

The Church at Oakwood

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Psalm 13

Perfectly thought out statements that appear intelligent and wise do not serve to console the agony and suffering of an individual. We live in a world where experience teaches us that life at times can be unpredictable and brutal, leaving us with a host of questions which will not always be answered by great Scriptural one liners and fall back statements such as "I will pray for you." We live in an existence where our flesh, minds and souls are assaulted by suffering.

The Christian existence though is to transcend, or rise high above the despairing grasp and joy destroying hands of suffering. Please notice that I did not say that the Christian existence would eliminate suffering or free you from the possibility of being caught in the snare of suffering. We are not provided with any sort of assurance that being born again will bring us into a new life of freedom from suffering. We are clearly told by Scripture that "many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Ps 34:19) and all who desire to live a godly life *in* Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). We are added to the roles of the great cloud of witness who have gone before us, and despite the loss of family, health, possessions and lives; we march forward to see with our new eyes our eternal community that is free of all types of despair.

David was one such man who was chosen and anointed by God. David was chosen to be his representative of righteousness and justice, by leading the kingdom of Israel to be the light of God to all within the nation and to reflect that light to the surrounding nations of the Gentiles. Yet in God's sovereign election of David to be king, there existed another king, Saul, who refused the clear and expressed plan and purposes of God. Saul the first king of Israel moved from becoming God's representative to David's enemy and foe who sought only to remove David's life.

Psalm 13 is one of those moments when David translates emotional experience into words that can be read, sung and meditated on. These are not perfectly thought out statements, with deep theological depth but this Psalm reflects the inner turmoil that exists in the life of this young man who was chosen and anointed by God to be king.

David's experience of suffering is not by accident. Your suffering is not and will not be, by accident. Whether you are God's chosen and anointed child, or one who is still trying to figure out faith; know that suffering is not by accident. David is committing his experience to words

and these words are directed to the sovereign God who is completely aware of every minute detail that occurs in our reality. He is that grand, he is that knowledgeable and he is that wise. The suffering that David is at war with and that you are at war with did not come about on its own but ultimately it exists under the watchful eye of the LORD.

This psalm is also a reflection on David's wanderings as Saul is on a passionate pursuit to murder David. So as we travel with David and as he shares his own pain, we must admit to ourselves, that from time to time, in spite of being sealed by God's Spirit and our giftedness; we ask "Where is my sin in this? Is my suffering the result of something I have done?" These questions betray us. These questions reveal that at some level we believe we do not deserve to suffer because we are American, educated, poor, black, and white, Hispanic or any other qualifier. At a deeper level we must ask ourselves, "Do I really believe in a God who is present with me even when there is no evidence otherwise?"

This psalm also reveals that we view our suffering as an enemy that is in pursuit of our life. When suffering arises, we understand that something important to us is under assault. Our emotions reveal that the suffering is real and the object of our suffering is very dear. So we use words to convey our suffering in terms that appear as if a person or persons is in pursuit of us. We speak in such a manner that if the suffering is not relieved, if the suffering is not triumphed over, death is surely imminent.

Lastly, for those of us that are Christians, meaning those of us who have repented of our sin and embraced the truth that the kingdom of God is not found in our efforts but in the finished work of Jesus Christ; a crisis of faith does not mean that you have lost faith. What it means is that the sovereign LORD has appointed to have each of us experience some form and length of distress in order that trust would increase and joy would abound. Never have we rejoiced in the warm life of spring without going through the cold death of winter.

Psalm 13

Psalm 13 is a song of David which we have outlined in six verses. David's psalm which can be considered an offering to God as both prayer and song, moves from questioning to request and culminates into what I would characterize as his whole internal being consumed in the joys of God.

Isaac Watts an old school psalmist of the 17th and 18th century states that Psalm 13 is David's "Pleading with God under desertion" or, David's pursuit of "hope in darkness." This short psalm is for you that feel as if God has deserted you. Or, you may be riding the heights of God's love at the moment and know of someone who is pursuing hope in darkness. Whatever the case, all of us can agree that we have been on the up and down road of questioning God, pleading with God and in our pursuit, finding joy in God.

David Questions God

The first two verses of David's psalm opens up with four questions to God asking "How long," will the suffering continue in his life. Remember David is the coming king of Israel and the one he thought was close to him, Saul, is in a vicious pursuit of his life throughout Israel. David has moved from towns and caves, from regions and cities, escaping the fury of the king of Israel.

