

Psalm 13 “What to Sing When God Forgets”
Psalm 13
Acts 4

January 31, 2016

So far in our miniseries through the “teens” of the Psalter
we have heard about the problems of violence and oppression (Psalm 11)
and the problems of the tongue – of lies and flattery (Psalm 12).

When the foundations of society are destroyed,
the righteous must not run for the hills – rather they must run to the temple
and *worship* the Lord and do what is right.
And when the rich and powerful use words to destroy others,
the righteous must *listen* to the pure and holy words of God,
trusting that God will keep his word, and guard us from this generation forever.

Psalms 11 and 12 both have confidence that God will listen and God will make things right.
Psalm 13 starts with a question
that would seem to challenge the confidence of Psalms 11-12!

How long, O LORD?
Will you forget me forever?

Does God *actually* forget you?
No!
Of course not!
God does not have a faulty memory!

But the language of “forgetting” and “remembering”
is not just about the “faculty” of memory.

Remembering cannot be detached from words and actions.
In Deuteronomy Moses repeatedly tells Israel,
“Remember the LORD your God.”
“Do not forget” the days in the wilderness.
In the same way, in Exodus 2, we are told
that God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And that “remembering” is what sparks God's actions in redeeming Israel from Egypt.

When God remembers, he speaks and acts.
When God forgets, he is silent.
I am grateful for songs like Psalm 13,
because Ps 13 teaches us that it is *okay* for us to say that God has forgotten me!
It is okay to say that God is silent – and that his silence is very painful for me!

Psalm 13 is a song for those who lament and mourn over the silence of God.

Sing Psalm 13
Read Acts 4

In Acts 4, the believers are facing foes who would silence them.

The apostles have been charged by the priests *not to speak* in the name of Jesus.
And so they gather together with the rest of the believers
and they pray – trusting that God will continue to do what he has promised.

In their prayer, they quote from Psalm 2 -

remembering what God had promised David:

“Why did the Gentiles rage, and peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed.”

Psalm 2 sets the stage for book 1 of the Psalter.

The Son of David sits on the throne.

The early Christians rightly saw that this is most profoundly true of Jesus.

In verses 27-28 they interpret Psalm 2:

“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus,
whom you anointed,
both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,
to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

This was all part of God's plan.

God is never surprised by the machinations of the wicked.
He works all things together for good for those who love him,
for those who are called according to his purpose.

In one sense, Acts 4 is the exact opposite of Psalm 13:

How long?

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken,
and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” (v31)

That was quick!

And yet, in another sense, Acts 4 is exactly like Psalm 13.

Besides the earthquake – which some might have explained as a “coincidence” -
what has changed in the situation of the apostles?

Their external situation is still the same.

Their enemies are still implacably opposed to them.

The priests and elders in Jerusalem have threatened them.

What has changed for the apostles?

Simply this:

“I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

So let's look back at Psalm 13 and what it teaches us about what to sing when God forgets!

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

1. How Long Must I Sing This Song? The Problem of Divine Silence (v1-2)

1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 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?

Psalm 13 starts by asking “how long?”

How long will God forget me?

How long will God hide his face from me?

How long must I sit here *alone? without God!*

How long will my enemies win? and I lose!

And where is God?

God says that he will be our God – and we will be his people.

Further, think about David – this is, after all, a *Psalm of David*.

God had promised David that he would establish David's throne forever.

But there were times when David felt that God had abandoned him.

You know how this feels!

You have all experienced the problem of divine silence.

Listen to the language here:

“Will you forget me forever?”

I feel forgotten.

Unnoticed. Unappreciated.

“No one remembers me...”

“How long will you hide your face from me?”

He won't even look at me!

No one notices me.

I'm invisible.

“How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?”

I am curled in upon myself.

Looking inwards – no one to talk to – no one listens –
no one understands me.

I know that I am describing the present experience of many of you this morning.

And *all of you* have experienced this sort of darkness –
and for many of you,
it is a frequent, and unwelcome, guest.
Psalm 13 invites you to insert your experience into this song.
This is me.
I am sad and depressed.
Because I do not feel the presence of God.
He seems distant and silent.

The last “how long” is perhaps the hardest to connect to –
but it is the most important for understanding our situation:

“How long shall my enemy be exalted over me.”

In our modern “enlightened” society, we don't like talking about “enemies.”
But the only reason why there is still sadness and depression in the world
is because of our *enemies*.

Why am I sad and alone and afraid?
Because my enemies are winning.
I do not yet see everything in subjection to Jesus!
Yes, Jesus has ascended into heaven and been seated at the right hand of God;
there is now a Son of David – a son of Adam – one who bears our nature –
who reigns over all things,
and he has begun to make all things right.

