

How Long Must I Suffer?

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Bible Text: Psalm 13
Preached on: Sunday, March 4, 2018

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The words of Christ in Mark 6:31 came to my mind as I was thinking about this morning, when he said to the apostles, he said, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while," in Mark 6:31. He said, "For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat." You know, there is a time where you need to just find a place of rest and solace for your soul, and this has been a demanding and a trying week for everyone, hasn't it, just in sharing in the sorrows of others? And what I wanted to do here this morning was to step back, look at a passage that we looked at on a Tuesday several years ago, and just being mindful that not just this past week but within our body, I know that there are some ongoing, chronic, deep sorrows and trials and struggles and I wanted to just speak a word of hope and peace into those situations here today and just trust the work of the Lord through his word to maybe go beyond ways that we otherwise wouldn't have expected to take place.

So I invite you for this morning to turn to Psalm 13. Psalm 13 will be our text for this morning as we take a one-week break from our normal exposition and go to a text that I think speaks to our body, speaks to us individually here today, and I offer it to the Lord first and to you secondly as an offering of praise here this morning. Let's read it together, Psalm 13. It's a Psalm of David and it says in verse 1,

1 How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? 3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4 And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. 5 But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

As this Psalm opens, our friend and brother David is full of despair over some kind of prolonged struggle and trial that has utterly sapped his strength, and yet a few short verses later when it closes, David is full of joy, and what we find in this Psalm, beloved, is this, what we find in this Psalm is direction, is help, is comfort, is a way forward in the midst of our most grievous sorrows. And I would go so far to say this: this Psalm helps us

where most Christians even refuse to go. They won't even go into the realm of this Psalm mentally. They won't go into the realm of this Psalm in their thinking and in their praying, certainly in their interactions with others. James Montgomery Boice says in this regard, he says, "If any of us should admit to such feelings of despair as we find in Psalm 13, many of our friends would look askance at us, shake their heads and wonder whether we are Christians. Isn't that true? Isn't that the chief reason why you do not talk to other Christians about many of your problems?"

There is this veil of silence that falls upon the expectations of many Christians and might I say in the realm of congregations and in body life, a reluctance, a fear, a refusal to speak in these terms of great discouragement and despair of which David spoke. We feel like we have to maintain this air of spirituality and put on the smile and put on the face of joy even if it is not real in our hearts, and for whatever else we say about that, it leaves the most important things in our hearts, it leaves the greatest needs of our hearts unaddressed and it just kind of gets stuck on a shelf someplace, left there. And whatever we say about that realm of interaction with men, and if wisdom makes us slow to share with men and sometimes it does, Scripture says, you know, a stranger does not know the joy and the sorrows of our heart, beloved, what I want to help you see here today is that in those times of deep anguish, that we can look to Scripture for help and we can not only look there for help, we find help, we find comfort, we find what we need, and Psalm 13 provides that kind of help for us today.

The great Charles Spurgeon said this about Psalm 13, he said, "This Psalm is intended to express the feelings of the people of God in those ever returning trials which beset them. If the reader has never yet found occasion to use the language of this brief Psalm, he will do so before long if he be a man after the Lord's own heart." In other words, what Spurgeon is saying is this is the experience of God that we find expressed in Psalm 13. It will be the experience of the true people of God at some point in their journey if the Lord gives us an extended period of life here on earth to walk with him.

There will be times of deep sorrow and I repeat myself so much, I have said so many times in the past several weeks, not just recently, that I like to be realistic and I think it is just so important for us over time as a body together, I look and see, you know, we are together as a body, we are joined together as a body, for us to be realistic of the fact that there will be times, there will be episodes, there will be seasons in our individual lives, in our hearts as a body, where the weight of life and the weight of living in this broken world seems utterly unbearable.

