When God Seems to be Silent

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Psalm 13:1-6

1 How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your
face from me? 2 How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my
heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? 3 Consider
and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep
of death, 4 and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed'; my foes will rejoice
because I am shaken. 5 But I 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.

1. The Waiting

A 94-year-old woman prayed, "Lord, I'd like to see my daughter Betty Jane before I die. I promise I won't bother her or interrupt her life. I just want to lay eyes on her." This is the prayer of a mother who gave up her daughter for adoption a long time ago. She had many reasons why she could not raise her daughter. She (Minka) was 16 years old and was on a picnic in the woods when she was assaulted and raped. She got pregnant and a baby girl was secretly born. Minka named her Betty Jane and placed her for adoption. The mother kept loving and praying for her baby even though she never believed they would meet again. Nearly eighty years later, the mother prayed an impossible prayer for the first time that she wanted to see her daughter.

A judge released the adoption records, and the mother called her daughter right away. This is a true story in a book entitled *The Waiting* written by her granddaughter Cathy LaGrow. When Betty Jane knew that she was adopted, she was anxious to meet her biological mother. She would pray, "Lord, how long do I have to wait to see my mother?" Many of us feel the same way at times when we are waiting on someone or for something. The wait can often be the most difficult part and isn't easy.

2. How Long?

In today's scripture Psalm 13 verses 1 & 2, the author says, "***How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?***" The author asks "how long" over and over. In verses 1 & 2, he says, "How long?" four times. We can sense the distress in the text. The author of Psalm 13 is attributed to King David. We are not sure of the circumstances, but we believe the psalm was written when David was being chased by King Saul. At that time,

David felt ignored and forgotten by God. He felt alienated in his situation and lamented his circumstance in his heart. David was filled with sorrow and would ask God for help. His enemy would insist that his trust in God was foolish and God would not help him.

How did David respond to the Lord? According to Psalm 22:1-2, one of his responses was this, "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*** [2] ***O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest***." David's response was to ask, "Why?". Why did God not care about David and not answer his prayers. David asked God why He had forsaken him.

Matthew 27:46 says, ***"And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?***'" We see in the passage that Jesus felt the same way as David. It seemed like God had forsaken Jesus. Did God not know what was happening to the Christ? Did he forget who God had sent to save the world?

Isaiah 49:14 & 15 says, "***But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.'*** [15] ***Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you***." Isaiah reminds the Israelites that God never forgets His people. God is the one who is in charge of everything. Nothing happens without His permission, and God does not forget a single person. Most importantly, God did not forget the Messiah that He sent into this world. Without God, there is no Messiah. In the same way, God cannot forget His creation. God knows and is aware of the situation of every single person, including you and me.

3. Pray and Wait

What do we do then when we feel like David or Jesus? What do we do when we feel like the Lord is silent and isn't there? In verses 3 & 4, David prays for God's relief before he is totally destroyed. He begs, "***Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,*** [4] ***and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed'; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken***."

David asks God to strengthen him, and give him the will to continue living. We all experience times when God seems silent. In those moments, we pray and wait on the Lord for God's timing and His answers to our prayers. In Luke 2:36, we see the story of the prophet Anna who prayed for years in the temple. It says, "***She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,*** [37] ***and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying***." Anna prayed for the coming Messiah for over 50 years and waited for God's timing of sending the Messiah. We think we pray for getting what we want. But

sometimes when we pray we discern that God wants us to wait. When we pray, we learn that God waits for the right time before God answers our prayers.

In verse 3 of our passage for today, David asks the Lord to give light in his eyes. This image reflects that sometimes we pray to have God's wisdom and perspective on what we are asking for. Then we will not be disappointed when God says "no" or "wait" to our requests.

4. Confidence in the Lord

We notice when we read further that the tone and attitude of David in verses 5 & 6 are quite different than in verses 1 & 2. In verses 5 & 6, David says, "***But I 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***." David puts his trust in God's absolute love and faithfulness to his people. Even though David doesn't have the answer and even though his situation hasn't changed yet, David is able to sing praises to God, trusting that God's steadfast love and care for his people will overcome David's specific situation.

Last Sunday, we talked about the meaning of God's steadfast love in the Bible. God's love is based on his promise to us. God can't hate us or forsake us because God has already promised his steadfast love to his people thousands of years before. An important word to remember when we reflect on the relationship between God and man is the word "goel." I shared its meaning in the Exodus Bible study group last week. The term "goel" is a Hebrew term which means "redeemer or kinsman." A redeemer or kinsman is the closest relative to a person and is the person who would be responsible for claiming and restoring the rights of a relative when things go wrong.

In Ruth 3:12, Boaz says, "***Though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I***." In this text, we see that the idea of kinsman has a very binding concept. Boaz would go on to marry Ruth and have a son named Obed. Before Boaz married Ruth, he told the community, "***I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred..***." (Ruth 4:10) Boaz reminds the people in his community that the reason for him to marry Ruth is to do his responsibility as a kinsman.

In the same way that Boaz redeemed Ruth, we are reminded this morning that God maintains a redeemer relationship with us. This is a relationship that surpasses time. And despite what may be happening in our lives, God maintains a redeeming relationship with the world and with his people, making things right according to his timing when things have gone wrong.

5. Conclusion

For many of us, Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus and to gather as a family. However, for some people, Christmas can be a difficult reminder of loved ones who have passed. Seeing others happy can be a reminder of the feeling of loneliness for some and at times it can be tempting to believe that someone else's problem is simply that person's issue. But we know some day that we will have the same situation. So all of us need to have God's wisdom on how to deal with this loneliness, sorrow, and disappointment.

Whether we are joyful or in sorrow these days, the season of Christmas is a time to remind us of God's unfailing and never ending love. God is a redeemer for the whole world and makes a promise never to forget or to forsake his people even when things seem like they are not going well and we are in the middle of personal crisis. Psalm 13 reminds us that when we feel caught in these situations, we need to pray and wait on God's comfort and grace. We remind ourselves that our faith is rooted in our trust in God's unfailing and never ending love for us.

Matthew 1:23 says, "***Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us***." Jesus did not come to be a messiah from afar, but Jesus came into the world to be with us. Our relationships with our family and friends all have limitations, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit retain a constant and everlasting relationship with us. No matter where we are or the situation we are going through, we are reminded that God is with us and that the Holy Spirit is with us as a comforter and a reminder of God's eternal love and faithfulness to each and every one of us.

6. Application

Last week, I saw the story of Bailey Sellers from Knoxville, TN. She shared the story of her father. She wrote, "My dad passed away when I was 16 from cancer. Before he died, he prepaid for flowers so I could receive them every year on my birthday. Well this is my 21st birthday flowers and the last. Miss you so much daddy." As the love of our parents goes beyond our imagination, God's love for His children surpasses all other types of relationships.

So we can trust the Lord in any circumstances. The poem was found in a concentration camp where God could seem far away. The poem reads, "I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining. I believe in love, even when I don't feel it. I believe in God, even when God is silent."

What do we have to do when God seems to be silent? We pray and wait, remembering God is present even when we don't feel it. God is with us even when we don't see it because our faith is based on God's unfailing love. As we reflect on God's unfailing love, we put our trust again in God through Christ who comes to dwell among us. In doing so, we can say the same as David says, ***"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I***

will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me" (Psalm 13:5-6 NIV***).*** Amen.