

LORD, HOW LONG?
Psalm 13

Intro: This is a Psalm of David, but when it was written, and during what trial, we do not know. But it is apparent that David was experiencing one of those times which the Puritans called, a time of God's desertion. God never does actually desert us, but, from our circumstances, and from the barrenness in our own hearts, it seems that He has. And during those times we could not be in greater distress if He really had deserted us.

Spurgeon said about this Psalm,

It was, doubtless, more than once the language of that much tried man of God, and is intended to express the feelings of the people of God in those ever-returning trials which beset them. If the reader has never yet found occasion to use the language of this brief ode, he will do so ere long, if he be a man after the Lord's own heart (Treasury of David, I, 151).

We would like it if we never had such a time as David had here, but they come to all of us, not once, but, as Mr. Spurgeon said, over and over again.

This raises a question: Why does God deal with us in this way? Why is it that often we pray, and it seems like God does not hear us? Why is it that, when we seek to honor the Lord, He does not honor us as He has promised to do? We talk about the faithfulness of God, and then it seems that we have to eat our words. WHY?

This Psalm gives us some answers to that question.

But, first of all, let me point out the divisions to the Psalm.

There are three parts, and even a child could discover them.

- 1) Vv. 1, 2.
- 2) Vv. 3, 4.
- 3) Vv. 5, 6.

In the first we have, DAVID'S PERPLEXITY.

In the second, we have, DAVID'S PRAYER.

In the third, we have, DAVID'S PEACE, or DAVID'S PRAISE.

I. DAVID'S PERPLEXITY (Psa. 13:1, 2).

Four times we have the question, "How long . . . ?" At this point in the particular desertion which David was experiencing he was not so much troubled by the fact of it, but by the length of it. It is bad enough to feel deserted, but

our distress is magnified when it goes on and on, and seemingly without any purpose.

But this is the point: There is a purpose, and it is brought our very wonderfully by David's own words. But we will come back to this in a moment.

Note that in verse 1 David did not seem to be conscious that the Lord was helping him, and so in verse 2 he indicated that he had been talking to himself, and all of the time watching how his enemy seemed to be enjoying his misfortune. In fact, his enemy seemed to be prospering.

And so we have the combination of a man forgotten by God, left to talk to himself to try to figure things out, and watching his enemy gloat and prosper while he suffered.

If you have ever been there, you can live your difficulties over again through David's words.

But let us look, secondly, at . . .

II. DAVID'S PRAYER (Psa. 13:3, 4).

When David prayed, he wanted the Lord to do two things:

- 1) To consider him.
- 2) To hear him.

The word "consider" means "to look with consideration and attention" (Wilson, p. 93). It suggests that from David's standpoint the Lord had not even looked at him long enough to know what was going on! If he could only get the Lord's attention so that the Lord would hear him, David knew that the Lord would help him.

But why did he want help? Perhaps George Muller learned to present his arguments to the Lord from the prayers of David.

He wanted help for three reasons:

- 1) So that he would not die.

Do you remember those words of John Newton which I have repeated to you many times--words which indicate that John Newton knew what David was going through when he wrote this Psalm? He said that when he prayed, the Lord seemed to make his troubles worse, not better, and then Newton said this:

"Lord, why is this?" I trembling cried,
"Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?"

The second reason:

- 2) So that his enemy would not be able to claim the victory, and thus make it appear that David was wrong.
- 3) So that David himself would not be "moved."

What does it mean to be "moved"?

When Job's wife wanted him to curse God and die, that would have meant being moved.

When many of our Lord's disciples turned in John 6 and walked no more with him, they were "moved."

We are "moved" when with our lips, or by our actions, we turn from the Lord. And David feared this, knowing the weakness of his own heart. And so he plead with God for help.

But then we come to the end of the Psalm:

III. DAVID'S PEACE, or PRAISE (Psa. 13:5, 6).

Here we see how God did help him before he was actually out of trouble. The Lord strengthened his faith.

In these verses David spoke of the past and the immediate future. Put the first part of verse 5 with the last part of verse 6. David had trusted the Lord before, and the Lord had dealt bountifully with him.

Consequently, David told the Lord that in the present trial he would:

- 1) Rejoice from his heart in the Lord's salvation, in his deliverance. Cf. Phil. 4:6, 7.
- 2) Sing unto the Lord.

This is why it is important for us to be learning the great hymns of the church--so we can sing to the Lord. There is probably more healing of wounded hearts in the singing of the great hymns than we ever realize. I personally can testify to that.

Concl: Now, can you see why the Lord led David through such a trying experience, and why we will go through the same type of experience? Let me give you several reasons:

- 1) So that we would really seek the Lord, seek His presence, delight ourselves in Him. We see this in verse 1. Here is a man crying out for God, even more than the blessings of God. Cf. Psa. 37:4.
- 2) In verse 2a, so that we will see how destitute we are as far as helping ourselves is concerned, and how lacking in understanding. Through our trials the Lord brings us to see how foolish it is for us to trust in ourselves.
- 3) David's concern about his enemy in verses 2b and verse 4 showed a concern for the glory of God. David was the Lord's servant, and failure on David's part would bring shame on the Lord's name.

Do you remember what Nathan the prophet told David when he had sinned in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah? He said, ". . . by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme . . ." (2 Sam. 12:14).

- 4) Through this time David learned more about praying, and was moved to pray.

How easy it is to neglect prayer. And how easy it is to become formal and cold in our praying. But let some trouble come along, let God withdraw His presence, and we quit saying prayers, and begin to pray. Sometimes a child of God prays, really prays, for the first time in his life when going through a time like David experienced here. And even if we have been praying, a deeper sense of our need to pray comes out from such an experience.

- 5) Through this time David learned the value of looking back upon the goodness of the Lord in the past.

Things had not always been like they were when David wrote this Psalm, and they would not always be like they were then. David had trusted the Lord before, and the Lord had "dealt bountifully" with him.

What did that mean?

It meant that the Lord had not only blessed him, but that he had been blessed far beyond anything that he had asked the Lord to do, or anything that he deserved!

- 6) Finally, David learned the strengthening, healing, delivering power of praise, and of praise expressed in singing.

Think how bankrupt people are in times of trouble, when God seems to have left them, if they only know the light, meaningless songs that most Christians know.

Some day, if that time has not already come, all of you will have occasion to praise the Lord for the hymns we have learned and which we sing here at Trinity. Sing them when your heart is full with the blessing of the Lord, but sing them also when the clouds hiding the face of God are in your life. They will strengthen your heart and keep you from being "moved."

Nothing that the Lord does is meaningless. He withdraws His presence so that we will seek Him more and more. He waits for us to praise Him. And then, in His own time, He comes--and, oh, how good it is to know again that He is near.

You may not need this Psalm tonight, or you may. But whatever your situation may be with reference to the Lord, I trust that you will never forget Psalm 13. Here is light shining for us in a dark place, guidance for those times when we need it the most!