Now, it's not always like that. It's not always a time and a vale, a valley of sorrow that we go through, but there are times like that and if we pretend that spiritual life is always a joyous happy occasion on the top of the mountain, and if we always in our public gatherings try to project that sense that that is not only the norm but that is the only expression of true Christian living, we are doing ourselves a great disservice and causing great destruction in the lives of the people of God and I'm not willing to do that. We as a church are not willing to do that and to pretend that the sorrows of life are not real. If we acknowledge them, if we address them, then we can come to Scripture and find that there

is real help for them in the times when we most desperately need them. So we're not going to put on a false happy face. Songs of joy are not appropriate when the heart is in great pain. There is a place for the minor notes to be played in the spiritual life and we find that when Scripture addresses us in those times of hurt and sorrow, we find a depth of soil for our spiritual growth that far transcends what imagination and pretense could never do for us. Many of you have buried spouses, in addition to other family members, or you've seen spouses walk away from you that you didn't want to leave. You've had children that have gone astray. And we can't pretend that that's easy or that that doesn't matter. We're just not going to pretend because that makes it worse, doesn't it, when you feel like you have to play the part of the hypocrite? Well, like I say, whatever we choose to do in interactions with men at least vertically, we can come to Psalm 13 and find that which gives voice for our souls to God in the midst of these times, and if we can walk with God and find the comfort of God in them, then the manner of dealing with men will sort itself out in time.

First of all, let's look at David's sigh of despair. If you're taking notes here this morning, let's look at David's sigh of despair as he opens the Psalm, and he is intensely discouraged. You can practically hear him moan as he writes these words. What is it that has provoked him to this level of depth as he cries out repeatedly, "How long, O LORD?" Well, first of all, part of what's provoking his soul is his silent God. His silent God. Here is David suffering. The mere use, the repetition of "how long" lets you know that he's been suffering a very long time and as he has prayed, he has simply been met with seeming inaction on God's part. God has not helped him. God has not responded. David has gone day by day, week by week, perhaps month by month, trudging along, crying out for help, crying out for deliverance, and finding that there is none. The difficulty of yesterday is repeated today and is on tap for the schedule for tomorrow. In the midst of that, his loneliness aggravates the problem, and from much distress and aggravation of soul, he cries out to God in verse 1. He says,

1 How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You
hide Your face from me? 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be
exalted over me?

Four times in those 2 verses he cries out, "How long?" God has not provided the practical help that David believes he needs in his difficulty. God has not answered. God has not responded to his prayers. God has not blessed him with prosperity and peace. It's evident, isn't it, from the reading of the Psalm that that's his spiritual experience, and we are not to chastise David for praying this way, rather we find sympathy and say, "Here is a man who has been where I am. Here is a man who has been where I've been. I get this. I understand this. This gives eloquent voice to that which I could not articulate in the problems of my own soul." Charles Spurgeon, again, says in his "Treasury of David," he says, "We have called this the how long Psalm." He said, "We had almost called it the howling Psalm." H-o-w-l-i-n-g, like a coyote howling. "We had almost said the howling Psalm from the incessant repetition of the cry, 'How long?'" David howling to God, "How

long? How long? God, I cannot bear this! This pain is too much for me! I am crushed beyond my ability to endure."

So what is it that's prompting David in this? First of all, it's the seeming silence of God in response to his distress. Sometimes, beloved, it will go for years. You know, over the years I have talked with people in the midst of distress and they'll ask this question, "How long do I continue on like this?" And as a pastor, you want to have answers but there are times where I just don't know what to say. I don't have any answer. I can't tell you how long it will be, how long it will be before the relief comes, but for the Christian, "Does there come a point where I quit?" And to that question I answer, "Not yet. Not yet. However long it has been, however long it will be, the time to quit has not yet come." And that's always true. Not yet. We don't give up. We don't give in to it, but we instead turn our sorrow into this plaintive cry to the Lord, "How long must this go on? How long in this unequally yoked marriage that is so difficult for me? How long with this rebellious child that will not respond to me? How long will my soul and my heart be broken over these things, O God?" The very asking of the question shows that there is no end in sight, right?

Well, where do we go? And here's what I would want you to see maybe as a passing observation at this point in the Psalm: the very fact that David asks the question how long means that he doesn't see an end in sight. But it doesn't stop there and the fact that you wrestle with the issue doesn't mean that you stop there. In the discouragement and the grief and crying out how long, there are other steps to take from there even though you don't see where the relief is to come. The fact that he cries it out but the Psalm doesn't end there tells us that there is spiritual direction yet ahead, and that's what I want you to see.

