

Sermon Title: Sermon – Waiting for the Marshmallow – November 24, 2013 (Scripture is from the ESV)

Introduction

Good afternoon, New Philly Itaewon! It's been a while since I've last preached here. In case you don't know who I am, my name is John-Michael Becker and I am one of the community pastors here at Itaewon. While I help serve as a lay pastor here, my job in Korea is directing an orphanage ministry called Jerusalem Ministry and teaching English at a children's home near Gimpo Airport. I have lived here in Korea for almost eight years now.

While I helped plant this church back in 2010, I don't think I have ever shared my testimony here at Itaewon. So today, before the message, I want to share with you all how I came to Christ and then how God led me to Korea...

Testimony of How God Led Me to Christ

I was born into a Christian family in Northern Virginia, just outside Washington DC. My parents put me in a Christian school through grade eight and I also attended church and the church's youth group. While I learned how to act like a Christian and didn't get in much trouble, I didn't have a personal relationship with the Lord until I was sixteen. It was during worship at a Christian camp center that I heard God's voice for the first time. He spoke gently to me, "I love you," and in that moment I some different memories flashed in my mind. They were memories of different people showing me love, and behind every person I could see God working through them. It was in that moment that I understand 1John 4:19, "We love because God first loved us." I understand in that moment that all the love I have ever received has come from God because God is love. Love originates from Him. I had understood the revelation of the Cross for some time but that didn't impact me as much as the revelation that God is and has been active in every moment of my life, showing His love to me. It was in that moment that I dedicated my life to Him about began to actively seek Him in my life.

It was during my time at Virginia Tech studying engineering that my relationship with God really grew. It was also during that time that God began to reveal His true plan for me.

Testimony of How God Led Me to Korea

During my final year of studying engineering at Virginia Tech I spent a considerable amount of time in prayer and fasting for my future. I made up a long list of different career possibilities including different jobs, countries, and ministries and prayed over them. As the year went by, God began crossing different options off the list. By the time graduation came around, the only thing left on my list was doing missions in Japan. A prayer of mine from the beginning was that my parents and I together would be led by God very clearly concerning my future. My parents were not at peace with me serving in Japan, but did understand my heart for ministry and were willing to let me go there for one year or two. I did not feel at peace with any of this. God had not yet made Japan clear to me or to my parents. It felt like I was just settling on it as the last option.

I graduated in May of 2005 and upon coming home I told my mom I would be fasting for one day each week. She asked me why and I told her I was going to continue to fast for guidance for my future. She told me that my future was important to her and to my dad and that they would join me in fasting. This was a great blessing to me.

Interestingly, the day after our first fast, my father told me that he had a dream that I was at the orphanage in Korea with the kids and the orphanage's founder Pastor Yoon Kwon Chae. This seemed so random that we laughed about it. (My father had met this pastor in Virginia one time back in the 1980's. I had also visited the orphanage in Korea for a couple days in 2003, but never thought anything would come of it.) This dream seemed completely out of the blue. Because at that point I was focused on Japan, we didn't take it too seriously.

In the next few weeks, though, God made it clear that I was not to go to Japan, so once again my future was wide open. My once long list of career options had been completely crossed out. I began working a job at a construction site as I waited for God to speak and lead me.

About a month after the dream of the orphanage my dad had another dream. This time it was a nightmare. Now I didn't know this about my dad, but he is the type of guy that lies down, goes to sleep, and wakes up. He very rarely remembers his dreams. After this bad nightmare he got out of bed in the middle of the night and went into another room and opened his Bible and began praying, asking God, "Why did you let me have this horrible dream?" As he was reading through Scripture and praying, God spoke to him in a very clear way. God said to him, "I speak in dreams. Pay attention!" At that moment my dad immediately remembered the dream he had of me being in the orphanage in Korea. So the next day he approached me and told me about this second dream and what God had told him. As he was telling me about his second dream, it clicked in my mind... I had literally been praying for my dad to dream dreams!