David reveals the foundation of his pain and questioning by asking at what point will God remember his chosen servant and have his face shine upon him. "Will you forget me forever...when will your face shine upon me again?" God is completely aware of David's situation. God is not removed to some other important matter on the earth, where his attention is divided and he is unable to tend to the suffering of David. No, God is completely aware of the locations of his servant, the joys of his servant David, the pains of his servant and those who seek his life. David reveals in a later psalm that:

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me"(Ps 139) David reveals to us that the God who has chosen him to be his king, is not far from him. The God we see revealed in Scripture has not created this universe, placed us in it and left us to endure the sufferings of life. No, he is ever present and aware of every event, emotion and experience that transpires and for that we should rejoice in such a blessing.

The blessing of God is a very critical idea and experience in the Old Testament and as we shall see, carried over into the New Testament. The blessing of God was considered endearing because as the people of God, they expected their lives to be the shining example to the world. So when we see this phrase, "shine upon me," David is possibly reflecting back to the blessing the Lord commanded Aaron and the priest to give to the people of Israel:

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them"(Num 6).

I wonder can you hear what is saturating David's questions to God in light of this blessing that is known to the people of Israel. Is David wondering if God's grace and peace is still upon him? Is David possibly considering that he maybe is not to be king of Israel? David is asking for God face to rise upon him and brighten his own face. David is longing for the glory of God to rise in such a degree that all his suffering would be extinguished by the glory of his face coming upon him.

Therefore, we see in the next two verses the two threats that would flee if only God's face would rise upon David again. The first is that his soul would no longer be in sorrow. There is surely a grief and sadness that comes to a person when they feel as if the one they were closet to is now in an active and purposeful pursuit to destroy their peace. It is very hurtful to discover that those whom you thought were friends, companions, parents, perceived loved ones are now on a campaign to trample your very soul into the ground. David has played in Saul's courts. David has slain the giant Goliath and accomplished a host of many things for the glory of Israel; now to only be pursued as a criminal. His soul is grieved and anguish has become his clothing.

The second threat that would flee once David experiences God's face rise with brightness and glory is that his enemy will no longer be higher than him. They have sung songs of David. They have sung the songs of "Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousand" (1 Sam 18:7). David has by the grace of God struck down Goliath with a smooth stone and now, he has found an enemy who is higher than he.

There is an enemy that is higher than all of us. Its face is the one we all must stare at and at the appointed time, the enemy that is higher than me, you and David will either be exalted over us or we shall be exalted over him. How long will this enemy be higher than you? We shall return to that question momentarily.

So David questions God and as I opened, these questions come in the midst of suffering. It is a suffering that wonders where is the bright shining face of God who will be gracious and bring peace to a sorrowful soul and victory over a great enemy. This leads us to the next group of verses and David pleading with God.

David Pleads with God

Children who are in the middle of a painful experience do not simply ask their parent to rescue them from the experience. The intensity of the pain is directly proportional to the intensity of the request. Therefore, when children scrape their knee their request for relief is obviously elevated and even mild. Yet let a child be taken from her parents or break their leg or they are chased by a dog, then the request is tearful and from the deepest parts of their soul. They are, with all their emotion pleading for rescue and it is a plea that touches the very heart of the one who is being pleaded with.

In verses 3 and 4, David pleads with God to look upon him and to respond to his plea. David's questions have now become pleas to the only one he knows will be able to shine upon him, relieve his sorrow and triumph over his enemy. David pleads to Jehovah; LORD; the self-existent and eternal God who is over all things. David pleads to the God of his fathers who rescued out of Egypt by a mighty hand and established a people as his treasured possession.

What is David's main request? "Lighten my eyes." In his darkness and crisis of faith, David pleads with God to rise upon him and shine upon his face with graciousness and peace. What will bring you through the suffering that you have perceived is greater than you and you perceive has prevented you from discerning the glory and majesty of God? He is none other than God himself who rises and whose glory will lighten your eyes to see him as wonderful, powerful and gracious.

The shining light of God's glory is what will breakthrough every aspect of our suffering and cause us to see wonders through the eyes of faith. It is the glory of God that is to wash over the earth as the oceans and it is the glory of God that will change us, taking us from one degree of glory to another, for the glory of God.