His silent God has provoked this cry. Secondly, also his suffering heart. His suffering heart has provoked it. Look at verse 2. God's delay has burdened his heart but in verse 2 he goes on and he says, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? God, this is unbearable. This is insufferable. This is too much," he cries out. And David's thoughts are evidently tossing within him. Martin Luther, the great Reformer of course, said this about this aspect of David's Psalm. He says, "His heart is like a raging sea in which all sorts of thoughts move up and down. He tries on all hands to find a hole through which he can escape. He thinks on various plans and still is utterly at a loss of what to do." Beloved, that's Martin Luther saying that. That's the man who launched the Reformation describing that aspect of spiritual experience, and what I want you to see, there is a certain deep and profound comfort in that, to see men like that recognizing the depth of the struggle; to identify with a man like David in the struggle; to identify with our Lord Jesus on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

These are not men lightly dismissed, obviously, especially as we speak of Christ. We look at our Lord primarily and then we look at these other men of like human flesh with ours whom God used so greatly, whom God called man after his own heart, whom God used to shape centuries of church theology and experience, and I find something really

helpful there in my own life, in my own past sorrows, and I invite you into this realm of comfort as well. You know, the superficial nature of much of preaching, not all preaching but much preaching in our day and age, the superficial expectations of Christians around us, you know, put on a happy face. Well, I cannot put on a happy face. The tears will make the makeup run if I do. And I find help in stepping out of the superficiality of the age in which we live and stepping into the deep experience of true men of God proven in Scripture, proven on the cross, proven by vindication in church history, and say these are the men that I want to identify with. These men understand. The word of God understands even if my world doesn't, even if my circle of acquaintances doesn't, even if my circle of Christian friends doesn't. I've been there. I speak from experience.

I have known, as many of you have, the stinging barbs of Job's so-called comforters. The stinging barbs of people perhaps even well intended, but their words simply pour salt on the wound because they are unwilling to recognize, to validate, and to enter into the suffering with you, and you just realize how useless it is. And with Job and with my friend Steve Creloff, incidentally, to say, "Oh, if you would just be silent and your silence would become your wisdom. If you don't have anything intelligent and useful and biblical to say in this manner of despair, at least keep your lips closed and don't make it worse. How long?" Goes the cry. "How long," as the sobs come again. "How long, Lord, must I be drug through this?"

Scripture, I hope you see, this Psalm comes to us and comes alongside us. This Psalm written 3,000 years ago under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this Psalm from God's holy word comes alongside and enters into the depths of those recesses of our soul and whispers to us, "I understand." This Psalm, God's word comes and puts its arm around us and draws us close and embraces us in the midst of that kind of spiritual experience and says, "I understand. Here's help. Here's direction. You are not alone. This is not alien to the experience of the true people of God." That beloved, even if no one else on earth understands, that is worth 10,000 happy faces. That is worth 10,000 bouncy sermons. That is worth 10,000, and nay, it is far better than 10,000 false promises of immediate comfort that will prove to be false. "How long? I see no answer. I see no way forward, God. How long?" And Scripture comes into your soul and says, "We're here." The Bible understands. We find that though no man understands us, we have a book, we have a word from God that understands us and that's far better.

So David's silent God, David's suffering heart is provoking this cry of how long. Also we could say his surging enemy. His surging enemy. David's enemies are too strong for him. Look at the end of verse 2, he says, "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" It's not just the spiritual suffering, it's not just the agitations of his heart, there is a human dimension to this as well. He has, as he often did, enemies and the enemy is not specifically identified. There is no historical background given to help us know what episode of David's life this comes from. We have to be content simply to say that somehow there is a man who is opposed to him who is somehow prevailing over him unrighteously, and David writing as the king of Israel, finds his godly position threatened; his representative capacity for the people of God in addition to his own earthly sorrow at stake. And in that circumstance, God is nowhere to be found seemingly.

David is afflicted both internally and externally. Men assault him and God is inactive. No wonder, no wonder he cries out, "How long? How long? How long? How long?" Four times, I didn't even exaggerate.

So we see his sigh of despair and the reason for it, but as I said, this Psalm doesn't end there. And sometimes, beloved, I would say this and looking back in my own episodes of deep sorrow, I was content to stay in the first 2 verses of Psalm 13, you might say. I didn't understand, I didn't embrace, no one had ever told me that even in the midst of that kind of deep sorrow, that there is still spiritual responsibility; there is a way to respond rather than simply staying in the realm of verse 2, and that there is a spiritual response for the people of God to seek and to activate and to do in the midst of that. We see it in the second point for this morning: the summons for deliverance. The summons for deliverance. In James it says, "You do not have because you do not ask," and we are reminded here in the next section of this Psalm that there is a place and there is a responsibility for us to ask for the help that we need. David has been asking but having found that there is no deliverance yet, he needs to ask yet again, and in the midst of his despair he asks for help from God.

