

PSALM 13: *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*

I. Introduction

Psalm 13 is a brief psalm of David. It is a Lament Psalm, meaning the psalmist pours out a complaint before God because of some trouble or pain that he is experiencing. It is also a Psalm with a drastic twist at the end, written to encourage believers who feel abandoned by God and near giving up. This is a Psalm for those who don't know if they can make it another day.

Hear now God's living and active word:

[Read Psalm 13. PRAY for the Spirit to speak through the Word.]

George Matheson was born in 1842 in Scotland. From birth, he suffered from poor eyesight, and by 15, he was told that he was going blind.¹ Undaunted by this news, Matheson graduated from the University of Glasgow at age 19 and went on to theological school. It was there that he became engaged to be married. When he told his fiancé of his failing eyesight, she said "I do not want to be the wife of a blind man" and left him.²

George's three sisters helped him with his studies. Looking back on the day of one of his sister's weddings, he wrote: "I was at that time alone. It was the day of my sister's marriage, and the rest of my family were staying overnight in Glasgow. Something had happened to me which was known only to myself, and which caused me the *most severe mental suffering*. **The hymn was the fruit of that suffering.** It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life. I had the impression of having it dictated to me by some

¹ Story that follows adapted from Richard Niell Donovan, 2008. Accessed at <https://www.sermonwriter.com/hymn-stories/o-love-wilt-not-let-go/>. On 6/14/18 at 5:42 pm; and from Justin Taylor, 2010 at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/o-love-that-will-not-let-me-go/>.

² Taken from an article by Pastor David Fielding, accessed at <https://www.crichbaptist.org/articles/christian-poetry-hymns/poems-hymns/o-love-that-wilt-not-let-me-go-george-matheson/> on 6/16/18 at 4:10 pm.

inward voice than of working it out myself. I am quite sure that the whole work was completed in five minutes...”

The title of Matheson’s hymn is the title of this sermon. The hymn begins:

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean’s depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

We will see in Psalm 13 this truth: *Because of the steadfast love of God the Father, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and proven in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we can trust God and anticipate rejoicing in the midst of great trials.*

II. Exposition [follow with me in the text]

We see three sections of this Psalm:

A. Dire Situation (1-2)

In verses 1-2, David cries out with 5 questions:

“**How long, O LORD?**” David’s emotions are in such turmoil, he doesn’t even finish the thought.³ Have you been there? Your heart is in such a mess that you can’t even put a sentence together. But you want to pray.

“**Will you forget me forever?**” This is a figure of speech. God has not actually forgotten David. He is all-knowing.

For God to “forget” someone means for him not to *act* on their behalf.⁴

³ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Vol. 1: Psalms 1-41), Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), p. 364.

⁴ Ross, pp. 364-365.

Remember **Exodus 2**, where God hears the cry of his people in slavery in Egypt – “**God heard their groaning, and God *remembered* is covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel – and God knew**” (Exodus 2:23-25).

And what did God do next? He brought his people out of Egypt. His *remembering* them led to his *acting* to save them.

So David is in effect saying, “God, why aren’t you helping me? I don’t see you at work in my life, and it feels like this will go on forever!”

Next, “**How long will you hide your face from me?**” For God to show his face in the Old Testament means for him to extend favor and grace, like in Numbers 6:25 – “**The LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.**” David feels like God has cut off his grace from his life.

He goes on: “**How long must I take counsel in my soul?**” The NIV translates this “**wrestle with my thoughts.**” This is mental turmoil. David keeps trying to change his situation, but none of his plans work. He can’t find a way out.

Have you ever been at a loss for what to do about a problem in your life? You go back and forth in your head searching for a solution. Maybe your mind is racing and it keeps you up at night. A very literal application is mental illness or dementia.

For David, with this mental chaos, his emotions are also in tumult. “**[How long must I] have sorrow in my heart all the day?**” This refers to intense emotional and spiritual pain – a nearly-paralyzing sadness that doesn’t let up, all day, day after day. Every attempt to get out fails.

This is a psalm for the depressed. For those immobilized with sadness, with emotional trauma, who feel trapped in a pit of sorrow and darkness.

Finally, “**How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?**” David is oppressed by an enemy seems to have him beat. We’re not told who or what, but this oppression is seemingly ceaseless.

[Who or what is the enemy triumphing over you this morning? Is it a strained relationship with a spouse that makes them feel like the enemy when in reality they are not? A secret sin? Believing lies about yourself? A co-worker who has it out for you?]

David has just put three sources of distress on the table: feeling forsaken by God, wrestling with his own mind and heart, and an outside enemy.

Where does this lead him, and where must it lead us? URGENT PRAYER.

