

Psalm 13

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

“Psalm 13”: The distance between four occurrences of “How long”, punctuated with question marks (verses 1-2), and the confident and joyful song at the end (verse 6), is covered only with prayer (verses 3-4), and trust (verse 5).

Sooner or later, most of God’s people feel as if He has forgotten them. By his pleas for the Lord to “consider and hear”, and “lighten” (“put the light back in”), “mine eyes”. David clearly felt that God had intentionally forsaken him, an emotion Jesus echoed (Matt. 27:46).

Verses 1-6: Psalm 13 launches with an explosion of 4 “How longs”, indicating another lament is about to begin. But David will shift radically from turmoil to tranquility in the space of 6 short verses through 3 levels of attitude.

- (1) Below “Sea Level” Expressions of Despair (13:1-2);
- (2) “Sea Level” Expressions of Desires (13:3-4);
- (3) “Mountaintop Level” Expressions of Delight (13:5-6).

Verses 1-2: These lines reintroduce the familiar triangle of the psalmist, his God, and his enemies. This 3-way relationship produces perplexity and pain. In view of God’s apparent absence (verse 1), he seems left to his own resources which are unable to deal with the reality of his enemies (verse 2).

Psalm 13:1 "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"

When God does not immediately deliver his people from their enemies, or help them out of an affliction. When he does not discover his love, communicate his grace, apply the blessings and promises of his covenant as usual. And when he does not visit them in his usual manner, and so frequently as he has formerly done, they are ready to conclude he has forgotten them. And sometimes this continues a long time and then they fear they are forgotten for ever. And this they cannot bear, and therefore expresses disapproval with God in a questioning manner, as the psalmist does here. But this is to be understood not in reality, but in their own apprehension, and in the opinion of their enemies. God never does nor can forget his people. Oblivion does not fall upon him with respect to common persons and things. And much less with respect to his own dear children, for whom a special book of remembrance is written (see Psalm 9:18).

“How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? His love, and the manifestation of it, from his person. His gracious presence, the light of his smiling countenance, which sometimes God hides or withdraws from his people by way of resentment of their unbecoming carriage to him. And which is very distressing to them, for they are apt to imagine it is in wrath and hot displeasure. When he still loves them, and will with everlasting kindness have mercy on them (see Isa. 8:17). The Targum renders it, "the glory of thy face".

I asked in a previous lesson, have you ever felt like crying out to God “how long”? It seems that David feels the situation is desperate. He must hear from God immediately. This is not a murmuring, but a cry for God to help. If you have never started a work for the glory of God, you have not experienced what David is feeling here. It is as if David is saying, I did the best I could Lord, Have I displeased you so that you are hiding from me? David really had not displeased God. Perhaps David was being taught a lesson of patience. Sometimes it seems the harder we try, the slower our answers are in coming. There is a little book on “Time Shall Be No More”. In the book, it was talked about how time flies when we are doing something we enjoy. Also related, was that when we are sick or suffering, time seems to just drag by. Perhaps this is the case here. David is suffering, so time is dragging by. The Lord never forgets His own.

Hebrews 13:5 "[Let your] conversation [be] without covetousness; [and be] content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Psalm 13:2 "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, [having] sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"

Or, how long shall I arrange plans? Tossing on a sea of doubt and perplexity, David forms plan after plan, but to no purpose. He seeks to find a way of escape from his difficulties, but cannot discover one. Having sorrow in my heart daily; or all the day. It is perhaps implied that the plans are formed and thought over at night.

"How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" A special enemy is once more glanced at. The allusion seems to be to Saul (compare Psalms 7:2, 5, 11-16; 8:2; 9:6, 16; 10:2-11, 15; 11:5).

This reminds me so much of the things we try to do by our own might. We try this and that and it fails. David is in the same fix here. He knows war and is not afraid to go into battle to win. He seems to have tried all the things he knows to do in the flesh, and none of these things have worked. Have you ever read, “When all else fails, read the instructions”? We Christians, and David as well, need to take that advice. The Bible is our instruction Book. There is an answer for every problem we face, and even for the one David is facing here. It is not by our might that things work out, it is by God's help.

Zechariah 4:6 "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This [is] the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."

Have faith in the instruction Book (Bible), and the Instructor (God), then you cannot fail. Even though the enemy seems to be winning, I have read the last page and God wins. All of God's children who learn to trust in the Lord, will have the last laugh over their enemies.

Verses 3-4: After running from Saul countless times, David was so worn emotionally that he felt as though he would “sleep the sleep of death”. In such difficult times, it is appropriate to

acknowledge these emotions and come to God for endurance and hope. For even when it does not appear to be true, God will prevail so that one's "enemy" does not.

Psalm 13:3 "Consider [and] hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the [sleep of] death;"

Because I find my own counsels insufficient. Do thou enlighten my mind, and guide me by thy counsel into the right way of obtaining thy merciful help. Or, he means, do thou revive, and comfort, and deliver me from the darkness of death, which is ready to come upon me, and to close mine eyes? "Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him". Namely, by my art or strength; which will reflect dishonor on thee, as if thou were either unfaithful and unmindful of thy promises, or unable to fulfil them. Therefore prevent, or repress this their arrogance and blasphemy, and maintain thine own honor. "I have trusted in thy mercy": Neither their threats and boastings, nor my own dangers, shall shake my confidence in thy mercy promised to me.