You see, every semester and summer I make new entries in my prayer journal. I write down peoples' names and pray for them. As I pray for them, sometimes the Spirit will put something specific on my heart to pray for that person and I will write it down in the journal and lift up that specific request every time I pray for them. Well, the day after I graduated, I made a new entry in my prayer journal and my dad was the first name I wrote down. As I prayed for him that day, the Spirit put a verse on my heart. The verse was Joel 2:28, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." I prayed over the verse and couldn't understand exactly how it related to my dad. I kept going over it in my head, "your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions..." and finally decided, "Well, my dad is my old man, I'll pray that he dreams dreams." So I wrote that in my journal, "Dream dreams, walks in your Spirit." And just a few days later my father had that first dream of me at the orphanage, and then a month later he had the second dream where God tells him, "Pay attention, I'm speaking!" After I told my dad I had been praying for him to dream dreams, he told me I need to e-mail Pastor Chae at the orphanage in Korea and find out what is happening there. We began praying over this possibility of serving in Korea.

I e-mailed Pastor Chae (who can speak English, thankfully) and asked if I could be of any help at the home. This began a long, slow process of trading e-mails with him. He would e-mail me every few weeks to tell me, "The staff is considering, but we don't know yet." In the mean time, as summer ended and fellow graduates were starting their careers, I continued to work construction, wait, and pray, believing that God had a plan for my future.

In late September, one night as I was laying in bed about to go to sleep, I found myself reflecting on the different faith jumps Korea would present (living in an orphanage that doesn't speak English, living with a ton of kids, being on my own, not having a secure future,

and even knowing I'd have to eat kimchi everyday). Then, amidst thinking of these concerns, God suddenly turned my mind to His promises. I remembered Hebrews 13:5, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." The end of the Great Commission in Matthew is this, "Surely I am with you always, even now to the very end of the age." I felt God's peace fall on me. I remembered all the times I had told God I would obey Him no matter what and go wherever He would send me. Now, because of His peace, I knew I finally had the strength to not just say I would obey Him, but to actually follow through and do it.

About a week later my mom received an e-mail from a distant friend. This lady asked how I was doing. My mom replied that I was currently working construction and praying about my future... that I would either be getting an engineering job soon or perhaps serving at an orphanage in Korea. Her friend replied to that e-mail by telling my mom that she had just paid off all her debts and also had started a new job with an increase in pay. She is a prayerful woman and during one of her times of prayer God directed her to give the money from her raise to missions. As she prayed for more direction about who exactly to give the money to, God put me upon her heart. She wrote to my mom that beginning in December she would begin giving \$1,500 a month for an entire year for wherever God would lead me. That is \$18,000 in support! I had not asked her or anyone for support money yet, this was completely a gift from God. My mom called me in and showed me the e-mail, and then looking at me in shock said, "Well, if Korea doesn't work out, you have to go somewhere!" I had to laugh. God was answering my prayer. He was leading my parents with me.

In fact, that same month my dad had two more vivid dreams of me living at the children's home in Korea. Before anything was confirmed, my family (parents, sisters, brother-in-law) gathered together and each shared their heart about me possibly leaving for Korea. They each felt God's hand was over everything that was happening. They each felt it would be beautiful for me to go love the children. They each voiced their blessing over me leaving and then together laid their hands on me and prayed for me.

Shortly after that family gathering, Pastor Chae e-mailed me that he and his staff had prayed and wanted to welcome me to the orphanage, requesting that I arrive by the end of the year. I would live in the guest room in the home and teach the children English. Right after I received the e-mail, I purchased my plane ticket to depart December 29, 2005.

During my time before leaving, God began speaking to my father about my future. My father shared with me that he feels this children's home will be my permanent home from here on out. That I will live there, but after a few years God will begin sending me on different missions for His work. God will take me to different places, but I will always return to the children's home to rest, recuperate, and prepare for the next sending. I felt in agreement with him in my Spirit and excitement grew within me about what would come. During this time God also reminded me of visions/daydreams I had when I was a 3rd year in college. For a few weeks whenever I would lie down and begin to drift off to sleep, I would have daydreams that would take me to poor towns and villages in Asia. I would be with a team of young adult volunteers. During the day we would build a church and an orphanage and serve the community. Every night we would gather together and worship God, read His Word, and pray for each other. We would simply rely on God. And after a year or two, after the community would become strong, we would go to the next town or village and do the same... place to place, just like the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts. I remember smiling as I would have these daydreams... it all just seemed so pure, just completely trusting in God's promises and going in faith. But after a few weeks of entertaining those daydreams, my lack of faith