Oh beloved, this is so very important. Let me read verse 3 and then make a comment on it. Verse 3 he says,

3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

He's thought this over incessantly and he has no answers. He doesn't know what the solution is and there is something so very practical to what I'm about to say that certainly responds to a lot of false thinking that I had in my life earlier on, what I think is not uncommon in the broader realm of supposedly Christian thought and experience on the whole matter of prayer. Let me state it negatively first. David here in this Psalm does not have a solution. He doesn't know what is the way out. He is in a black dark room surrounded by a black curtain with a blindfold on. He can't see his way forward. Now, how many times have I heard in ministry, you would have no way of knowing the number, or how many times have you heard people trying to figure out what it is they are supposed to ask for in prayer? You know, what is the solution that I want and then I'll ask for that, and saying, you know, if I can just figure out what the answer to this complex dilemma is, I'll ask for that and that will be the key that unlocks it, the idea being that you have to figure out what you need before you can ask God for it and get help for it. That's not true. In fact, that's a very foolish way to think.

First of all, it's not true to experience. There are times where there is no solution to your sorrow, there is no bringing back the past in order to make the present feel better. You can't do that. That's impossible. And beyond that, thinking theologically here, God always has a purpose for us in the midst of our sorrows but he doesn't tell us in advance what that long-term purposes. How can we know in the present, in the moment, what it is that God is working out? He doesn't reveal that to us and so how are we supposed to know how to ask for what he would do as if we needed to have the circumstantial

solution figured out and then we go to God and ask him for it. No, it's just the opposite, beloved. For some of you, I realize this may turn your whole thinking about prayer upside down. If so, it's about time and it's for your benefit.

No, the whole point of these episodes in life is that we go to God in utter humility and utter dependence and say, "God, I don't know what to make of this. I don't have any solutions, God. I can't change this situation. I can't change this person. I can't change this hostility. I can't silence the pride of my enemies. I can't humble them. There is nothing I can do. I don't have a secret bank account in Switzerland to go to to fund my way out of this, Lord. I am helpless here." And that is precisely the point. "God, I don't have any answers. You help me. You're the one with all the wisdom. You're the one who is omniscient. You know the future. You have a purpose. You have a plan. You help me, I can't help myself here." And you embrace – I mean this in a constructive way – you embrace your ignorance. You embrace your inability. You embrace your lack of understanding and you say, "God, that's precisely why I'm here. I need someone greater than me to help me and that's you. I need my Lord, my Master, my King. I need you to help because I have none to give to myself." And there is an utter bankruptcy, there is a poverty of spirit involved in this kind of praying that you come and you lay that out rather than thinking that somehow people get the distorted idea in their mind that the way to pray in the midst of such circumstances is to figure out the answer and then you go and inform God what the answer should be so that he can do it. When you see it clearly, you realize how foolish that is. Sometimes our hearts are too broken to think clearly.

So what David does is more direct, it is more basic, and it is far more profound. Look at verse 3 with me again. He says, "Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death." He says, "Lord, consider me." In other words, what he's saying here in verse 3, he's saying, "God, pay attention to me! Pay attention! Help me! This silence has gone too long. God, have a gracious attitude toward me in the midst of my sorrow, and now that I have your attention, answer me. Give me a perspective that I now lack that will help me going forward." I'll say it again, "Give me a perspective that I now lack that will help me going forward. I don't have this. I don't get it. I don't understand. God, give me wisdom."

Going back to James again, James 1:5 in the context of very profound trials, he says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." "God, I don't have any wisdom here. I don't know what to do. Life is moving on without me, God. My dreams are dissipating before my very eyes, God, and I'm still sitting on the sidelines. I'm not in the game and it's the fourth quarter and it's late. God, give me wisdom. Give me help. Pay attention to me." And what this is, this is the language of doctoral studies in faith that we are seeing David express here. We are seeing advanced faith being articulated here, not a kindergarten variety. This is the urgency and the language of sincere determination that says, "God, I know you have the answers and I know you care about me, and so somehow in this there has to be a motivation for you to unleash your power and to help me in the midst of it."