"Lest I sleep the sleep of death": A natural death, which is comparable to sleep, and often expressed by it. And which sense agrees with lightening the eyes of his body, as before explained. Or rather the sense is, lift up the light of thy countenance, revive thy work in the midst of the years. Let me see thy goodness in the land of the living that I may not faint and sink and die away. Or it may be an eternal death is designed. For though true believers shall never die this death, yet they may be in such circumstances, as through unbelief to fear they shall.

David has done the only thing left to him. He is praying to the Lord for help. When we feel that God is not listening to our prayers, it brings the worst despair a person can know. David says, he is sorrowful unto death. Perhaps death would be a relief from his great sorrow. Even Jesus felt this great sorrow, as we read in the following verse.

Matthew 26:38 "Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me."

Jesus prayed and submitted to the will of the Father.

Verses 4-5: "Rejoice ... rejoice": Using the same verb, he deliberately contrasts his enemy's celebration with his own confidence in divine deliverance.

Psalm 13:4 "Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; [and] those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved."

I have overpowered him; I have conquered him. That is, to triumph over him as having obtained a complete victory.

"And those that trouble me": Hebrew, "My adversaries." The reference here is the same as in the former member of the verse. It is to the enemies that seemed almost to have triumphed over him already, and under whose power he was ready to sink.

"Rejoice." Exult; triumph.

"When I am moved": Moved from my steadfastness or firmness; when I am overcome. Before he had been able to hold out against them; but now he began to despair, and to fear that they would accomplish their object by overcoming and subduing him. His ground of apprehension and of appeal was, that by his being vanquished, the cause in which he was engaged would suffer, and that the enemies of religion would triumph.

One of the reasons that Moses gave God a reason not to destroy the children of Israel out in the wilderness, when they made the golden calf, was that the Egyptians would rejoice about it. David is explaining to God that God's enemies will rejoice over the destruction of David. Those who are opposed to David are God's enemies, as well as David's. In fact, they associated David with the God of Israel. When David killed the giant (Goliath), David came against Him in the name of the God of Israel. This is a good reason David is giving here, but it is not necessary. God will help David, because He loves him. God will help you and me, because He loves us. He is our Father.

Verses 5-6: The psalm reaches its turning point when David recalls what God has done for him, giving him victory over the giant Goliath (1 Sam. chapter 17), and saving him from Saul's attacks (1 Sam. 19:9-10). David did not have to worry about God's plans for the future because he knew what God had done in the past.

Psalm 13:5 "But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation."

The faith, hope, and comfort of the psalmist grew and increased by prayer. From complaining he goes to praying, from praying to believing. He trusted not in himself, not in his own heart, nor in his own righteousness and merits, but in the mercy of God. And not in the bare absolute mercy of God, but in the grace and goodness of God, as the word here used signifies. As it is displayed in the plentiful redemption which is by Christ. Which is a sufficient ground of faith and hope (see Psalm 130:7).

"My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation": Which God is the contriver, author, and giver of, and in which the glory of his perfections is so greatly displayed. And a true believer rejoices more on account that God is glorified by it than because of his own interest in it. And this joy is an inward one, it is joy in the heart, and is real and unfeigned. And is what continues, and will be felt and expressed both here and hereafter.

Now, we see a statement of confidence in the mercy of God. We see David remembering his trust he had placed in the Lord. Just as every one of us must place our trust in the salvation that Jesus has provided for us, David must activate his faith and trust. God is a God of mercy. Prayers are answered when we have faith that they will be answered.

Psalm 13:6 "I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me."

In prayer faith is encouraged, through believing the heart is filled with joy. And this joy is expressed by the lips, in songs of praise to the Lord, ascribing the glory of salvation to him, and giving him thanks for every mercy and blessing of life.

"Because he hath dealt bountifully with me": Both in a way of providence and grace, granting life and preserving it, and supporting with the comforts of it. Blessing with spiritual blessings, and crowning with loving kindness and tender mercies. All which is generous and bountiful dealing, and affords a just occasion of praise and thanksgiving (see Psalm 116:7).

What a beautiful way to end this chapter. David is praising God in song for dealing so bountifully with him. The sorrow we feel when we are convinced that God has forgotten us, is quickly turned to joy and thanksgiving when we remember all the blessings He has showered upon us. Pray with faith and God will bless you above what you can ask or think.

Psalm 13 Questions

1. Have you ever felt like crying out to God the words "how long"?
2. This from David is not a murmuring, but a _____.
3. Perhaps, David was being taught a lesson of _____.
4. Time _____ when we are doing something we enjoy.
5. Where do we find the Scripture that says, I will never leave you nor forsake you?
6. In verse 2, what has David tried, that didn't work?
7. When all else fails, read the _____.
8. What is the instruction book for the believer?
9. Not by might, nor by power, but by my _____, saith the Lord.
10. What is probably the worst despair for a Christian?
11. Who is sorrowful, even unto death, in Matthew 26:38?
12. What was one of the reasons Moses gave God for not destroying all the Israelites, when they made the golden calf?
13. David's enemies are _____ enemies, as well.
14. What was the name of the giant that David had killed?
15. David came against the giant in whose name?

16. When are prayers answered?

17. What did David do, that showed he thanked God for dealing so bountifully with him?

18. Pray with _____, and God will bless you.