

From Sighing to Singing

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[0 : 00] Psalm 13, which is to be found on page 548 of the Church Bible.

Psalm of David. How long, Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death. And my enemy will say, I've overcome him.

And my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love. My heart rejoices in your salvation.

[1 : 11] I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me. Amen. Thank you for reading that psalm so well.

And good morning again, everyone. It's very nice to be here. Can people understand my accent?

That's encouraging. That's very good. I can't say what a delight it is to be here this morning.

I've got to say, it's beautiful. It's my first time in Glasgow. It's my first time in Scotland on this trip. I haven't been here before. And such a beautiful country. And even better to be here with you this morning at St Silas.

I'd never met Martin before. We'd corresponded a couple of times. But I met him for the first time on Friday. And my first visual thought of Martin was he was picking me up from a cafe.

And he just drove the wrong way down a one-way street. But did it with such confidence that I thought, there's someone I'll get on with. Let me pray.

[2 : 22] We're going to look at this psalm, Psalm 13, that was just read so well to us. But just before we do, let me just ask the Lord to help us. Heavenly Father, as we gather together this morning, we're very mindful of the fact that each one of us will be going through different things.

We'll be facing different issues in life. We will be rejoicing in certain things, perhaps mourning in certain areas. We're thankful that you're the one that knows us better than we even know ourselves. And we entrust ourselves into your hands this morning. As the great physician, please work in us and through us, individually and collectively. And as we look at this psalm, a psalm that is so strong from the lips of your servant, we pray that you might speak afresh to us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, one of the reasons that the psalms have been loved by God's people down through the ages is that often in the Christian life, you can feel quite different than other Christians around you.

We can go through experiences or suffer feelings or whatever it is that makes us think, well, there must be something different with me. My faith isn't strong enough. Or maybe God doesn't love me enough.

[3 : 34] But the psalms has been a blessing to Christians because every now and then you'll come across a psalm which puts into words exactly what you're feeling. And it's a reminder that, oh no, there's not something strange with me.

This is normal. This is what the people of God have gone through all through the history of the world. You see others struggling with doubt or questions, wrestling with the difficulties of life.

And it's an encouragement because you think, well, I'm not alone. Someone's expressed it before. And that's a truth that I hope you know. Charles Spurgeon, you guys will know better over on this side of the world than we do, but Charles Spurgeon was a Baptist minister in England in the 19th century.

He had the nickname of Prince of Preachers. And if you're going to have a nickname, that's not a bad one to have. It's estimated that he preached to over 10 million people in his lifetime. That's not

hits on a website.

That's people sitting down physically in front of him and him preaching the word. But what's not always known about Charles Spurgeon is that from the age of about 24 onwards, he suffered from a debilitating depression.

[4 : 40] He described it in these words, He used the phrase, his causeless depression.

And what he went through has been the experience of many people of God down through the ages. The reality of sorrow, of sadness, of brokenness, of despair, is a common one for all human beings on this planet, regardless of age, regardless of gender or race or religion.

And Christians are not exempt. Life in this fallen world as fallen people is tough. And sometimes we think, well, it must just be me as a Christian.

No one else goes through it. They do. And today we see that expressed very strongly in Psalm 13. And the author of this psalm is a surprise in this way.

If you have a look in your Bibles, before verse 1, we see that the author of this psalm is King David. And that's very significant. Have a think about who David was for a moment.

[5 : 50] David is repeatedly described in the Scriptures as having a heart fully devoted to God.

That's a phrase used about him repeatedly in the Old Testament. He was God's choice for king for God's people.

He was the forerunner of the Christ, God's special, unique, promised king to come. God made David incredible promises and blessed him amazingly in his lifetime.

And yet, this special man of God struggled. Big time. Look at the phrase that he says in the first two verses. He says four words and then he repeats the abbreviation of those words three more times in the first two verses.

How long, O Lord? That's what he says. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me? How long, O Lord? That was the expression of David in this psalm. And I know that as I say that, every one of you who's here as a Christian this morning will be able to completely sympathize and empathize with that.

[7 : 06] You will have cried out at some stage. How long, O Lord? If you haven't, congratulations, you're a brand new Christian. You will at some stage in the near future experience this.