David in his situation writing as the king, reminds God that if David fell, it would give his enemies to boast over him. Look at verse 4. He says,

Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4 And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.

That's not simply a personal concern of David's. Remember, he's God's king. He's the head of the theocratic nation so that if David stumbles, the people are affected by that as well and the glory of God is diminished in the eyes of men if God would not deliver his king. David's position makes God's answer urgent. If they boasted over David, it would be like they were boasting over God himself. So having brought that perspective to the matter, David bearing out his bankrupt understanding, bearing out his bothered soul, crying out for help that seems so long-delayed, cries out and says and asks again, "God, help me."

Beloved, in the midst of your trials like that, don't stop asking. Don't stop asking for help. This is the pattern, this is the way that it would cultivate a sense of ongoing dependence in your life. That's part of what the Lord is developing in us in these times, is that we would learn an ongoing truly humble dependence upon him, and that we would learn to express that dependence in believing prayer that asks once again, "God, give me my daily bread. God, lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil. God, deliver me. God, help me." It's not a one-time request and then everything changes and gets better. This is a pattern and a way of life in these kinds of seasons.

So he summons God for deliverance and that summons brings him to a new place spiritually, as we go to verse 5 and for our third major point here this morning, you can see his song of delight. His song of delight and David here pivots in verses 5 and 6, he pivots from the despair, he pivots from the request for help, and he pivots into praise. He pivots into trust.

Look at verse 5, and verse 5 is almost jarring by way of its contrast with what has preceded it. He says in verse 5,

5 But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

If you want to look for a pivot point in the midst of your despair, my friends, look at those first 2 words in the English text of verse 5 where David says, "But I." But I. Here he is making a declaration of faith. "But I" is a recognition, "God, everything I have said to you is true and it expresses the reality of the situation as I see it at the moment. Your silence, my tears, the opposition of my enemies, the urgency of the situation, and there is a lot at stake." And you could just pile those up and place a burden on someone's back and just watch them collapse before you. Sure, you could. But again, those first 4 verses

are not the end of the Psalm. "But I" is an expression of the fact that David says, "There is another, transcendent, broader, taller, deeper, wider perspective to this than my earthly situation." And it is here, beloved, where you make the articulation of faith. It is here where you find the strength to continue on.

"But I" is an emphatic expression of David's resolve. He says, "I will not collapse under the weight of this trial. Whatever else happens, I will not collapse to such a degree that I walk away and I abandon my faith. I will not forget what I know." Oh, this is so important. It's important. It's really critical what I'm about to say. "Despite everything, I will not forget what I know to be true about the character of God. In the midst of all of my earthly change and difficulty and sorrow, God, I know that your character is unchanging. I know that I can go to my final absolute Rock and find my refuge in who you are. One day I will rejoice and sing." How can he say that when he doesn't know the way forward? This is insanity from a human perspective. This is insane to say, "I have a way forward," when I've just said that I have no way forward.

Look at what he does. He says in verse 5, "But I have trusted in your lovingkindness. I have trusted in your loyal love. I know that you care about me and I know that you are loyal to your people, and whatever else may be true about these earthly circumstances, God, I know that that has not changed. I don't see the way forward, I don't understand how I got here, I have no idea how you could possibly bring any good out of this whatsoever. This is beyond my ability to grasp but, God, I know one thing, I have one unalterable cornerstone that cannot be abandoned, that will not be abandoned. There is one overarching principle that determines the course of your dealings with your people, it is an unchanging principle of the moral universe, God: you are a God of lovingkindness. You are a God of loyal love to your people. You would never leave your people in a permanent state of despair, God. You would never abandon us to an utter crushing that had no relief ever ever ever ever. So while I feel crushed now, God, I know that your lovingkindness is still as real as it was before the trial ever came to me. I will not deny," as many have said, "I will not deny in the darkness what I came to know to be true in the light. What has happened here, God, a great black cloud has intervened between me and the sun but, Lord, I know that the cloud eventually goes away, not because of the cycles of weather but because of who you are. You are a God of unfailing love and faithfulness and kindness and grace to your people and, God, I rest and trust everything completely in that. I stake, God, everything I care about, God, is at stake here. Everything I care about has been affected by the events in my life. God, everything is on the table and I want you to know that even in that desperate time, God, I remember your loyal love. I remember your faithfulness and I trust in that alone even when I see nothing that, earthly speaking, will alleviate my suffering. I trust in you that much, God."

