

God's Plan, Worth Waiting For

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Dear congregation, our plans are not the best plans. Our plans, even if God allows them to go forward, can be to our own detriment. Think of how Abram and Sarah planned with Hagar to pursue the seed of the promise. It was their plan, but it was not a good plan, and it was to theirs and others' detriment. Think of that plan that David had. Children, do you remember how he was once offended by Nabal having guarded his vineyards for a whole season and Nabal insulted him and David came with his army against Nabal and God graciously stopped him. But that plan was not a good plan. Or think of Peter's plan. Peter said to Christ that he should never suffer when the Lord Jesus told his disciples of his suffering. "May it never be," he said. What if Peter's plan had succeeded? Peter's plan was bad. And maybe this has happened also in your own life, that you had a certain plan and you followed your own devices and you ended up in darkness. You know, the Lord can give us over to our own plans, as we see in our text passage with Israel. But that's not for good, it's for spiritual leanness, as we'll see. How necessary it is for us, especially as we come together for prayer, to depend on God's plan, and to look for God's plan in everything.

As we see from this remarkable Psalm, and our text is especially verse 13. Psalm 106, verse 13, where we read about Israel, "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel." They waited not for his counsel. Or as another translation has it, they didn't wait for God's plan to unfold. Our theme looking to the Lord this evening for a few brief moments is "God's Plan, Worth Waiting For." First, a few things about this remarkable Psalm, Psalm 106. We read it together. It's a Psalm of confession, of sin in which Israel brings before the Lord their frequent, their constant really, transgressions. They list them, they enumerate them, they picture them graphically in all their heinousness and that despite the Lord's mercy. But the Psalm is divided into three parts, verses 1 through 5 is really an invitation to bless the Lord with a personal prayer that we might share in the Lord's favor; and then the bulk of the Psalm, 6 through 46, is really covenant history, a catalog of the people's failings despite divine mercies; and then thirdly, and lastly, very briefly at the end, there's a petition, a prayer for restoration, and then a blessing of God for his everlasting mercy. And so really, in a certain sense, this Psalm 106 is a summary of the whole Bible. It's of man's sin and God's mercy and they're like two strands that are woven together, man's sin and God's salvation, and at sometimes man's sin comes to the surface and then God's mercy comes to the surface.

And so the tapestry of the Psalm is woven together, man's sin and God's salvation, and really that's the sum of the whole bible isn't it and you say, "But where is Christ in the Psalm?" Well, sometime later, look at how Moses is pictured as interceding for the people and how Phinehas stood up and defended the honor of God and there you'll see, yes, faint, but portraits of what the Lord Jesus Christ came to do in the fullness of time, sin and salvation. But our focus here is especially on this remarkable word in verse 13, "they waited not for his counsel," for his plan to unfold, and as we begin, I'd like to just say a few things in general about guidance. How do we know the Lord's guidance in our lives, and I'm speaking here to young people, to children, and really to all of us, but many times we can ask, and this is a very good question, how does God guide his people, and there are really seven things I want to just very quickly, based on the whole of the Bible, put before you. If this is your concern at this time, how may I know the Lord's guidance in my life in this particular issue or that particular course of life? And the first word is glory, the glory of God. We all should be about the glory of God. Whatsoever you do, whether you eat or drink or anything else, the Bible says, do all to the glory of God, and that's really the key to everything and that's why the Westminster Shorter Catechism says so very directly and incisively that God has made us to know him, and to enjoy him forever, and to live for his glory is the sum of it. And the Bible says, for example, in Ecclesiastes 12, that that means that we fear God. We dealt with that a few weeks ago in the preaching, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and that we ought to live in the fear of God all the day. We haven't even started on the journey of pleasing God unless we know this fear of God by his grace in our hearts, and the way the Lord Jesus put it, and it's really the same thing but in different words, is, seek first the kingdom of heaven and everything else shall be added unto you. In other words, do you want to know about guidance in your life? Seek God's glory. Seek his kingdom. Be all about God. Don't, in the first analysis, worry about yourself, but be consumed with the glory of the worthy God, his kingdom, his might, and to spread his glory throughout this world. Whatever you do, whatever ends up being your calling, and we'll talk about that secondly, but whatever your calling is, be about the glory of God.

So what do we mean by calling? Well, God does everything by calling. He calls his people to salvation. The effectual call of God, he's called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. And that basically means that God opens his mouth and he lays hold of us. He claims us for himself. And what that means, too, is that's not just in salvation, but that's in all of life, that God claims you in his service to do whatever he has called you to do. Now, that's going to look different for different people, but whoever you are, if you are a child of God, you need to think of your life in terms of, what does God call me to do? When you wake up in the morning, it's, what is God calling me to do? And when you choose a career or when you consider marriage or singlehood, what is God's calling for me? You look at it in terms of what God wants you to do, not simply what your own desires are. Yeah, desires play into this, but all underneath God's calling.