All Christians go through it. Some of you may feel that's exactly expressing what I'm feeling right now. How long will I have to keep wrestling with the consequences of COVID?

How long do I have to keep going through this personal issue, this relational breakdown, this loss of a loved one? How long, O Lord? Now, Psalm 13 doesn't give us many clues as to what David was particularly facing when he wrote this psalm.

I think verse 2 and verse 4 hint that he was facing physical enemies, and we know that he did at different times in his life. But we don't know the exact specifics of his circumstances.

But at one level, we don't have to, do we? Because we all understand the sentiment. Unsure if we can keep going because the pressures and the burden is so big. It affects everyone from God's chosen king through to you and I, living in such a different place and such a different time in history.

[8 : 20] Well, then what can we learn from David? If our circumstances can be similar, the sentiment's similar, what can we learn from David from this psalm? Well, the verses split up very neatly into three sections.

So in verses 1 to 2, you've got the pain of David described. Then there's a slight change in verse 3 and 4, and you've got the prayer of David as he pleads with God.

And then in verses 5 to 6, we see David start to praise God. So pain, prayer, and praise. Two verses each. And we're going to look at the psalm in those three sections.

So firstly, verses 1 to 2. This is where David describes his pain. And if you're a note-taker, my heading for this point is Christians will encounter despair.

Christians will encounter despair. Have a look again at verses 1 to 2. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

[9 : 20] How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? I think this psalm is so powerful because in such a few words, it sums up such truths that we just, we get, we connect with.

Do you notice that in those two verses, David describes struggles in three different areas of his life? Just in those two verses.

The first is he describes the wrestle he's having spiritually in his relationship with God. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Do you see what he's saying? David is sunk so low, he feels despair because he feels that God is distant from him, disinterested in him. Now, you'd never have thought that God's chosen king would feel as though God had turned away from him, would you?

Because, well, we think that only happens to us. We're the only ones who get to such places in life that we think that God is distant or disinterested or even absent.

[10 : 31] And then we feel worse because we think, well, it's only us that feel this way, so there must be something wrong with me. Or David felt this. Will you forget me forever?

That's how he feels like God's forgotten him completely. How long will you hide your face from me? He feels like God has turned away from him, turned his back on him. It's very powerful what David exclaims here.

But it's not just spiritually that he's struggling. He's suffering personally and himself. Verse 2. How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

Here's the personal turmoil that he's experiencing. And again, do you see the language is so potent and relatable. This is why, you know it's the word of God. Because it's so true, this.

He wrestles with his thoughts. Is there anything harder to control than your thought life? Very tricky, isn't it? Can you think like me of nights where you haven't been able to switch your brain off?

[11 : 36] Because it's just been working in areas and in directions that you wish it wouldn't and you want to rein it back. But you can't control. You're wrestling with your thoughts. Sometimes it's inappropriate thoughts that are coming.

Sometimes it's injustices that you've felt that you're wanting. You wish you could explain to other people. I don't know how you wrestle with your thoughts, but I know you will do.

I can tell you one of the ways I've wrestled with my thoughts often. Often I will have a situation that I've gone through or a conversation with others. And then I'll go away afterwards. And I'll just keep replaying it over and over in my head.

And sometimes wishing it had gone in a different direction. I've lost lots of arguments in my life, but I've always won the replay in my mind afterwards. Where you think of a great last comment to kind of drop the mic and walk off.

You can't do that because it was eight weeks ago when I finally come up with the good answer. But you're wrestling with your thoughts. That's what David's talking about here. But it's not just wrestling with his thoughts. It's the sorrow in his heart.

[12 : 38] It's the things causing him pain. Causing him despair. It's the loss of a loved one or the difficulty that he's experiencing. And often those two things go together.

They build on each other. The things which cause such pain in our heart, we then wrestle with in our mind. Why, God, is this happening and what's going on? Which causes more pain and then more struggle.

And it goes on and on. So David is struggling spiritually. Why have you turned your back on me? Why have you forgotten me? He's talking about internal turmoil that he's having.

But thirdly, he despairs in relation to his enemies. End of verse two. How long will my enemy triumph over me? And this is the bit where most of us go, well, I don't really get this bit, David.

