

# Psalms 13

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Date: 25 November 2014

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of the accusations against Christianity, against religion generally, is that it's just a crutch. It's just an emotional crutch for weak people, so they can feel good about themselves in a tough world.

! Now, one thing I'd like to say to that is, well, who doesn't need a crutch to get through life? Who doesn't need something to help you in the storms and problems of life? But the second thing I'd want to say is, who said that being a Christian makes life easier?

For one thing, there is the problem of unanswered prayer, the problem that we see demonstrated here in this psalm. You hear how David prays, how long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

Now, for the person who doesn't believe in any God or any higher power, no such question can ever enter their head. The world is just the way it is. But for someone who trusts in God, this is a question, isn't it?

Why? Why are my prayers not being answered? Why are young children I know very ill in hospital? Why are friends struggling with depression?

[ 1 : 08 ] Why are some prayers I pray, why do they never seem to be answered? Why do I see so little progress? I wonder if you know that experience. Because some people will say, well, the reason you don't see answers to prayers, the reason you feel deserted, is because of your lack of faith.

You don't believe enough. If only your faith were stronger, it would be different. But I want us to notice two things about the very title of this psalm. That rebuke that idea.

Two things. Who's it by and who's it for? Well, who's it by? It's a psalm of David. David. David, great king David. David, the shepherd boy who had faith that God had rescued his people, such that he was prepared to go out and fight a huge giant.

David, who the Lord himself said was a man after my own heart. David, whom God installed as king over his people. David, of weak faith?

It's not the picture we get in the Bible. That's who it's by. And who's it for? To the choir master. This is a psalm David wrote out of his own experience.

[ 2 : 20 ] A prayer he wrote down and gave to the choir master so that it might be sung by God's people. Worshipping in the temple together. Why did he do that? Because he knew that this is a regular experience for God's people.

It might not be the normative experience, but that actually for all people who trust in God, there are times in our lives we think, Lord, where are you? How long do I have to keep calling to you?

So, for those who say, actually, you just need more faith, that is not the answer. The Lord has given us this psalm in our Bibles that we might know how to pray when it feels God is distant, when it feels he isn't listening.

So what I want us to do is look briefly at each of the pairs of verses. There are three verses here. There are three stanzas, if you like. Verses 1 and 2, we hear the storm of despair.

And verses 4 and 5, we hear the cry for help. And verses 3 and 4, we hear the cry for help. And verses 5 and 6, we get the calm of assurance.

[ 3 : 24 ] So let's look first of all at the storm of despair in verses 1 and 2. There is a storm that rages on three fronts. It is hitting David from three angles. Verse 1, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? So the first front of this storm is his disappointment with God, his feeling of isolation from God. And that is what troubles him the most.

Sometimes I think as Christians, we can, those of us who are Christians, those of us who call ourselves Christians, sometimes we pray, but actually, in our attitudes, we're really like functional

atheists.

So we pray, but we don't really expect God to do something. But notice David isn't like that. He's disappointed, because he doesn't see God responding. You hear that in his cry, Will you forget me forever?

And the Bible, when it talks about forgetting and remembering, it's talking about action. So back in Exodus chapter 2, verse 24, when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, they cried out to God, and God remembered his promises, remembered his covenant.

[ 4 : 32 ] What did that remembering mean? Well, it meant rescue. You see that as the story goes on. So for David to feel forgotten by God, it means that, I don't see you rescuing me, Lord.

I don't see you doing something in my life. And that's how David feels, and that's why he cries out. Now, people will only ever pray like this, if God matters to them.

Isn't that right? I mean, let me use this illustration for a moment. If you were ill at home, or had a bad accident, that meant you were shut in your home, and couldn't get out and get the shopping, or do the things you needed to do, it probably wouldn't bother you, if an acquaintance you hardly knew, didn't stop to help, or didn't call up to find out how you are.

But if a close friend, or a parent, ignored you, and didn't come to help you, then you'd feel it, wouldn't you? And that's why David feels it here.

