

THE PSALMS OF DAVID: PSALM 13 - WHEN GOD SEEMS ABSENT

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 11/10/19, Matt Heerema

This morning we're continuing our series on the Psalms of David. On the heels of our series on 1st and 2nd Samuel we thought it would be good to look a little deeper into David's heart and mind and find out what it was that drove him to be such an inspiring man of faith, such a model for us. Much of his (and others) poetry is recorded for us in the Psalms. The Psalms have served God's people through the millennia as a prayer book, a song book, teaching us how to communicate with our father in heaven.

Last week we talked about how to pray when life is hard and we are in distress, how to turn to God in prayer and cast our burdens on him. But what do we do when it feels that God himself is absent? That is our subject for today, and thankfully, David gives us an example to follow here as well.

Also today, I thought, rather than simply reading the text of the Psalm, which loses some of its flair in the translation from Hebrew, where it has rhyme, meter, and structure, into English which can only preserve the meaning, we'd add some of that flavor back in through song. So turn with me to Psalm 13 in your bible, and let's meditate on the Psalm here as the band sings it for us.

[Song: Psalm 13 by Brian Doerksen]

Where do we go with our faith when God seems absent? How do we maintain faith when prayers are unanswered, our circumstances all seem to be stacked against us, and we are filled with grief and sorry and darkness in our heart? Are we trapped, or is there a way out?

In Psalm 13 we are going to see a progression of David's thought through this prayer. First he **reveals** his soul, he pours out his heart to God in anguish. Then he **requests** what he feels he needs. Then he **remembers** what is true and looks to that as the source of hope God provides. He finds the answer to his requests in the promises of God.

And we go through these times too, don't we? It is in these times especially that it is important **reveal** our soul, what is really going on inside, to him. He already knows it, but, probably more for our own sake than his, he wants us to tell him about it. In the times when God seems absent and everything seems stacked against us, it is important to **request** specifically the help we seek. It is important to **remember** God's promise that He is near, and that nothing can separate His called and chosen children from him.

Let's look at the Psalm. In the first two verses we see David **revealing** his soul:

REVEAL YOUR SOUL:

Verses 1&2

1How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Through the Psalm David deals with three dimensions he is feeling need in:

- Spiritual dimension: God seems distant
- Emotional dimension: Sorrow
- Physical dimension: Enemy dominating

I am impressed by the rawness of the prayer. The boldness, near presumption of the demand that God show himself: "Where are you!"

This is a normal part of the human experience, but it is naïveté, forgetfulness, doubt, or unbelief, and it is important to work through. God is near to every one of us.

Notably: David is asking God, trusting that he is being heard, even though it "feels" that God is not paying attention.

I think we're also looking at a progression here: God's seeming absence leads to sorrow in the heart all day, leading to a sense that his enemy is dominating him.

In the next two verses we find his **request** for help:

REQUEST HELP:

Verses 3&4

3Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

His requests follow those same three dimensions:

- Spiritual dimension: "Look at me and answer me!"
- Emotional dimension: Light up my eyes = bring me hope and joy...
- Physical dimension: "Don't let me be shaken..."

Again I'm impressed by the boldness of the request "Look at me! Answer me!"

And see again the progression here: If God would answer him, his eyes would light up, and he will not be shaken by his enemy.

The victory he asks for over his enemies: that he will not be shaken. That he won't be afraid, or despair, or give up. It is courage and hope he is looking for in this case, not necessarily a physical victory...

And finally we see where David goes to have his needs met, to have his feelings of God's absence, leading to sorrow, helped: He **remembers** God's promises to him.

REMEMBER THE PROMISE:

Verse 5&6

5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

These promises each speak to the three dimensions:

- Spiritual: Trusting God's promises
- Emotional: Rejoicing in what is true
- Physical: Thankfulness for God's generosity toward him.

David trusted in God's promises to him. This was not some nebulous concept of God's love and salvation and generosity, hear what God promised David specifically:

2 Samuel 7:8-9, 15-16 (CSB)

"So now this is what you are to say to my servant David: 'This is what the Lord of Armies says: I took you from the pasture, **from tending the flock, to be ruler** over my people Israel. I have been **with you wherever** you have gone, and I have **destroyed all your enemies** before you. I will make a great name for you like that of the greatest on the earth....

...But **my faithful love will never leave** him as it did when I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever.' "

APPLICATION

Reveal, request, remember.

We do face the same sort of experiences that David did, that God feels absent at times, that we are overwhelmed with emotion and in impossible circumstances. We can relate here, can't we?

It is so important to learn to **reveal** our souls, to bear our souls to God. I think song is such a powerful way to do this.

[Story about 16 years of leading worship being a powerful sanctifying force in my life.]

We are told to ask like David asks. Jesus says "ask whatever you will in my name." The apostle James tells us "we have not because we ask not.." My your **requests** to God, knowing that he hears.

And we have the same sort of promises that David does, we need to **remember** them.

His love for us is unfailing. His salvation is cause for rejoicing, and his generosity toward us is cause for signing. Turn to Romans chapter 8 with me and we'll see this.

Romans 8:18 (CSB)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:31-32 (CSB)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything?

Romans 8:35-39 (CSB)

Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (As it is written: Because of you we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.) No, in all these

things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

No matter what situation we are in, we have Christ. If we are facing starvation, homelessness, nakedness, persecution or death, we are conquerors in Christ. We have cause for rejoicing. He has dealt so vastly more generously with us than we deserve.

The question for us is: “Is Christ enough?” This is what we need to pray through.

That life will go as we want it to, that we will be comfortable, materially prosperous, free from physical pain or sickness, and have everyone happy with us, is not the Christian message. It is not the promise the Bible gives us. Wanting these things is normal and natural, but they are not promised to us.

We are promised something far better: we get Jesus himself, the most valuable treasure possible to have. Is that valuable to us??. We are promised that life in this world is going to be hard, but that life in the next world is going to be amazing, and eternal. Do you believe that this is better?

The peace that comes from a right relationship with Jesus is the best peace and best contentment we can know in this life. And the life to come will be far better than any comfort you could obtain here, far better than any pleasure or excitement or experience or happiness you could possibly find on this planet.

In Jesus we have every promise God has made, everything we could need and want. “Every promise of God is yes and amen in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:20) - We have a people, a community to belong to: the church. We have a place now, and promised homeland: in heaven, and a future: eternal life together with our creator God. What more could we ask for?

- So when it seems God is far off, call out to God and let him know. Ask him to turn to you and answer, and look to Christ and remember God’s unfailing love.
- When your soul is troubled and full of sorrow, tell God of your sorrow. Ask him to bring you joy, and look to Christ and be filled with it.
- When it seems that our enemy stacked against us and we are about to fall, cry out to God, ask for the strength to remain standing, and look to Christ and remember God’s bountiful blessings.

Pray with me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read Psalm 13.

1. Does your prayer life have a category for this kind of honesty with God?
2. Is your relationship with God close enough that you sometimes experience *and notice* a felt absence of him?
3. What do you tend to do when you experience God's absence and sorrow in your heart?
4. How does David's example of communication with God in this Psalm provide an example for you in your prayer life?