Because David had literal soldiers out to try and kill him. Most of us don't. I take it most of us don't have that. But it doesn't take too much work to work out the principle of what he's talking about here.

[13 : 36] And then I think we do go through it all. What he's describing here is he sees other people that don't seem to care about God succeeding in life. And when he looks at his own life, someone who cares about God, he's struggling.

And it causes him even more angst. It's a bit like Psalm 73, if you know that psalm, where the psalmist says he looks out and he sees people that don't care about God.

And they're winning in life. They're having a great life and succeeding and having happiness and prosperity. And then he looks at his own life. Someone who's tried to follow God faithfully all the time.

And he's struggling in life. And he says, my foot nearly slipped. If you know that, Psalm 73. Well, that's what David's describing here. So can you feel David's despair in these two verses? Does it echo times in your life? How long, O Lord, will I feel like you've left me and forgotten me? How long will I be going through this pain? How long will I feel worse when I look at other people and they're succeeding in life and I look at myself and I struggle?

[14:39] How long? The whole breadth of David's life is here. His relationship with God. His own personal well-being. The way he looks at other people.

Some of you here this morning may know exactly what David's feeling. It's describing you to a T. You may be in the thralls of it. It might be fear and anxiety that's causing you to wrestle in this kind of way.

My wife and I were talking the other day that there's a generation in Christchurch, where I'm from in New Zealand, there's a generation of school kids who've just finished their schooling life. And in their 13 years of school, they've gone through earthquakes, a terrorist attack, because there was a gunman who shot dead 50 people in Christchurch, and a global pandemic.

No wonder we've got a generation of people that are struggling with anxiety and fear and mental health issues more than certainly I did when I went through school. But it might be physical pain that you're struggling with.

It might be loneliness or separation. It might be being rejected in different ways, or struggling with the uncertainty of the future. It might be the struggle of injustice that you've suffered.

[15:52] Or there are so many factors, but they lead to how long, O Lord? Because Christians will encounter despair in this fallen world.

So firstly, we encounter despair. Secondly, we can cry out honestly to God. We cry out honestly to God. That's exactly what David does here.

Do you see verses 3 and 4? He cries out to God. He pleads in prayer. Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death.

My enemy will say, I've overcome him, and my foes will rejoice when I fall. Do you see what David's doing here? He cries out to God, and he's almost demanding an answer. He's saying, I'm so close to the edge.

You must tell me, show me, do something. He even says, or I'll die. Now, this is a psalm, and so there's a poetic sense to what David's saying.

[16:50] And it's David speaking about his particular kind of situation. But again, do you see the similarities for you and I today? Answer me, Lord. Please do something, because I'm not sure how long I can keep going.

God, I feel like I'm on the edge. I'm at the end of my tether. Please do something. I don't know that I can keep going in this way. And I want you to see from this psalm that it's good to cry out to God when you're struggling in this way.

I point that out because sometimes we as Christians can think perhaps it's inappropriate for us to cry out to God, to admit our struggles in this way, because maybe it means our faith is faulty or God's love is not enough.

But I take it that the Scriptures are giving us permission here for exactly this, for us to cry out to him. David does it repeatedly in the book of Psalms, but he's not the only one.

Job cries out to the Lord. Habakkuk cries out to the Lord. There are other people we'll get to in a moment who cry out to the Lord, and I think that gives us permission. Now, I'm not trying to suggest that we can't sometimes cross over into inappropriate anger or fear, but David pleads here, and he does it strongly.

[18:01] In fact, there's another psalm in Psalm 32 where David does something similar, and he uses a phrase which I've always loved. He says, When I kept silent, my bones wasted away. Don't keep silent.

Cry out to the Lord. It's healthy. It's good for us to do. It's also, this is a slight tangential point, but I'll only be here once, so why don't I do it?

Sometimes we need to cry out corporately. I think it's very interesting that this is a psalm. In other words, it was a song of the people of God that they used to sing corporately together, and it's a lament.

Most of our songs, I'm very interested to see, you've got some music stuff coming up lately. Most of our Christian songs are songs of rejoicing and celebration and thankfulness, and there is absolutely

nothing wrong with that because the gospel is good news, and we rejoice in all those sorts of things.