What will be prevented when David's eyes are lightened? David pleads for God to lighten his eyes in order that he will not die, that his enemy will not have victory and that his enemy will not rejoice. When the glory of God rises on his people there will be life among his people. "In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people" (Is 28). This is to be the hope of the person who is in suffering. The rising and shining face of God that lightens the eyes of his people brings life.

Secondly, the enemy will not have victory. David is pleading with God that the righteous will triumph and not the wicked. That justice will be carried out by the holy God of heaven and earth. When the rising and shining face of God lightens the eyes of his people, they can be assured that the LORD of hosts [who] is exalted in justice,...the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness (Is 5:16).

Lastly, the plea of lighting eyes will result in the enemy not being able to rejoice in the overthrow of one of God's people. What will be the song sung when God rises to brighten the face of his chosen, it will be the song sung by those who came out of Egypt and were relieved of great suffering.

"I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name" (Ex 15).

David's crisis of faith is not an abandoning of his faith. He is human and he like us moves through questions and pleadings when suffering arises. We all can acknowledge that at differing points in our lives because of suffering we wonder, "Where is God," "God I plead with you to do something!" While David is a significant person in human history and the history of

Israel, there is a far greater human and king who became like us and as we look upon his face we see Psalm 13 ultimately answered.

Our Joy in God (Gospel)

The Scriptures pronounce without apology that Jesus Christ is God's son and chosen king to rule over the universe. God's son became a man and in every aspect, Jesus shared in the totality of the human experience. He is not only the ruler of history, he participated in history. Christ not only declared the existence of bread, fish and water but he also consumed loaves, fish and cups of liquid.

Jesus Christ is far greater than David not just because he is king and not just because he was an innocent man who was pursued by men consumed to kill him. Jesus Christ is far greater than David because as the sinless, God man, he understands your sufferings. Our sin that began with Adam and spread through all of us like a virus was one of the causes for the suffering of Jesus. He is the righteous that has suffered because of the unrighteous.

In his suffering and agony, in what can only be described as the "beating, afflicting and crushing" of Jesus, we see him as the fulfillment or answer to what is said in verses five and six. Never have we rejoiced in the warm life of spring without going through the cold death of winter.

Jesus Christ in his suffering and agony on the cross prompted him to echo the words of David in Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus Christ perfect man and perfect God, suspended between heaven and earth experienced the weight and burden of our sin and the great despair that is over mankind. He is the man that heard at his baptism, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3). He is the man who stood on a high mountain with Moses and Elijah that heard, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him" (Mt 17). He is the man who is God's revelation of himself and because of our sin, he hung on a cross and the question arose out of his soul to his Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He is not only the man who questions in the midst of suffering but his plea with God is answered. Jesus slept the sleep of death and in that real and physical death, Jesus secured victory. When all the principalities and powers thought they had triumphed over the Son, it was Jesus in his death that triumphed over all suffering. Death and sorrow now become "mild, sweet and gentle."

Family, when Jesus died, he stripped the ruler and authorizes. He spoiled every aspect of their power. Paul in the letter to the Colossians portrays Jesus as the returning and conquering king to festive celebration and in tow was the naked and shamed rulers and principalities. Jesus has

prevailed over them. He has disarmed every principality that exalts itself above God and prevents his people from rejoicing completely in him. Jesus through suffering that was greater than yours, in blood, agony, questioning and pleading rejoices and leads us to rejoicing as well. Dietrich Bonhoeffer on suffering says "it calls to us with heavenly power, if only we realize that it is the gateway to our homeland, the tabernacle of joy, the everlasting kingdom of peace."

Therefore, now in the midst of your suffering you can trust, rejoice and sing. Do you see the "but" in verse five? It does not signal that the suffering is over. It does not signal that life is 100% perfect. The "but" signals that in the midst of my suffering, God has his steadfast love showering me in the midst of affliction. It signals that while suffering maybe present, it is and will never be victorious because Christ is our salvation.

And so we sing. We sing because the bountiful blessing that God has given us and that far exceeds all our suffering, all our doubt, all our crisis' of faith is the bountiful blessing of King Jesus. And when you see Jesus, when you believe that Jesus is the Christ who has triumphed by death and through resurrection, we are given a sure word that the face of God is not hidden from you but he brilliantly shines upon you with grace and peace; in suffering and loss.