And the same is true for work, too. If you're a farmer who plows the field and this is what God has given you to do, you need to do it as unto the Lord. You need to wake up in the morning and you need to plow the fields and sow the seed and tend to your crops and harvest them and take this all to wherever you take this and sell this and all for the glory

of God. That ought to be your all-consuming purpose. It's not your paycheck. It's not what you can buy with the things that you earn but you need to do what you do to the glory of God, whether it's in the home, in school, or in the office, or out on the land, or even retired; that ought to be your all-consuming desire, is to fulfill God's calling in your life.

Thirdly, stewardship. What talents and gifts and skills has God entrusted to you that you will need to give account of in the day of days? You know the parable of the talents. God gave to the one, one, two, five, and God calls at the end each to give account of their stewardship and we have so much to give account of. If you have a healthy body, if you have a healthy mind, If you've been placed in a free country as we have, with all the concerns that we may have, if you've been raised in a Christian home, if you have a Bible in your home, if you have air in your lungs, if you have a brain that works, if you have feet that move, you will give account of all those things. You will give account of the opportunities that you've been given and to think about that, to steward that as unto the Lord.

Now I have very few gifts for farming. I have tried planting a garden and a few things work out, and other people, they seem to do this and everything works out well; they have much more skill. Now, that doesn't mean that I shouldn't garden. It doesn't mean that the Lord can't call me to that but as you discern that, and young people, you too, what do you have gifts in? What has God given you legitimate gifts in? Is your mind able to work really fast, really hard? Are you able to put things together? Do you enjoy that? Then find things in those areas whereby you can glorify God, knowing that you will give account of those things. And also, desires. What are your desires? What do you enjoy doing, provided it's legitimate, it's a God-given, it's a legitimate area of calling? Then pay attention to those things. And also opportunity. Some people, they love to do this or that, but they're never given the opportunity. Well, opportunities are things to steward as well.

So the glory of God, calling by God, and stewardship unto God. Also, if you really want to know how to be guided by the Lord, you need to walk with the Lord and you need to commune with him through his words. That's how the Lord talks to you through his word. As you read his word, this is his inspired word, it comes from his mouth and you should live by every word that comes out of his mouth. It's a living word. It's not just an old book written many years ago, but God speaks still through it to us today. Read the word of God. Study it. Get to know the word of God. Get skilled by grace and by study to interpret the word of God. Make it your business to get more and more at home with all your head and with all your heart in this book because it's God's word.

But also pray to God. So, in our devotion time, in our quiet time, God speaks to us through his word, and we speak to him through prayer and we lay our needs before him, and we put our requests before him, and we praise him, and we thank him, and we supplicate, and we intercede for others, and so we have communion by grace with God, and that's how we don't lean on our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct our paths. And you come to church, you are under the means of grace, you listen to what God has to say to you, what he determines through the minister

that you should hear, and you give your mind to it, and you listen, not to a man, but you listen for what God says in his word, and you compare scripture with scripture, and you're like a Berean who reads the word of God, and you study it. And it's not about the man. It's about the word of God, communion with God.

And then, we're not just individuals by ourselves as islands, all by ourselves, lonely. No, God has given us to be part of a church and that means that there are older Christians, there's younger Christians, there's to be a family. And you know how it is in the family. If it's right, we lean on each other, we learn from each other. We don't just make decisions all by ourselves. You ask your mom, don't you? You ask your dad. And you can ask the elders. And you can ask the pastor that the Lord will bring to us in his time. And that's like a family. You ask for advice. You ask for counsel. And you ask people to pray for you. You're an arm, a hand, and a foot to each other. That's what a body needs to be. And so when you have needs, and when you don't know what to do, then you seek for counsel from other godly people, experienced people, people who have seen more, people who know fellowship with the Lord and can humbly give you advice, the body. And also, I would say, you serve other people in the body. It's not just about what you can get from the body, but it's more even what you can give to the body and so you're there, especially for needy people in the church. You look out for them, and you reach into their lives, and you seek to help them, because the Lord would have you do that. He makes that very clear. And you can have a lot of fulfillment, a lot of joy. I know that myself a lot of times when I have struggles or problems or confusion or sometimes I'm writing a sermon and I just run stuck, and of course, I pray and I seek God, but as I move among people, sometimes even people who have no idea what I'm dealing with or struggling with or up against in preaching, a lot of times God is using these people as I speak with them and I walk away from a visit like that and I know my next sentence. I know the next thought. I know because God is in the midst of his people like that.

And an important thing, too, is to keep the Sabbath day holy and young people and children, I hope all your days that you will remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. God wants that. It's in his law. And you're not serving God if you just work seven days a week, and your boss asks you to work seven days. No, you can't do that. Six days shall you labor, and one day you shall worship God, especially in his house, and you go to hear what God will say.