But I am depressed – I am sorrowful – because *in my life* my enemy is winning.
I am not presently experiencing the triumph of Jesus.

Paul, in Ephesians 6, speaks of our spiritual warfare against the principalities and powers,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Yes, Jesus has triumphed over the powers through his resurrection,
but while the definitive battle has been won,
the war is not yet over!
(Think of the analogy in David's life:
once David slew Goliath and cut off his head,
the definitive battle was over – the Philistines turned and fled –
but then the rest of Israel had to join in the fight,
pursuing and plundering the Philistines.
In the same way, Jesus has struck down all his and our foes on the cross,
but now he calls us to join him in doing battle against the defeated foe).

And sometimes, in this present evil age, it feels like the enemy is winning.
It feels like the world is falling apart – the foundations are being destroyed.
Sin and death are too powerful – and I don't have the strength to fight!

This is why the final “how long” in verse 2 is *so important* for us!
I know that my foes have already been defeated in the resurrection of Jesus.
So “how long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

The very form of the question is a confession of faith!
How long?
Until when?
I know that there will be a “when” - there will be an end to this madness.

Maybe you are depressed right now.
Maybe you are trying to help someone who is depressed.

Psalm 13 reminds us that *it's okay to be depressed!*
There are good reasons to be sad and sorrowful.

When your mother dies, when you lose a baby,
when your best friend moves away,
when family or colleagues or friends treat you horribly,
when you wonder, “what am I doing here?”

Bad stuff happens.
And yes, sometimes, in the midst of the bad stuff, God's presence shines through,
and you find joy in the midst of suffering.
Other times, in the midst of the bad stuff, God seems absent – silent.

Sometimes ordinary sorrow and sadness can deepen into depression,
where you are *sunk* into the depths of despair.

And that's okay!
It's okay to be depressed.
It's okay to say so.

We seem to have created a church culture in America where everyone needs to be happy.
I think that in large part that is due to our church music.
If the music is always “happy,”
that communicates the idea that the Christian life is about being happy.
But Jesus and the apostles are very clear that the only route to glory –
the only way to attain to the joy and the happiness of the resurrection
is by the way of the cross – sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

This is why the Psalms have always been so important in Christian worship.
There are Psalms of joy – and Psalms of lament.
And most commonly, you find a blending of both (like in Psalm 13).

So the first thing that we need to see from Psalm 13 is that *it is okay to ask God* “how long”?

How long will you forget me?
How long will you be silent?

Psalm 13 does not specify *why* God is silent.

Psalm 13 leaves that open for you to fill in the blanks.

The Westminster Confession has a brilliant answer to the question, why is God silent?

Chapter 5, section 5, puts it this way:

“The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season,
his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts,
[and then they offer several basic reasons]
to chastise them for their former sins,
or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption
and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled;
and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support
upon himself,
and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin,
and for sundry other just and holy ends.” (WCF 5.5)

Sometimes God is silent in order to rebuke you for your sin.

Other times God is silent in order to show you how much you need him.

Maybe God wants you to learn how much you should *hate* sin.

Maybe God wants you to learn the deceitfulness of your own heart.

Why has he brought this trial – and then seemingly disappeared?

I like their last line:

“and for sundry other just and holy ends.”

In other words,

often we have no idea why God is silent!

All we know is that God is holy and just,

and so therefore he must have a good reason for it!

And as we turn to verses 3-4, we can see that the Psalmist would concur.

Because while David may be hurting – depressed and alone –
he knows that he has nowhere else to turn!

2. Death – The Result of Divine Silence (v3-4)

3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;

light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

4 lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,”

lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

Think about the result of divine silence.

Death.

If God remains silent, then I die.
Then I “sleep the sleep of death.”

Many have pointed out the connection between depression and death.

In “Depression: A Stubborn Darkness” Ed Welch cites several authors:

“I feel as though I died a few weeks ago and my body hasn't found out yet.”

“Depression...involves a complete absence:

absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest.

The pain you feel... is an attempt on nature's part...to fill up the empty space.

The deeply depressed are simply the walking, waking dead.” (Welch, 8)

“The only certainty is that misery will persist....

You doubt that you are loved by anyone...

The only thing you know is that you are guilty, shameful, and worthless.

It is not that you have made mistakes in your life or sinned or reaped futility.

It is that you *are* a mistake, you *are* sin, you *are* futility.” (Welch, 11)

How could anyone love me?
If they *knew* the wickedness of my heart...

This is where we wind up – if God remains silent.

And this is why the Psalmist pleads with God:

“Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

Notice that while it's *okay* to be depressed,
you need to bring your depression to Jesus.

