

From Sorrow to Singing

How Long O Lord?

Text: Psalm 13:1-6

Introduction:

1. The Author of the Psalm: The preface to the Psalm reveals that David was the author of this Psalm. There is no reference to the time period in which this Psalm was written but there are multiple situations in David's trial filled life which could qualify as the occasion.
2. The Structure of the Psalm: The Psalm divides into three clear stanzas of two verses each.
 - Vs. 1-2 – David cries out to God about his doubts and struggles.
 - Vs. 3-5 – David petitions God regarding his situation.
 - Vs. 6-8 – David recovers a position of faith and trust in His God.
 - C.H. Spurgeon summarizes the structure succinctly as follows: The Psalm is very readily to be divided into three parts – the question of anxiety (Vs. 1-2), the cry of prayer (Vs. 3-4), the song of faith (Vs. 5-6).
3. Concerning this Psalm, Luther wrote, "This is a prayer full of the sighings and groanings of an afflicted heart in the hour of darkness, and almost overwhelmed, under that darkness, with the extreme of grief and sorrow, and driven to the greatest strait of mind."
4. The changes in tone in the development of this little Psalm are amazing. Delitzsch notes that the composition begins with a deep sigh, followed by a gentle prayer and concludes with great joy.
5. We will study the Psalm's three stanzas under three headings:

I. THE STRUGGLES OF FAITH (VS. 1-2)

The repeated refrain in this first stanza is the question "how long" which occurs four times. David is dealing with a deep sense of despair and depression on account of God's apparent delay in coming to his aid. C.H. Spurgeon writes, "If the reader has never yet found occasion to use the language of this brief ode, he will do so ere long, if he be a man after the Lord's own heart. We have been want to call this the "How Long Psalm". We had almost said the Howling Psalm, from the incessant repetition of the cry, "how long?" David feels:

A. Forgotten (Vs. 1a)

1. "How long" = this is a repeated refrain, not only in this Psalm, but in multiple other places in the Psalms. It is one of the questions believers of every age have had to grapple with. We know that God is infinite in power and therefore able to work in our situation but as time bound creatures we struggle with what appears to be an unnecessary delay on the part of God in answering us in our time of need. "We are all prone to play most on the worst string." (Spurgeon)
2. David felt that God had forgotten him. This was a perception and not reality. God cannot forget his own beloved children but it can feel like it at times. So great was David's despair that he adds the word 'forever' to the question. He was beginning to feel like nothing would ever change. In reality our answer to the question should be 'never'!

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3. We need to be reminded at such times that God never forgets us! Isaiah 49:14-16 "But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? **yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.** Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of *my* hands; thy walls *are* continually before me."
4. This Psalm reminds us that it is inevitable that we will deal with doubts in the Christian life. It is what we do with those doubts that is key. If we let our doubts drive us to the Lord, we triumph. If we let our doubts drive us from the Lord, the devil triumphs.

B. Forsaken (Vs. 1b)

1. This is a more accurate question than the first one. God can at times hide his face from his children but he never forgets them.
2. Why does God allow His children to go through such times? We know it is not because He is cruel and unloving towards us. We need to remind ourselves of some truths at such times:
 - a. Our God acts in accordance with His infinite wisdom, working for our ultimate good and His own glory. God makes no mistakes!
 - b. God is never early and never late; He is always on time. The delay is from the human perspective. We can identify with Mary and Martha's perplexity over Christ's delay in coming when Lazarus was sick and their grief-stricken exclamation "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." The purpose of Lazarus' sickness was for the glory of God (Vs. 4) This was love's delay. John 11:5-6 "Now Jesus **loved** Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, **he abode two days still** in the same place where he was."
 - c. Divine delays, if responded to correctly, can help bring us to a deeper resignation of self and a more entire trust and dependence upon our God. Like Jacob, we learn to cling.
 - d. "Before God does something about our situation, He wants to first do something about ourselves." (John Phillips)

C. Troubled (Vs. 2a)

David now gives us a window into his internal, heart struggle at this season of his life. He was struggling in:

1. His thoughts – "How long shall I take counsel in my soul". Do you ever try and counsel yourself when you are going through a trial? Do you ever try and get your thoughts straightened out only to find at the end you have managed to get yourself even more tangled and tied in knots? Is your mind sometimes like a maze where you start at one point and follow a line of thinking through hoping it will lead you out of your despair only to find that you reached another dead end? Then you start at another point and try from there only to experience the same thing. You are left with a feeling of hopelessness and despair. This is how David felt!
2. His emotions – "having sorrow in my heart daily". The whole struggle had inevitably led to grief of heart. Each day David woke up, sorrow flooded his heart as he realized his trial had not yet ended.
3. Note: Some believers seem to have the wrong idea that a Christian should never struggle with despair and depression. If men like David could experience such soul torment, then so can we! It is not a sin to struggle

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with such things. However, the choices we make at such times are of critical importance.