God, where are you? You're the one I look to. This is the first storm front in his life. He feels disappointed with God. And disappointment with people, is always in proportion, to the importance of the relationship.

[ 5 : 43 ] See, if David just thought God was, another emergency service to come to rescue him, then he, if prayer wasn't being answered, he'd go and find some other help. The AA used to advertise themselves, didn't they, as the fourth emergency service.

Now, if you were an AA member, like I am, and you had a bad experience, where you called them up, and for two hours, they didn't come and get you, what would you do? I'll tell you what you'd do. When the renewal notice came from them, you wouldn't bother renewing. You'd go to the RAC, or whoever else. If you just treat them as an emergency service, then if they don't deliver, you don't care and move on.

But David is personally invested in this God. This relationship is important to him. So he feels the disappointment. And that's the first storm front. Where is God? The second aspect of the storm is, the despair in himself.

Look at verse 2. How long must I take counsel in my soul? In other words, he's talking to himself. He's mulling over his situation. He's trying to find a way out of it.

[ 6 : 45 ] He's despairing in his thoughts all the time. And as a result, how long must I have sorrow in my heart all the day? He feels this isolation.

He feels disappointed with God, disturbed in himself, sorrowful in his heart. And the next part of the problem comes at the end of verse 2. He has an enemy.

How long must my enemy be exalted over me? See, David, remember who David is. He's God's king. He's God's appointed leader of God's people. He's not just like you or I, but he's a special person.

And so he feels, or he knows, that the people who oppose him are not only opposing him, but opposing God's purposes in the world. And that is the reality of the Bible's worldview, the Bible's view of the world.

It's the reality of David's view. David saw his life with two poles, if you like. The all-powerful, all-loving God on one hand and God's enemy on the other.

[ 7 : 48 ] And that's the Bible's worldview. We are in a spiritual universe. There is the all-powerful God and there is his less-powerful, defeated, but nonetheless real enemy. And David sees that all these threats come to him because of an enemy.

And for those of us who are Christians, perhaps we feel the attack of the enemy. We feel our doubts. We feel our despair. We feel the mocking of other people, saying, where is your God? How come you've lost your job if your God is on your side?

How come sickness is afflicting your family if God is on your side? So David cries out, how long should my enemy be exalted over me? So there's the storm of despair in verses 1 and 2.

But in verses 3 and 4, we get the cry for help. See who he cries. Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. He's crying for help, isn't he?

And notice who he cries to. You know, most people in times of trouble will cry out for help, won't they? Will pray. I read a great survey that was conducted last year in the US.

[ 8 : 51 ] In the US at least, 41% of people who claim to be atheists or have no religion pray at least once a month. In fact, 6% of people who claim to be atheists pray every day.

Brilliant. Brilliant. But what are they praying to? It's that vague cry for help, isn't it? But for David, this isn't just shouting for help to anyone who will hear.

Look at the words carefully. Verse 3. Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. See, through years of crying out to God, through years of knowing this God, it's his instinct just to cry out.

And it's not just to anybody, it's not just to anyone who will listen, it's to my God, the Lord my God. It's my God, it's personal. He knows him. And the word Lord there in block capitals, that's the personal name of God.

Back in the book of Exodus, the Lord had come to rescue his people Israel, he revealed his name, Yahweh, to Moses. And that's Yahweh, the four letters in Hebrew, are transliterated in our Bible, come to our Bible as that title Lord in capital letters.

[ 10 : 04 ] It's actually a personal name. And in the Bible, we don't read about an impersonal God, just a great force out there who may or may not help. We read about a real, personal God.

A God who is the story of the Bible unfolds, reveals himself more and more clearly. Yahweh is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

As we read through the Bible, we see this triune God, three persons in one, who has forever been a perfect, happy, joyful community within himself.

And who reveals himself to people. So those who trust in Jesus Christ can call out to this God as my God, our Father in heaven. And call out to him through God the Son, Jesus Christ, in the power, with the help of God the Spirit, this triune God.