But that makes coming to church sometimes very alienating for people who come despairing because they're not given an opportunity to express their lament before the Lord.

[19 : 13] And I always think it's a good thing. If you're a Christian musician or a Christian songwriter, write some laments because it's good sometimes for the people of God to corporately allow that to be expressed so that you can, oh, I'm not alone when I'm going through this.

That's what this psalm would have been for the people of God in the Old Testament times. They would have sung it together, and it would have allowed them to cry out to the Lord corporately. Now, some of us are not good at expressing crying out to the Lord.

I've been trying to work out in New Zealand who's the worst at it. I think it's me. In other words, I'm the wrong age, the wrong gender, the wrong ethnicity, because we tend to bottle things up.

But there's a younger generation in New Zealand that express everything, and I want to say to them, keep some things to yourself. You don't have to let it all out. But for those of us who are older, we don't sometimes cry out honestly to the Lord.

We find it difficult. We should. We should say it. We should cry out to the Lord. It's us showing him that we need him and depend upon him. And when we cry out, it's not just any old release.

[20 : 21] A few years ago, there was a theory called primal scream theory. Did anyone know of primal scream? There's a few nods. Anyone do it? You don't embarrass yourself. It was a kind of thought in psychology and mental health things that if you had something which was causing you deep distress and discomfort, scream it out at the top of your voice.

Better to express than suppress. That was the theory. Now, in fact, this will date me, but if you love 80s music, then bless you.

But if you love 80s music, people remember Tears for Fears. The song Shout was exactly written about primal scream theory. Shout, shout, let it all out.

These are the things I can do without. Come on. Try getting that out of your head now. The problem, of course, with primal scream theory is nothing changes.

You let it all out, but it still remains objectively the same. If the thing that's causing you most difficulty in life is your boss, and on the way to work, you scream out their name at the top of your voice, you get to work, and it's still exactly the same.

[21 : 38] But we don't do primal screaming as Christians. We cry out to the Lord. We cry out to the one who sits on his throne and who's in charge of everything. And he doesn't just sit on his throne sovereign.

He's also our heavenly Father who knows us and loves us. We cry out to him. Our words are not just empty things spoken and blown away in the wind.

We cry out to the one who holds us in his hands as we cry. Now, his ways are not our ways. We will not always understand what he's doing.

We won't always know why he's allowing what he does or what he might bring from situations that we go through. But we're crying out to the Lord, and that makes all the difference in the world.

And I've got to say that's so much different to what the rest of the world has. I've got to be honest, as life has got more difficult in New Zealand over recent years, I'm not sure I could cope with the hopelessness that you have.

[22 : 37] If you don't have a God you can cry out to at the moment. Because then you are just screaming out words into a wind that takes it away. Your plea for justice or help or support or strength will just be unanswered.

I'm not sure how people cope without the Lord these days. David gives us permission. Take it to the Lord. Cry out to him. So firstly, we will encounter despair.

Secondly, cry out honestly to the Lord. Finally, very quickly, trust joyfully. Have a look at the last two verses. Verse 5. But I trust in your unfailing love.

My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. Notice there's three couplets in those two verses.

So what I mean by that is David says he will do three things. He will trust, his heart will rejoice, and he will sing to the Lord. And he will do those three things because of three things about God.

[23 : 41] God's unfailing love, the Lord's salvation, and because God has been good to him. Now, does anything strike you as odd here? Does anything strike you as unusual or missing?

You don't have to shout it out, but just think for yourself. Is there anything missing or odd or strange here? If you can't think of anything, you've forgotten the last four verses. There's no reason for the positivity of David in verse 5 and 6.

In verses 1 to 4, it's hard to think of how much lower David could get. He started off saying, How long, O Lord, will I feel like you're away from me, and I'd be struggling in this way and feel worse when I look at other people?

You must do something about it now because I'm not sure I can keep going. He demands an answer in his prayer, but no answer has come. And yet in verse 5 and 6, he's trusting, rejoicing, and singing.

What on earth makes that change happen? It would make sense, wouldn't it, if there was a verse 4 and a half? And if in verse 4 and a half, it said, Not for too much longer, Dave.