caught up to me and I told myself, “I’m not cut out to be a missionary. I can’t speak a foreign language. I don’t have the experience. I like air conditioning and my car and American food. I’m an engineer. Those daydreams are for someone else.” And I quit letting my mind wander there again. But now, as I was preparing to go to Korea, God reminded me of those visions and I felt in my Spirit that there was a lot of truth in them. I had to repent for my lack of faith and recommit myself to Him. I began to feel that God was sending me to Korea to train me and prepare me for that work. By going to Korea I could learn the language, learn the children’s hearts, and build a team. My hope was that after five years or so I would have the language down, have grown in God’s love for the orphans, and would have a team of full time volunteers at different orphanages in Seoul. And then we would come together as a team and go and begin building orphanages for the orphans of North Korea, whether directly in North Korea or in North China for the refugees there. These were the hopes and visions that I carried with me to Korea and am continuing to pray towards.

Sermon Transition

God’s call for me to Korea took a lot time to play out. I waited on the Lord, waited some more, and waited some more. I kept expecting God to miraculously direct me in a fast and powerful way, but instead God took His time and in doing so made the calling so much more clear and powerful. In retrospect, it was very worth the wait. So was waiting for my spouse. And so will be the wait I am enduring for North Korea to open up. It will be worth it.

This is what I’ve felt led to give a short message about today: **waiting**. The title of the sermon, if you’re taking notes, is, “**Waiting for the Marshmallow.**”

To make sense of the title I’m going to show you a video of a marshmallow test. This test was originally done by Stanford professor Walter Mischel on a number of kindergarten children back in 1970. The purpose of the study was to understand when the ability to wait to obtain something that one wants develops in a child. Professor Mischel put 4 to 6 year old children in a room and put a treat of their choice on a table by a chair. The children were told if they were to wait for fifteen minutes that they would receive another treat, or they could just eat the treat in front of them and not receive another. This test has been repeated many times and I will share the results of it after this video... (go ahead and pause the podcast)

<https://vimeo.com/5239013> (3:44 total)

About 20 years after the first marshmallow tests Professor Mischel followed up on the participants from the study. He was shocked to find a strong correlation between the results of the marshmallow test and the success of the children many years later. Those who had waited longer had higher SAT scores, better grades, were healthier, much more likely to attend and graduate from college, and even proved better at staying in relationships. Amazing! The children were just 4 to 6 years old when they took the test, but their ability to wait even then would foreshadow how they would live their life and the decisions that they would make.

So my question to you all today: **What is your marshmallow?** I want you to think about that for a moment. What is something in your life that you are waiting for? It can be one, two, or a few things. I know some of you are waiting for a spouse. You know God has something good in store for you, but at the same time you’re ready to just take whatever is front of you and settle for it. For some of you your marshmallow is a calling to the entertainment mountain, or the media mountain, or simply breakthrough in your job situation. For some of you your

marshmallow is North Korea or another place in the world. Please take a moment and consider, “What is my marshmallow?” Write it down...

You have been waiting. Early on in your waiting there was sweet anticipation. But as time has passed, you’ve likely begun to find yourself like the kids in that video, squirming and wanting to just give in and settle with whatever is in front of you.

Let’s look at some of what the Bible has to say about waiting...

Psalm 27:14 – Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Psalm 37:34 – Wait for the Lord and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.

Isaiah 40:30-31 – Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but **they who wait for the Lord** shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint.

And a personal favorite...

Habakkuk 2:3 – For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it, it will surely come; it will not delay.

Why does God encourage us to wait so much? Why does God take His sweet time in answering certain prayers for us? **The reason why God has us wait so often is so that we can meditate on His truth enough to be ready for what is coming. Waiting is a form of meditation.** When you are waiting you are always meditating on something, whether you know it or not. You’re either meditating on God’s promises and you are in anticipation, or you’re meditating on His lack of response and the seemingly lack of hope around you for an answer and so you are in bitterness or apathy or fear.

Your ability to wait and the way you wait reveals your heart. Is your trust fully in the Lord? Is your trust in His goodness? Psalm 139:23-24 are two great verses to be lifting up as you are waiting...

Psalm 139:23-24 – Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and **know my thoughts!** And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Do you see God as a great and mighty God able to do all things? Or do you see Him as a limited God, only able to work in your limited surroundings? Do you see God as the God of just these five loaves of bread and two fish and that is all? Or do you see God as the creator of the bread and of the fish and as the provider of every good thing in our lives? He is able to do far more abundantly than we could ever ask or imagine. But often He will wait to work in our lives because our desires have not been purified or our view of Him has not become clear enough. Or, sometimes God waits to give us our marshmallow because our faith is not yet at enough strength to faithfully steward what He wants to give us. His timing is perfect.