This is not just a vague, vague cry. It's a personal, real God who has revealed himself. He's not just looking for a spiritual connection with nature, or with some idea of a supreme being, but with a God who has revealed himself.

[ 11 : 14 ] And look at what that cry entails. Consider and answer me. The word consider there really means look at me. Look at me. Don't ignore me anymore. And why does he pray that?

Light up my eyes, verse three, lest I sleep the sleep of death. We all know what it is, don't we? To look in the eyes of someone who's just dark with despair and sorrow and depression.

And that's how David feels. He wants his eyes to be lit up. And that little phrase, or similar to it, actually appears somewhere else in the Bible. In 1 Samuel chapter 14, there's a story of Israel's soldiers who've been hard-pressed all day in a tough battle.

And they're exhausted and hungry and weary, and they're walking through some woods, and David, sorry, Jonathan, the son of King Saul at the time, sees some honey. And he puts his staff into the honey and gets a bit out, and scoops it up to his mouth and licks it.

And we read, his eyes became bright. The fatigue, the despair, the weariness suddenly lit up. David feels dark with despair, feels he slipping into death.

[ 12 : 25 ] He says, Lord, light up my eyes, give me hope, give me life. So that's his instinct, is to cry out to the Lord, his God. Do you notice the argument he uses, his reasons?

Verse 4, Lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say, I have prevailed over him. Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. So this is his argument.

Don't let me just die. Because if you die, how can I serve you? If I'm defeated, if my enemy triumphs, then what does that say about you? If you let me be shaken, then those who hate you will be singing and laughing.

See, David cries out and his reason is, his reasoning with the Lord is that you are my God and so you've tied your reputation to how you deal with me.

So don't let your enemies triumph, please. He's not pleading for his own comfort. He's pleading for God's reputation, ultimately. For those of us who are Christians, that is how we can pray.

[ 13 : 30 ] There is something bigger in the world, something more important than our comfort and ease. And that is that the great triune God, the three in one, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, has put his name on us and has in a sense tied his reputation to how he deals with us.

That's how David saw his life. I wonder if that's how we see our lives. We've had the storm of despair, we've had the cry for help.

Finally, verses 5 and 6, we get the calm of assurance. But, but, it's a great word, isn't it? But turns things around.

Verse 5, but, I have trusted in your steadfast love. So that's the turning point for David, it's how he climbs out of the despair. I have trusted in your steadfast love.

Now, what on earth is steadfast love? What does that mean? Well, it's a really important word in the Bible. It's a word God uses twice as he introduces himself to Moses on top of Mount Sinai.

[14:36] Exodus chapter 34. There the Lord says, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands.

See, steadfast love is by God's own definition one of his key characteristics. So David's saying, but, despite all this, I have trusted in your character, I have trusted in your steadfast love.

What does that love actually look like? What is it? Well, three very important things about this love. It is undeserved, it is unstoppable and it is inescapable. It's undeserved.

We see that time and time again throughout the Bible. So for example, Jacob, the forefather of the Israelite nation, in Genesis chapter 32 verse 10, says, unto the Lord in prayer, I am not worthy of all the deeds of steadfast love that you have showed me.

I am not worthy of it. What you do for me out of your steadfast love is undeserved. That's what God's love is like. It's undeserved. David isn't praying saying, I have trusted in my reputation, I have trusted in my position, I have trusted in the fact I have done the best I can.

[15:51] No, he is saying, I have trusted in your undeserved steadfast love. The second thing is, it's unstoppable love. And that scene where God introduces himself to Moses and tells him that steadfast love is his key characteristic, if you like, that scene comes at a critical moment in history.

The Lord had rescued Israel out of slavery in Egypt, he had made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, effectively he had married them, that's what a covenant, marriage is a covenant, it's a commitment.

And almost straight away, the people had rejected, had disobeyed that covenant, had broken that commitment. They had worshipped a golden calf they had made instead of worshipping the one true God.