[24 : 53] Because it's David saying, How long, O Lord? And God answered me and said, Not for too much longer, David. I will sort out your enemies in a couple of weeks. Just hold on for two more weeks. Or if verse 4 and a half said, I've heard what you've said, David, and I'll take care of that.

Just leave it with me, but you can rest assured. But it doesn't. There's no answer given. There's no time frame provided. And that's what makes the words and the sentiment of verse 5 and 6 all the more incredible.

Because in the midst of the despair and the crying out, David trusts in God's saving goodness without explanation, without answer, without time frame.

How can he respond that way? Well, I want to say he chooses to trust. That's what he does. That's what it boils down to in the end.

He makes a choice. Just like we can choose to respond in any way, he makes a choice to trust God. Now, it's not just a, Oh, well, I'll just trust.

[25 : 55] No, it's based on God's unfailing love. It's based on his salvation. It's based on David's own prior experience of God. See those things in verse 5 and 6. But because of those things, he is intentional to trust God in the midst of his despair.

And I want to encourage you this morning that you and I have even far more reason to trust in God's goodness and unfailing love and salvation than even David did.

Because you and I can look back and see the full expression of those things in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we can be reminded of exactly who our God is because we know who our Saviour is. We can feel better about who God is and what he's doing because we know exactly what Jesus achieved for us. In Jesus, we see the full demonstration of God's love for us.

And then we can trust. More than that, do you know that Jesus experienced the first two points of this psalm in his life?

[27 : 03] He encountered despair and he cried out honestly to God. And it's worth seeing that and knowing it because often when we're in the midst of despair, we think God's the furthest away.

But actually when we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, we remember, no, he too himself has gone through this and understands it. Jesus knew despair. He knew what it was to struggle spiritually, have personal turmoil, feel like his enemies had triumphed.

If it's possible, take this cup from me. Jesus knew what it was to cry out to the Lord, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But he cried that out at the precise moment that he was ensuring that our despair and struggles will not always last. He cried that out and experienced that for you and I at the precise moment on the cross that he made sure that we will not always be experiencing the difficulties of this fallen world. He went through it to guarantee that our struggles will one day be gone, eternally removed, never to be gone through again. You and I can see even more clearly than David could the unfailing love of verse 5, the salvation of verse 5, the good the Lord has done for us in verse 6.

[28 : 27] We know that because of the Lord Jesus Christ, we're not just the people of God. We've been adopted as sons and daughters. We know the future that's ours, the new creation that will one day come.

We know that we're never alone because we always have his spirit as we live life in this way. We know these wonderful truths all guaranteed for us because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's why we, along with David, can choose to trust, our hearts can choose to rejoice, and we can choose to sing to the Lord, even in a world when despair will still come to us.

Spurgeon, who I mentioned at the beginning of the talk, who struggled with depression, he wrote a number of sermons on the Psalms, and he wrote one on Psalm 13. And he's got this wonderful phrase where he says that David starts the Psalm sighing, but he finishes it singing. And that's true. It's exactly what happens in this Psalm. But David doesn't just start at one end and end at another because he's manic and swings from kind of extreme to extreme with no rhyme or reason.

[29 : 34] He was a real man who struggled with despair, but he knew the God that he trusted. Despair and the need to cry out to God will continue for you and I in this fallen world.

And Christians can't escape it. David didn't escape it. The Lord Jesus didn't. The apostles didn't. Why would we think we're different? In the midst of that despair, though, David cried out to God and then chose to trust.

There is an answer to David's question in the Psalm. How long, O Lord? The answer because of Jesus is, not for always. You will not always be in the despair that you may be feeling. It will come to an end because of Jesus. May we choose to trust him no matter what we go through. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your servant David expressing what I know all of us will go through at different times.

We thank you for the example he sets, but more than that, we thank you for the one he points forward to, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank you for the difference knowing him makes to everything. I pray particularly for any of us who this morning may specifically be going through difficult times.

[30 : 51] May we fix our eyes upon the Lord Jesus and may you encourage our hearts, strengthen our souls in the knowledge of who you are and what you've done. preserve us and strengthen us this day and forward.

And may we hold the light of Christ out to those who don't know him. And we pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.