Let me remind you of a passage that we've looked at in the past in the book of Habakkuk as eyes dart back-and-forth in terror, "How am I going to find the book of Habakkuk?" It's toward the end of your Old Testament. This is the nature of biblical faith in the worst of trials, my friends. When there is no outward earthly solution, this is where the soul of the people of God go and find their peace. In Habakkuk 3, if it helps, it's just before Zephaniah. I know that doesn't help but we need to lighten the mood just a touch. In

Habakkuk 3:17, the prophet who is anticipating the soon destruction of his nation as judgment from the hand of God says in verse 17,

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls, 18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. 19 The Lord GOD is my strength.

"God, my hope, my delight, my comfort, my help is in you alone. Lord, my earthly circumstances may not change. There are times where you say they cannot change. Life has changed, Lord, but you have not, and so rather than looking for relief and deliverance for my anguished soul from an earthly circumstance, God, I look up. I look up to you and what I remember is your faithful love. I remember your unfailing kindness to your people. And Lord, though undeserving, you've brought me into your family. Lord, though undeserving, I am in your hand and I trust you to be who you are. I trust you to manifest to me that which is eternally true about your own character. I trust you, in other words, O God, I trust you to deal with me individually in my despair and difficulty and grief, and I trust you to deal with me personally like I know you are to be eternally. And God, in that I have a hope that cannot fail."

Go back to Psalm 13 with me. As you are turning there, beloved, I've got to say this. There are certain things of absolute truth that have to be said about the nature and the dealings of God and we let those define the way we view everything else. God is a God of everlasting love. God is a God of faithfulness. God is a God of goodness to his people and he will never violate his loyalty to us, and that means something. We are meant to say a "therefore" at that point. We are meant to say, "There is a consequence to that in my difficulty and despair." And beloved, this is something that you can take as the one absolute certainty in the midst of all of your confusion and pain. Every bit of it without exception. No matter what age, no matter what condition, no matter how weak your present faith may seem to be, this is what's true: God will never leave you in a permanent state of despair even though your trial is severe, deep, and has lasted for a very very long time and there is no obvious solution to it. No matter how many years pass in your trial, no matter how difficult things become, no matter how hard it is just to pull yourself out of bed in the morning, no matter all of that, beloved, the one thing that is absolutely true in the midst of that is that God will not abandon you to complete sorrow and despair forever if you are in Christ. If nothing else, if nothing else, death will usher you into his presence where there is no longer any mourning or pain or tears. If nothing else, that. But beloved, especially those of you younger in life, which is most of you younger than me, most of you younger than me. I've been a Christian for 35 years now almost and I have seen this play out in my life, I've seen it play out in the lives of saints that are now in heaven, I've seen it play out in your lives. Beloved, God is faithful. God is good and he will bring good to you. He will comfort your soul in time. He will help you. He will change the perspective. He will inject something new. He will do something so that the pain will be softened, the corner will be turned, and there will be a new light in your understanding and they will be a new delight of the proven faithfulness of God to you personally.

That is who God is and that is what he does for his people and I know that there are times where you can't see any way forward to affirm that. I know. I get it. I've been there. But beloved, do not trust in what you think you see. Don't trust in your own understanding. Trust in the character of God revealed in Scripture, revealed at the cross of Christ. Trust in that and let that define your perspective, not the other way around. Proverbs 3:5 and 6,

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Look at verse 6 in Psalm 13. David says, "I will sing to the LORD," notice the all caps. LORD, Yahweh, the covenant keeping, promise keeping God of his people. "I'm putting my confidence in who God has revealed himself to be." And David is saying, "I know that the Lord will certainly help me." He rises to a great faith as his faith has been reminded and informed by the character of God, he rises to a great faith even though nothing has changed.

Our friend, I don't know him personally, a friend through his writings, Sinclair Ferguson says this. He says, "God's name indicates that he is a gracious and powerful, redeeming, providing, guiding God, a God who overcomes all opposition to his purposes. The very God that David needed, David already had." And although David does not have any present relief, he can still sing.

Verse 6, look at it with me,

6 I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

David prays for wisdom. He prays for help. He prays for enlightenment. I want you to see something really vital here. He prays in the midst of all of this despair and sighing and the length of time, and he has been praying and praying, "God, how long? God, help me!" And do you know what the answer of God to his prayer is? It's included in the Psalm. The answer to David's prayer for help and enlightenment, beloved, the answer to your prayer for help and comfort and enlightenment, is God himself. It's the character of who God is.