The Bible is filled with amazing stories of faith. We read about Abraham, David, Daniel, and so many others who received amazing revelations and promises and who did great things for

the Lord. When I read the Bible though, I'm always curious about the missing pages between the chapters. In Genesis we read about God appearing to Abraham and giving him a mighty promise and calling. In the next chapter we read a great story about Abraham, but in between the two chapters thirteen years has passed. And the next chapter is another ten or so years later. What was happening in Abraham's life in between the chapters? What was David doing during all those years in between being anointed and called to be king as Israel as a youth and eventually becoming king many years later? The book of Daniel is loaded with some prophecies and stories that will blow your mind, but it covers only a mere fraction of Daniel's life. What was Daniel doing in between all the stories and all the revelations?

I can tell you what each of them were doing. They were praying. They were remembering God's promises. They were remembering what God had done in their lives and the lives of those around them. They were meditating on God's goodness. And in their meditation, God was continuing to prepare them for greater and greater things. It was their waiting and their meditating that created greater and greater anticipation for what was to come. And they reaped what they sowed. God never failed them but released greater and greater blessings for them.

I know Abraham, David, Daniel, and so many other men of faith never looked back on their lives with frustration. They would all say, "It was worth it. Every minute and every year was worth it."

Need to Trust

There was a second marshmallow test given to children with another variable added to it. That variable was trust. For half of the children the teacher running the test would give different promises but not fulfill them, such as telling the kids that if they accomplished their homework she would give them stickers but later returning to the room with a sad face and telling the kids she had run out of stickers. When they finally ran the marshmallow test with these children using the same teacher, almost every single one of kids chose to eat the marshmallow right away. But for the other half of the children their teacher fulfilled the earlier promises of stickers and other prizes every time. So when the kids with the faithful teacher went through the marshmallow test they were much more likely to wait. Trust is critical for waiting. I will say it again, **your anticipation, your waiting, must be anchored in God's goodness at all times.** God rewards faith! God rewards those who keep their steadfast trust in Him! Without that trust, bitterness can seep in. But with the steadfast trust, you will endure and you will be truly satisfied.

I mentioned Psalm 37:4 earlier as I shared my testimony about how when we delight ourselves in the Lord He gives us the desires of our hearts. Let's look at the context about that verse though...

Psalm 37:4-9 – Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices. Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Those who wait for the Lord shall receive their marshmallow. God is faithful and God is good! **Sometimes the marshmallow doesn't come packaged like you expected, but I guarantee you that you will be satisfied.** Our God does not disappoint. Isaiah 49:23 says **"Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."** The NIV translates this as, **"Those who hope in the Lord will not be disappointed."** Your focus must remain on the truth of God's Word and on the goodness of God's character. If you put your steadfast hope in Him, you will not be disappointed and you will not be put to shame.

Let me close with this point, and this is most important: **Your key in waiting for the marshmallow is to not focus on marshmallow, but rather to focus on the giver of the marshmallow.** Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. He is able to far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. Our joy is found in Him. We were never worthy of anything put before us, but by His sacrifice on the Cross we are able to come before Him. By His love and sacrifice we are able to receive from Him. He is so faithful and He is so good and His love never fails. He never fails us!

Closing

I'm going to invite up the praise team now. I want us to close in a song of praise, rejoicing in God's goodness for us. God delights in you. He loves to give the best gifts and He loves when we are anticipating them, just like a happy child waiting for Christmas.

If you have any negativity or frustration or bitterness or fear, I want you to just give it to the Lord right now. Just say, "God I repent for not trusting you and for forgetting Your goodness. Please take my bitterness and take my frustrations and take my fear. You are good! God you are good! You have been so good to me! You will be faithful in my life. I live to know You more!"

Let us remember what He has done in our lives. Let's remember our own testimony. Let's remember the friendships and the people God has blessed us with along the way. Let's remember the moments where God revealed Himself clearly to us, whether at a retreat or on the mission field or through a prayer someone spoke over us. Let's remember His goodness. Let's entrust our marshmallows into His hands and keep our hearts in worship and in joyful anticipation for God to reveal His goodness to us even more.

Pray

He is faithful! He is so good to us! Let's worship Him...