

You don’t have any suffering. No struggle, no trials, no hardship, no dark nights, no 30 years of trying to navigate a broken planet. No 50 years of trying to navigate hardship. No 70 years of having to live with the pain of waiting. You trust God, you go to heaven. Isn’t that the plan anyway? No, that is not the plan anyway. The plan is that God gets glory and that we fall in love with Jesus. And I wonder what song we sing if we meet God on Tuesday and go to heaven on Wednesday.

Yes, we’re glad we’re saved, but we don’t really know what we’re saved from fully, because we haven’t lived in the fullness of the freedom of what it means to stand on the other side of the Red Sea and go, “We are not dead. We are alive and we are moving on with God into better places. We are moving into his promise for our lives and it has gotten better and better. Not easier and easier but better and better as we have followed him.” And I’m telling you, heaven is going to be amazing because of the waiting we’ve lived in heaven is going to be amazing because of the trials we’ve been through.

Heaven’s going to be awesome because we’ve been down but we were not knocked out. Heaven is going to be a celebration because we’re going to all have scars all over our lives and we’re going to stand there and worship the one whose scars trumped all of our scars and whose wounds healed all of our wounds. And that’s what heaven’s going to be about. That’s what heaven’s going to be about. So when you are going through the valley, when you’re going through the valley, you’re getting a song because that’s where songs are born and that’s where praise happens.

I want to show you one quick way and then I’ll close. Chapter 15. So we’re in 13, 14, 15. Just listen to this, you don’t need to turn to it. The waters washed away the Egyptian army, and chapter 15 opens like this. “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.” Now what song did they sing on the other side of the Red Sea? Can you remind me of that song? What song did they sing on the other side?

They didn’t sing any songs on the other side. They were just freak out mode. “Where’s God? Why are we here? What? This is awful. We’re going to die. They’re coming after us. This is a bad plan.” There was no, “Man, I’m telling you what. The Pharaoh’s army’s coming. Let’s just sing a tune.” No. But as soon as they made it to the other side and the waters covered the armies of the Pharaoh, the very next verse says, “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.” Because worship is born out of deliverance.

And until you’re delivered, you got nothing to sing. Except the lament, which is, “I hope God’s going to come through. I don’t know if God’s going to come through, but I hope God comes through.” But once you are delivered, your lament turns into a song of worship, a song of praise unto God. And in the middle of their song, I love the way it’s written, one of my favorite passages of worship and one of the great worship songs ever written. It says in the middle of this chapter, in the middle of this song, and it’s a long song. It says, “Who among the gods is like you? Oh Lord, who is like you, majestic and holiness awesome and glory and working wonders. You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them.” And then verse 13, man, just go home, highlight this, rest on this.

Trust in this. Believe in this. “In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed.” That’s pre-faith worship that’s saying, based on what we’ve seen, we believe now you are going to lead us. You didn’t save us through the sea to leave us in the desert. You saved us through the sea and you’re going to lead us to the promise and be with us on the journey. In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed in your strength. You will guide them to your holy dwelling.

We got to worship while we wait because worship keeps our face moving forward. Worship keeps our eyes moving forward, keeps our view on Jesus. So we don’t spend our whole lives looking back over our shoulders, wondering if our enemies really did drown. No, they really did drown. The same saving power of the blood of Jesus that delivered us in salvation wiped out our enemies forever. The same blood of Christ that washed us, brand new, washed our pursuers out forever. So we don’t have to keep looking back into the past to try to figure out who we are. We have the option of looking forward into the future and knowing that our God with his loving kindness is going to lead us on into his promise for our lives.

So I just want to encourage this in this advent season, quit looking over your shoulder. Quit looking back. Your hope isn’t in the past. Your hope is in Jesus. The answer to our lives is not in looking back into the past. The answer to our lives is in looking forward into the future. And we do that by worshiping God and saying, “Who is like you among the gods? Who is like you, majestic and holiness, awesome and glory, working wonders In your loving kindness? You will lead the people.” So we don’t spend our whole Christmas wondering what’s wrong with us. We spend our whole Christmas focused on what’s right with Jesus. Because the cloud was always in front and the fire was always in front and Jesus is always in front.

And he’s leading us on. The angel went behind to stop the pursuers, but God kept moving forward into the future he had purchased for his people. Someone encourage you. Don’t spend your waiting focusing on what’s missing, but ask God to help you. Start focusing on who’s with you. Praise God in the waiting, at least as much or more than you ask God to resolve the problem. Praise God for who he is and what he’s done in the midst of the waiting, and help ask him to help you see that he is near. That he’s near.

So while you’re weeping, waiting for your spouse to come home, you can take the hand of Jesus who’s sitting with you and waiting with you, who’s holding you the whole time, and who’s enough for you. The whole time. When you walk into that waiting room, you don’t have to distract yourself with the Newsweek magazine, but the Time Magazine is just simply covered with 80 layers of germs of all the other sick people that were there. You don’t have to be distracted.

You can totally zero in on the fact that Emmanuel came with you. And when you walk in to see the doctor, you’re walking in hand in hand with the savior of the world. God showed up and he’ll show up everywhere there’s waiting and he will be enough everywhere there’s waiting. If you set your eyes on him and say, Jesus, I need you to come through right here and right now for me.