4. Consider the great and godly Apostle Paul. 2 Cor. 1:8-10 "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, **insomuch that we despaired even of life:** (9) But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: (10) Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*,"

D. Oppressed (Vs. 2b)

1. For David it felt like the enemy had the upper hand over him at this time. He was in some sort of battle! Perhaps he wrote this Psalm during the time he was being hunted by Saul or perhaps when he was fleeing Absalom.
2. Remember! The devil is never far away from the depressed, discouraged saint. Satan loves to use a season of depression to destroy you. Make sure, like David, you are fleeing to God for refuge in such times and pouring out your soul to him. Let your depression drive you into the arms of Christ, not into the devil's trap. Remember that if you struggle with some form of mental condition, you need to be humble and willing to have your thinking helped and corrected lest you unwittingly become a weak point for Satan to setup up a destructive dart launcher.

II. THE SUPPLICATION OF FAITH (VS. 3-4)

We reach an important bridge in the Psalm. Prayer is the bridge that takes David from the deep depression of verses 1-2 to the joyful singing of verses 5-6. Take note of:

A. The Request of the Prayer (Vs. 3a)

David prays:

1. Remember me – "Consider and hear me". This plea ties back to verse 1. David is asking God to take pity on him in his situation.
2. Revive me – "lighten mine eyes". David was in a dark place and He needed illumination. He needed some rays of hope in his darkness. Are you going through a dark time? Ask God to enlighten you through His Word so that you will have perspective and understanding. Make Psalm 119:18 your prayer, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

B. The Relationship of the Prayer (Vs. 3b)

1. David has a relationship with God. Jehovah is his God! This alone would have been a great comfort to him in his trial.
2. He calls on Jehovah, the God of promise. "Jehovah is the personal and covenant name of God; so David was appealing to God on the basis of his relationship to him by covenant, using his Personal Name." (Ross)
3. He calls on Elohim, the God of power.

C. The Reasons for the Prayer (Vs. 3c – 4)

David gives two motivators for the prayer to be answered. They are both introduced by the word 'lest'. Essentially, he prays, Lord hear me:

1. Lest I Die (Vs. 3c). Perhaps David felt like the sorrow of his trial was going to take his life or maybe his life was physically under threat from the enemies he was facing. Either way, he appeals to God's compassion in his situation knowing that His God was merciful.

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2. Lest the Enemy Dishonour (Vs. 4)
David pleads with God to intervene lest the enemy:
 - a. Claim he had prevailed over him. How the enemy loves to triumph over our lives!
 - b. Rejoice when he was moved. The word 'moved' means "to waver, to slide". What a picture of the devil! He watches our lives and glories in our failures. Sometimes ungodly, carnal people watch with the same mindset.
 - c. This was a powerful argument to bring before God in prayer. If the enemy triumphed, ultimately God's Name would be dishonoured. God is concerned for His own glory and the good of His children.

III. THE SONG OF FAITH (VS. 5-6)

David moves from the sigh of doubt to the song of faith. Flanigan writes, "From mourning the Psalmist has gone on to singing, and the turning point is praying." Spurgeon adds, "David's heart was more often out of tune than his harp. He begins many of his Psalms sighing and ends them singing." Three themes were on his heart in relation to His God. In faith, he would:

A. Rest on God's Mercy (Vs. 5a)

1. David chose to cast himself upon the mercy of God in his situation. David knew something of the gracious, loving character of his God. How often David speaks in the Psalms of his trust in Jehovah God. In all his sorrow and trouble, he was still trusting.
2. Prov. 3:5-6 "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

B. Rejoice in God's Salvation (Vs. 5b)

1. David made a commitment that he would rejoice in his salvation. Rejoicing in one's salvation is balm for the troubled soul. No matter how dark the situation may be, if you are saved, you can rejoice in that!
2. In relation to our salvation, let us rejoice in:
 - a. The provision of our salvation – the Father gave the Son as His love gift to the world. Salvation was God's plan!
 - b. The price of our salvation – the Son gave His life willingly on the cross and shed his blood to pay the price of our salvation. Praise God for Christ's body and blood.
 - i. 1 Peter 2:24 "Who his own self bare our sins **in his own body** on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."
 - ii. 1 Peter 1:18-19 "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with **the precious blood of Christ**, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"
 - c. The permanency of our salvation – the Bible teaches the eternal security of the believer. We are saved forever. The day we got saved, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13) and that seal is unbreakable (Eph. 4:30).

C. Remember God's Goodness (Vs. 6)

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1. David resolved that he would sing to the Lord even in his trial. Don't stop singing to the Lord because you are having a difficult time. Sing in faith, believing in the truth of the words you are singing even if you feel flat in your feelings.
2. David would sing to the Lord because of His bountifulness to him in the past. He is likely also anticipating in faith that God would deal bountifully with him again in relation to his situation.
3. When going through a trial, pause to think back over God's abundant goodness to you throughout your Christian life and then look to Him in faith to bless you further with His goodness in the future.
4. In this final stanza, "David moves to the final stage of his soul's experience in a time of trial and testing. He had come through tears to truth and through truth to triumph. Some wonder how David could come from such gloom to gladness. The answer is in the middle section of the Psalm where he gets his eyes firmly fixed on the Lord His God." (Phillips)
5. Between his gloom of verse 1-2 and his gladness of verse 5-6 stands his God.

Conclusion: Are you going through a dark time? Pray, trust, sing, wait and see what God will do!