It's a bit like a bride on honeymoon, while a husband is out picking up something nice from the shops for her, jumps into bed with a waiter in the hotel. That's what they've done, effectively.

And yet, did God destroy them? Did he divorce them? Did he cut them off there? No. So the Lord is gracious and merciful, showing steadfast love.

[16:59] This love is undeserved and it is unstoppable. Despite their faithlessness, he kept it up. It's unstoppable. The third thing he says, it's inescapable.

Our versions of the Bible translate the Hebrew word behind this in a number of different ways. And in Psalm 23, another Psalm of David's, the Psalm closes, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

But that word translated mercy is the same word that's often translated steadfast love. Surely, God's goodness and steadfast love shall follow me all the days of my life, says David.

It is inescapable love. The word translated follow is actually a stronger word than that. It's a word that means to pursue. It's almost the picture if you imagine, take the shepherd image to a full extent for a moment.

The picture is almost like the Lord is a good shepherd and his sheep dogs are goodness and steadfast love who will pursue the sheep all the way and round them up and bring them home. This steadfast love of God is undeserved, it's unstoppable and it's inescapable.

[18:11] God's steadfast love pursues his people. That's what David is trusting in. He's not trusting in his position, not trusting in his performance, not trusting in seeing the situation starting to get better around him, so that's a sign God's at work.

No, trusting in God's steadfast love is inescapable, undeserved, unstoppable love. And notice the difference that makes, verse 6 or verse 5 again.

I've trusted in your steadfast love, therefore my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.

So situation hasn't changed, but remembering what he's trusting in is not a situation, but this unstoppable, inescapable, undeserved love means he knows he's going to be singing again.

He knows the end of the story will be good. Victor Hugo, who wrote Les Misérables, said in that book somewhere, that life's greatest happiness is to know we're truly loved.

[ 19 : 13 ] Life's greatest happiness is to know we're truly loved. And that's right, isn't it? We can face up to more or less anything if we know someone loves us, that someone cares.

How amazing to know that the great creator God, who rules over everything, has set his undeserved, unstoppable, inescapable love on those who trusted in him.

And that's the difference it makes to David. I will sing to the Lord. There's the old football chant, isn't there, that says, sing while you're winning. Well, David's had a different song.

It says, sing while you're trusting, because the result will be good. The Lord will deal bountifully with me. He expects, because of the Lord's love, he'll get more than he could ever deserve.

And that is the hope for everyone who's a Christian. That while there'll be times in life where God may feel distant, times in life where things are hard, yet because of God's steadfast love, the end of the story is a good one, and the Lord will deal bountifully with us.

[ 20 : 25 ] So if we're despairing today, if we're wondering, how can I know this steadfast love? How can I be sure the Lord will deal bountifully with me? Let me tell you how you can be sure.

This love is on offer today. God has shown his steadfast love in its fullness in sending his own son, Jesus Christ, to take the punishment we deserve, to live the life we should have lived, to die on the cross, to take the punishment we deserved.

He was abandoned and forsaken so that we don't have to be. Jesus chose willingly to die for our rebellion. And it looked like the enemy of triumph, didn't it?

It's what those who looked on as Jesus died said, where's his God? Where's he going? God weighs him up from the dead. And everyone who's trusted in Jesus, that will be our future.

We can sing of God's steadfast love, displayed in Christ, and we've trusted in him. And we can sing because the Lord has dealt bountifully with us. He does not count our sins against us.

[ 21 : 33 ] He lights up our eyes with the hope of eternal life in a new world, where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. And in his steadfast love he is a father to all who trust in Jesus.

He knows our needs. He knows our situation. So whatever your situation is now, if you're a Christian, because the Lord is full of this steadfast love, we can keep crying out to him in confidence.

And we know that we have a saviour who cried out to him in despair. And he has walked in our place so that we can have forgiveness and hope. Let's pray.

Amen.