*When we feel abandoned by God we should pray to God.*⁵

B. Urgent Prayer (3-4)

In his first prayer, “**consider me,**” David pleads with God to *remember* him. To “consider” means to “gaze intently” at him.⁶ It’s the opposite of how he felt – “**How long will you hide your face from me.**”

[Do you ever long for God to consider you, to gaze intently at your situation, and to do something about it? The reality is that God already knows the intricate details of your situation. In Psalm 139, David proclaims, “**O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.**”]

Then David asks, “**answer me, O LORD my God.**” Notice that he prays to “*my God.*”⁷ He had an intimate relationship with the God he’s praying to.

⁵ Ross, p. 364.

⁶ Ross, p. 366.

Last prayer: “**Light up my eyes,**” pleads for both physical and spiritual help. The *physical* is illustrated when Jonathan tasted honey after Saul had laid an oath that cursed anyone who ate food in **I Samuel 14**. When he put the honey to his mouth, “**his eyes became bright**” (14:27). If you’re like me, you feel almost every day like physically you don’t know how you can make it. If God does not light up David’s eyes, he will die, and his enemies will rejoice.⁸

Spiritually speaking, David longed for restoration of fellowship with God.⁹ For God to light up the eyes of his soul. “**As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God**” (Psalm 42:1).

If God doesn’t intervene, he will “**sleep the sleep of death**” – for David, this is life or death. Maybe you are in a place where you are living moment by moment, not sure if you can take another step. Maybe you have even toyed with ending your life.

God does light up David’s eyes.

David’s tone drastically changes in verses 5-6, from anxious to anchored, from despondent to dependent. What happened?

Look at the verbs in verses 5-6. “Trusted,” “rejoice,” “sing.”

C. Confident Trust (5-6)

“**But I have trusted in your steadfast love**” – David trusts in the LORD’s faithful, covenant love for his people.”¹⁰

⁷ Emphasis mine.

⁸ Ross, 368.

⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 19 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983) p. 142.

¹⁰ Ross, 368.

The keyword is STEADFAST LOVE - *Hesed*. In the original, this word is deeply rich in meaning. The main idea is God's unchanging covenant love for his people. Translations include "mercy," "lovingkindness," "unfailing love," "faithfulness," "loyal love." It is a love that will not let go – cannot let go.

A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties with a punishment if it is broken. In Genesis 15, God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through him. To show that he would keep it, God passed through animals that had been torn apart, meaning, if he went back on his covenant, he would be torn apart.

We see this love in Jeremiah 31:3, when God says to his people, "**I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.**" The word "**faithfulness**" is *hesed*.

"**My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.**" Before, his heart had sorrow all the day. Now, he anticipates rejoicing in God's deliverance from his dire situation.

Joy from sorrow. Deliverance from death. **Psalm 30:5 – "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning."**

*O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.*

David ends his Psalm with a vow: "**I will sing to the LORD, for he has dealt bountifully with me.**"

Why is he vowing to sing to the LORD? Because he is sure of deliverance. His trust is not in his circumstances but in the steadfast, loyal love of God.

Hear this: In Psalm 13, **DAVID’S CIRCUMSTANCES DON’T CHANGE. HE DOES.** Through prayer, God changes our hearts from gloom to joy, from despair to delight.¹¹

What is this steadfast love? It is the love Paul speaks of in Romans 8: “**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**” (Romans 8:35) Here is God’s steadfast love. Here is ultimate salvation, not simply from physical enemies bringing death, but from Satan, sin, and eternal despair. In Christ, God turns his face toward us and lavishes favor by the “**riches of his grace**” (Ephesians 1:7).

There was a time I didn’t believe this. Before seminary, I worked with a campus ministry called RUF at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA. My time there was better and sweeter as well as harder and more humbling than I anticipated. Somewhere along the way, I began to forget the Gospel. I would talk of it with students, but rarely with myself. In the Spring of my second year, I remember feeling like David: “**How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?**” I felt that he had hidden his face from me and left me in my sin. Every day I was beating myself up and believing lies that I was worthless. In the midst of this dark valley, a brother in Christ told me something I didn’t believe at the time: “**Blake, the King loves you.**” The Holy Spirit let this truth pierce my cold heart, and over the next months and years, God has been working on my heart to believe what I preach to others.

Brothers, sisters, *THE KING LOVES YOU*. This King is the better David.

Pour out your heart to him. Trust in his steadfast love. For those who cry, “**How long?**” you are not alone.

Andrew Brunson has been in prison under false charges for 18 months.

Revelation 6:10 tells of those who have been killed for being Christians: “**They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy**

¹¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973) p. 77.

and true, HOW LONG before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers shall be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”

Soon, we will rejoice in his salvation and sing, for God has dealt bountifully with us in Christ.

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Amen.