Now, sixthly, I just want to bring this up here, the ministry and serving God with your life. Some of our forefathers said everyone who is a true Christian should consider how it is and whether it is that God would use them in ministry. Of course, for men that may be in the various offices as pastor, as elder, deacon, but also as a woman, as a young woman, you can ask God how you can serve him in his church, or in missions, or maybe as a nurse, or as a teacher, or as a mom; however that God would have you do this, but you should put his service in your mind. You should ask God if God is preparing you for one or more of those areas of service. There have been people in history, and I've known some myself, that even at a young age, God called them into the ministry, or God laid upon the heart of a young woman, a young girl, that she would go into missions, that she

would give herself to that and help people come to know the Lord who didn't know the Lord.

Now, that doesn't mean that everyone is called into the ministry or to be a missionary but to consider it prayerfully is very good. Now the ministry, to know whether you ought to devote yourself full-time to the Lord in either an office or in mission or whatever it is, there needs to be this unshakable burden for the glory of God and the eternal good of people no matter the cost, an unshakable burden for the glory of God and the eternal good of people no matter the cost. Ministry is not some glorious thing where everything goes your way. The Christian life is giving your body a living sacrifice to the Lord, but in ministry, it's all the more so. You face the assaults of Satan. You face the attacks of unbelievers. Even God's people can sometimes make things difficult for you. You need to know, like Paul did, you need to have this unshakable desire and compulsion to seek the glory of God and God makes this clear in the lives of those whom he's calling into full-time ministry. And so I just put that to you as part of this question of guidance.

And then the seventh thing is this, and this applies to every Christian. When you consider guidance and when you consider your calling, then don't choose the easy way. The Bible makes clear that with being a Christian, there's a cost, even a heavy cost. And the Bible makes clear, too, that Christians should not shy away from difficult things. Worldlings, worldly people, they have that attitude and even in the world, you'll find people who do very hard things and at some level we can admire that, but how much more not for the Lord, to not shy away from suffering, to not shy away from the cost of following the Lord Jesus. Being a parent comes with a cost and it comes with suffering. It comes with self-denial. And so do many other things. A lot of people, when they're faced with a choice, they look at, well, "What's easier? What's more pleasant? What's going to give me more free time? What's going to give me more money? What's going to give me more relaxation? What am I going to enjoy more?" And you have to be careful with this but I think a lot of times the Lord wants us to do the more difficult thing for his glory and indeed, don't forget the other points I've mentioned here, but life here is not to be at ease. There's an eternity of joy in the presence of God. But while it is day, we ought to labor, the Lord Jesus Christ told his disciples. Now, that doesn't mean that you simply embrace difficulty for difficulty's sake. No, don't misunderstand me. This doesn't mean that you simply go into some suffering because, well, we have to all suffer. I'm not saying that either. But just be careful of this mindset that's come into our world and into the church that prefers ease, prefers things that are easy to us.

Now having spoken there generally about guidance, I want to say a few things about how our plans are not the best plans. Notice what the Lord says about his people here. He had delivered them from bondage in Egypt, and they had come through the Red Sea, and the Lord had overturned the designs of their captors, of the Egyptians, and they saw the works of the Lord and it even says here in verse 12, they believed his words. They sang his praise. But right after that, they soon forgot his works. They waited not for his counsel. And what that means is our plans are not the best plans because, first of all, we are so forgetful. We're such forgetful creatures. We forget the deeds of the Lord in the past, the things that are recorded in the Bible. We forget what he's done in our own lives.

We're like Israel. The Lord has done so many great things for us, hasn't he, people of God, and yet how often we just, we forget them. We suffer from spiritual amnesia, just like Israel did here.

The second reason our plans are not always the best plans is because we are impatient. Notice how it says here, "they waited not for his counsel." The picture here is of the people having come out of Egypt, the Lord had delivered them, but pretty soon they start to realize that they don't have water and where are they going to get water? And so they murmur and they complain. And sometime later they wonder where their food is going to come from and they murmur and they complain. Why? Because they're impatient and you and I are so often impatient. It seems like given the pace of our world where so much is about instant gratification, that we too want things now. We want things right at our doorstep without doing much for them. The Bible calls us often to wait. They waited not for his counsel.

And the third reason why our plans are not always the best plans is because we are carnal. What that means is we're worldly-minded. We're so often selfish. We want the wrong things and we say "my needs, my wants, are most important." And you can see it here with the people. They lusted, it says, exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert, and he gave them their request. He's talking there about the quails, that they wanted meat. They were tired of manna. They wanted meat. And their desires were lustful. Their desires were carnal and worldly. And by nature we're no different and Christians, too, can want many of the wrong things, or on the wrong terms, or in the wrong way, or at the wrong time. I have a quote here from Matthew Henry, "Many that fare deliciously every day, and whose bodies are healthful, have leanness in their souls: no love to God, no thankfulness, no appetite for the Bread of life, and then the soul must be lean." Later on he goes on to say even the Lord's people are often guilty of this.