You need to come to God and say “Help!”

“If you don't say something, O LORD – if you don't answer me –
then I will die.”

Medication can be useful in treating the symptoms of depression.

Sometimes depression can become so severe that medication can be helpful.

But the root problems can only be dealt with by the medicine of grace.

It was fascinating to hear Rex talk about the hundreds of people who came to the clinic in Niles seeking medication for depression.

As he asked questions, he would probe into the reasons for their depression.

Over and over again, they were isolated and alone.

Broken families, uprooted, alienated, distant –

when asked, “Do you have any friends?”

one person said, “Yeah, I've got a friend in New York.”

Medication can make a person feel better –

and sometimes that's essential to get them out of the rut that they are stuck in.

But only the grace of God can bring life to the dead.
David Powlison spent years working in the mental health field.
He tells the story of a young woman who slashed herself with a broken bottle.
“As we dressed her wounds and sought to calm her, she wailed inconsolably,
‘Who will love me? Who will love me? Who *could* love me? Who *could* love me?’
Drugs eventually quieted her down.
But her anguish and guilt made the psychologies I believed seem like thin gruel.
Her distraught cry was realistic and heart-rending.
Nothing I knew could really answer her, not her psychiatrist, medication,
parents, job, boyfriend, or peers in the small group I led.
We could manage Mary – sort of – but neither our theories nor techniques
could really touch what ailed her.
I now see that her cry of desolation could only find answer
in the mercy and hope of Jesus.” (Speaking Truth in Love, 155)

And seriously, what is the difference between Mary and you (or me)?
We may cover our fears, hatreds, desires, and anxieties with a thin veneer of civility,
but we are no different.

I need God to fix this!
The normal reaction to trouble and suffering is to turn inward (like verses 1-2).
To shut down – and shut others out.
But verse 3 sees a shift in direction:
“Consider and answer, O LORD my God.”
I need *you* to do something or else I will die!

When you are in the midst of the dark night of the soul,
cry out to God!
Ask him – beg him – plead with him to *do something* – to *say something!*

Notice how the Psalmist blends together the theme of the *word* (answer me!)
and the theme of *light* (Light up my eyes!).

In a world of silence and darkness,
I need God to speak – and to shine.

Otherwise my enemy will have the last word!

And that is why John says,
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things were made through him,
and without him was not any thing made that was made.
In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

And this confidence becomes stronger and brighter in verses 5-6,
as the Psalmist reflects on God's promises:

3. Salvation – The Result of God's Steadfast Love (v5-6)

a. God Is Faithful to His Promises – so I *Know* that Silence Cannot Last Forever (v5)

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

We saw last time that the *hasid* – the faithful one who demonstrates steadfast love – is gone
the trustworthy have vanished from among the sons of Adam.

Where can you find *hesed* – steadfast love?

Where can you find loyalty?

Where can you find someone who will do what they promise?

David says to God, “I have trusted in your steadfast love.”

My confidence is that *God* is faithful to his promises.

When God makes a promise, he will do it.

And so, even though David is still in the midst of his darkness –
in the midst of his sorrow –

he says that he *will* rejoice in God's salvation.

Where is the faithful one?

The sons of Adam are too fickle.

The faithful one is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

God told Abraham that he would bless all nations through his seed.

When that promise got written down in the book of Genesis,

Israel was one itty-bitty little country

with pretty much zero influence in world history.

And yet, because of the apostles' preaching,

the blessing of Abraham has now come to all the nations of the earth!

God is faithful to his promises.

Jesus told us that the gates of hell would never prevail against his church.

When that promise got written down in the gospel of Matthew,

the Christian church was minuscule, persecuted,

with only a few tens of thousands of adherents.

Oh, and those adherents were divided by all sorts of schisms and heresies –

false teachers running off with a few hundred here, a few thousand there!

And yet, two thousand years later, here we are on the other side of the planet.

Brothers and sisters,

it still remains the case that no one has been able

to better articulate the plight of the human race –
and the solution needed in order to be saved –
than the Lord Jesus Christ and his prophets and apostles.

Everything else is just coping mechanisms.

And so...

b. And so I Will Sing to the LORD, Because the Future Has Begun in Jesus (v6)
*6 I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

At the end of the Psalm, David is still in the same situation that he was in the beginning.
But now he is singing praise to the LORD
because the LORD has done great things for him.

We sing to the LORD because he has dealt bountifully with us.
Depression and despair lead to death.
But Jesus has won the victory over death.
Jesus has been raised from the dead and has restored humanity to life.
And by his Holy Spirit he unites us to himself,
that we might pass from death to life through our union with him.