He turns a corner because he remembers and trust and the lovingkindness. His heart rejoices in the salvation of his God. He sings to the Lord and who it is, and that is the guidance. That is the way forward. I know this, this is absolutely true for every one of us that are in Christ. This is absolutely true even if you don't see it, even if this sounds like the most preposterous stupid thing to come out of the mouth of a man standing in a pulpit that you have ever heard in your entire life. Don't lean on your own understanding, lean on the word of God on this one. What you need, what your heart, what answers the devastation of your heart is the character of who God is. Habakkuk said, "I will exalt in the Lord, even though everything else fails." David says, "I'll sing to the Lord. I have trusted in your lovingkindness." David has been saying, think about it this way, those of you that were with us last Tuesday, the title of my message was "Not Why, But Who."

Not why, but who. David here in Psalm 13 has been praying in a slightly different way, "Where, God, where are you?" And what we find throughout the pages of Scripture, what we find at the end of Psalm 13 is this. Where is God in the midst of my trials? Beloved, what I want you to see is this: not where, but who. Who God is sufficiently answers the question where he is, because who God is tells you inevitably where he will take you forward in his love, in his faithfulness, and in his grace.

Who God is answers the question because it reminds us that he knows and he cares, and beloved, I'm not saying these words cheaply. God is my witness, I don't say these things cheaply or lightly what I'm about to say. When these things, when we see these things in the word of God, when we come to know the true character of God, we do this: we take the long-term perspective on our trials based on God's character, rather than despairing in the short term perspective based on what we see in our unfavorable circumstances. God has dealt bountifully with us. It's translated in the past tense. "He has dealt bountifully with me." The certainty of God's provision is so absolute that we can speak about it before we experience it as though it were a past tense event. It is so certain that this will happen that I can say, "God has dealt bountifully with me," before I actually experience the bounty in time. Days and months and years recede in significance in light of who God is because we trust not for a timetable but for who he is.

And let me add a closing New Testament word to this. Eventually, you always want to go to the cross. Eventually, quickly, you want to go to the cross and find the answer to all of these things. The judgment of God poured upon his Son who voluntarily stood in our place at the cross. Who in love took our place to bear our sin, to bear the wrath of God, in order to deliver us, in order to make certain the fact that we would be in the people of God and with him forever. At the cross, you look and you see the utter certainty, the undeniable reality of the perfect love of God manifest as the Son of God achieved the culmination of the reason that he left heaven in order to come to earth, that he might give of himself in love for the salvation of your soul from sin. Beloved, look at the cross and see the love of God and draw the only conclusion that is possible. Even though I don't understand, even though my heart is breaking, I remember my Redeemer. I remember his love. I remember that he has saved me, therefore, it has to come out different than what it feels like today. It has to otherwise God's loyal love would be violated and that's impossible. So I will trust in that love even when I don't understand.

So in Christ, beloved, we can wait. You say, "Oh, but it hurts and how long do I have to wait?" Just a little longer. Just a little longer. And beloved, those of you that are in Christ, one day soon enough, we will be standing on the shores of glory.

Father, look upon the broken hearts in this room and comfort them with the glory of Christ, the glory, the certain glory of his love, the certain outcome of your faithfulness to your people. Father, for those that are here that do not know Christ and all of this is foreign to their thinking, help them realize that the seeming confusion and the uncertainty and the newness of what they heard is merely an indication that you have reached into their lives and are now offering them a full and complete salvation from sin by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and may they, Father, reach out to Christ in the weakest

and simplest of faith and receive him that they too might enter into this glory of which we have spoken. O God, you know the names, Father, they are written on the hands of Christ, of the sorrows that are borne in this room. Some fresh and recent, some longer-term in standing. I ask you, God, to display your loyal love in their own personal experience. In their own heart, may they find comfort, Father, not in pretending that things are different than what they are but seeing the reality of sorrow and disappointment and reaching through that to lay hold of thee, and as they do that, Father, be swift to make yourself known to them as the God of all comfort no matter what the earthly despair may be. You are able to do that, Father, and we appeal to you as your people to be that kind of God, who you are to us now. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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