Shall we examine ourselves? Are we like Israel? Are we forgetful of God's marvelous works? Are we impatient? Are we carnally minded? You know, God could give you what you wanted, but it would be a curse to you. It would bring leanness into your soul. What does that mean? Well, leanness is when you're just emaciated. Maybe you've seen pictures of children who don't get enough to eat, and we need to seek to help them, but there they are, and their bodies are just skin over bones. And that's sad. But what if your soul is like that? What if you never feed your soul? Or what if you pray for something, and God gives it to you, but it's wrong, and there you are, and your soul is just pining away? Leanness. It's an unhappy condition. It's an ineffective condition.

Our plans are not the best plans but, congregation, thanks be to God his plans are the best. His counsel is wonderful. It's worth waiting for because God is a God of wonders, first of all. This whole chapter is filled of it. He does wonders, undeserved things, miraculous things that you and I could never make happen and that you and I could never deserve or ever repay. God is a God of wonders. His counsel shall stand. His counsel is good. His plans are good. "I know the plans I have for you," he says, for his people. His plans are worth waiting for.

Secondly, God's plans are worth waiting for because God is the perfect guide of his people. He knows exactly what you need to most glorify him. You don't know tomorrow. You don't know a year from now. You don't know what will most glorify God, but God does and God orders everything in our lives in order that we would most glorify him. That's his counsel. That's his plan. And sometimes that's affliction. Sometimes that's great suffering, even. Sometimes that's to wean us off of our self and our self-reliance. And because we're such poor students, it takes a long time, and it takes a lot of difficulty and suffering, but God knows what he's doing. God is the potter. We are the clay. God is the greatest guide and he is the Lord of each of his people.

Also, God's plans are worth waiting for because God is a God of mercy. This Psalm, if there's one refrain running throughout this Psalm, it is that God is merciful for his own namesake. He has a heart of mercy for rebels, for wayward sons and daughters like you and me. And should we then not wait for his counsel? Should we not be enthralled with his plan? Should we not, as we sang earlier, be like servants and handmaidens that look to the hand of their master and to the hand of their mistress and wait upon God for what God is doing and God is all about and God is accomplishing in our lives and God is accomplishing in this world?

He's a God of mercy. If you're here today and you say, "You know, this Psalm is my Psalm. I've strayed times without number. I've gone my own way. I'm like Israel, only worse. I forget God. I murmur. I complain. I don't do the things I should do and I do the things I shouldn't do." My friend, his merciful arms are outstretched still. Though we oft have sinned against him, still his grace and his love abide. But do plead for his mercy. Do you notice verse 47? "Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen." Also you, my friend, that you would taste and see that the Lord is good, despite all your sin, all your shortcoming, all your unbelief, all your rebellion, all your going your own way. And maybe today you're lean. Spiritually, your soul is at starvation point. But God's mercy can fill you up, can make you fat and flourishing, to use the biblical language. When he pours that into your soul through Jesus Christ, when you humble yourself before him, and you plead for mercy, and you plead with him to save you, like that second to last verse says and you ask the Lord to give you that undivided attention to his word, and to live by his word, that your soul may feed on his word, then our bodies may waste away through suffering, through difficulty, through old age, through disease even, but as long as our souls are prospering, soul prosperity.

Three brief applications and I'll just give you the sentences. As we consider that God's plan is worth waiting for, beware of self-centered motives. Beware of self-centered motives. They cling to us. They're subtle. Even in religious things, beware, my friend, beware. Secondly, know and follow God's revealed will. That's his revealed counsel. We don't know his secret counsel. God will unfold his secret counsel, but he's given us his revealed will, which is this book. And read this, and study it, and know God through it, depending on him. Know and follow. Don't just become big-headed in knowledge without also in your heart and in your life following the Lord fully like Caleb did. Thirdly

and lastly, live a life depending on God. Wait for God. Look to God. Don't run ahead of God, but follow behind him and be every day looking to him as a servant looks to his master. All through Christ and for his glory. Amen.

Gracious, good-doing guide of all thy people through the wilderness of this world, we confess, Lord, that we are like Israel. We go astray. We follow our own plans. We are so impatient and self-seeking and forgetful. Lord, forgive us. Wash us. Cleanse us. Make us new all for Jesus' sake, and help us to wait for thy plan and while we wait, help us to be all about thy counsel. Help us to know what it is that thou shouldst guide us by thy counsel, and afterward, receive us to glory. We pray this all in Jesus' name, and for his sake alone. Amen.

Let's sing in conclusion, 362. 362, all the stanzas.