

PSALM 13 HOW LONG?

Not long ago, I scheduled a meeting in my office for 10:45 in the morning. The two of us were going to talk about a particular subject, then get on our way for noon appointments with other people. We talked for a while, and I looked down at my watch and saw that it was about ten minutes after eleven. Great. I enjoy talking to this person, so we continued a good conversation about all sorts of topics. After a while I looked down at my watch again, and saw that it was...about ten minutes after eleven.

God had not made the sun stand still! My watch had stopped. I rushed over to my computer and discovered it was about two minutes before noon. We both hurried out the door, as I fumbled for my cell phone and called to apologize for making someone wait.

Time did not stop that day. But sometimes it seems like it does. You look at your watch or your calendar, and you could swear so much time has passed, but it seems no time has passed. And still you wait.

This fifth Sunday, I ask you to join me in pondering the subject of waiting. This is NOT the waiting of...waiting for the red light to turn green...or waiting for my friend to text me back about our plans for this evening...or waiting for my wife to stop talking and let us leave the party. If I have a problem with that type of waiting, I simply need to grow up and learn to act like I am not the center of the universe!

This IS the waiting of a middle-aged man who longs to finally be free of the oppression of depression. This IS the waiting of a godly woman who wants to fulfill the calling she senses to be a loving wife and caring mother. This IS the waiting of a young person who truly wants to serve the Lord in his or her life, but is struggling for clear direction. This IS the waiting of a servant of God's kingdom, seeking fruit from his or her faithful labors. This IS the waiting of a saint with gray hair, pleading with God for the souls of his or her children. This IS the gut-wrenching waiting we do in a fallen world, where we live real lives with real joys and real sorrows before a real God.

Today, we learn about waiting through one of my favorite Psalms - Psalm 13. In the Psalm before this Psalm, David has struggled with the sinfulness of people - the faithful seem to have vanished from the earth. But now David is striving to understand the purposes of God. We do not know exactly what is happening in David's life as he writes this Psalm. But we know the cry of his heart: "How long?" Through his words, we face the questions we ask when we wait, and we find answers for our waiting.

HOW LONG? Lord, has time stopped? This is David's burden in the first four verses. We capture the heart of these words through three simple questions.

First, *WHAT ABOUT YOU?* What about you, Lord? David writes...

* "Will you forget me forever?" David knows he not accidentally slipped from the Lord's mind. The Lord is not saying, "Now, who is that David? I just cannot seem to place him." Yet to David, it feels like the Lord has done this. David also writes...

* "How long will you hide your face from me?" Where David writes about the Lord hiding his face, we would probably describe it as the Lord turning his back. David feels his Lord has set himself against him. Once he looked toward me and was for me. But now he has turned away.

You have to grasp the emotion here. David is not writing out a tight, systematic, logical description of the Lord and his attributes. He is going to the Lord and expressing how he is feeling as he awaits the Lord's deliverance from this situation. He feels as if the Lord has forgotten him. He feels as if the Lord has chosen to turn his back. That feeling may be wrong, but that feeling is real, as David cries to the Lord, "What about you?"

He also cries, *WHAT ABOUT THEM?* David may be thinking of the people he described in Psalm 12. They are liars. They hurt the weak and the needy. They honor what is vile to God.

They also oppose David, and they are defeating David. He writes, "How long will my enemy triumph over me?" He worries, "My enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall." While we do not know exactly which enemies David is describing, we know enemies pursued him before he was

king, and when he was king.

Yet while David is surely thinking of human enemies, we cannot ignore the spiritual realities here. These enemies not only oppose David's life before the Lord, but they threaten David's life with the Lord. He is the Lord's Anointed, called by the Lord to lead the Lord's people, but they want to defeat him and destroy that relationship.

What about them? Who is "them" for us? Enemies may be human. You may have people who oppose you because you are you, and you may have people who oppose you because you are the Lord's. Yet as we read these words through the lens of the New Testament, we remember that our true enemy is not people of flesh and blood, but Satan. As Peter writes, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." As we learned last week, Satan is a defeated foe, but he is still a disruptive foe. We wait upon the Lord, and we wonder what Satan will do. We may even wonder if Satan will win.

What about you? What about them? David also cries, *WHAT ABOUT ME?* David is boldly and intensely honest here. He writes...

* "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts...?" This is a wrestling match between the ears. Here is what David desires. But there is reality. David is struggling with his hopes and dreams, with his fears and nightmares, and he is wondering how God fits into all of this. Like a wrestler, sometimes he gets the upper hand, but sometimes his thoughts slam him down and pin him to the ground. Then he writes...

* "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?" This wrestling match never ends. This sadness is persistent. This misery is each day, and it is surely each night. It does not come and go. It comes and stays. David wonders how long he can face each new day with this dejection and despair in his heart. So he even writes...

* "Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death." He wonders if he can survive the wrestling and the sorrow. He believes something has to give. He cannot go on this way forever. Either the light of God will shine into his eyes and stream into his heart, or he will remain in the darkness and discouragement of his heart, and he will eventually die.

In 1841, when he was a small-town lawyer in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln wrestled with his thoughts, and every day he had sorrow in his heart. In one of his darkest hours he said, "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me."

What about you, Lord? What about them, Lord? What about me, Lord? Have you ever experienced anything like this? Have you ever found yourself waiting on the Lord and realizing you are in the fight of your life, and even in a fight for your life? Have you ever wondered how long you can wait, and questioned how long you can live?

I repeat: I am not talking about waiting for a TV show to begin. I am not talking about waiting for your son to finish cutting the grass. I am not talking about waiting for your parents to decide whether your great idea is a really such a good idea.

I am talking about the woman who is waiting to see if her marriage can be salvaged, after her husband's unfaithfulness. I am talking about the man whose reputation has been damaged and even destroyed by untrue accusations in the workplace, and who does not know how he will feed his family now. I am talking about the young child who wonders if anyone will ever notice what her uncle is doing to her. I am talking about the man who has given his time and his heart to disciple young men, and now sees one of those young men wasting his life. I am talking about the believer who feels the sorrow of this world so strongly, that he doubts he can go on.

What about you, Lord? What about them, Lord? What about me, Lord? How long? Yet David does not just show us the darkness. He leads us to the light. After he cries, "How long?", he writes, **BUT I TRUST...**

What should we be doing as we wait? David's inspired words reveal that waiting is less about

technique, and more about trust. When I have heard teaching on waiting, I have often heard about technique. For example, you may use techniques like setting goals for your life and staying busy in your life. As you wait on the Lord, this will be good to do and good for you. As you read David's story, you see him doing all sorts of things as he waits. So there is a technique of doing that helps with waiting.

But David presents something better to us. He speaks not to the movement of our hands, but to the direction of our hearts. He begins with just one word: BUT. Yet with this word, David shows that while the realities of waiting may not change, our reaction to those realities may change. David says, "But I trust."

First, Lord, *I TRUST IN YOUR CHARACTER.*

Verse 5: "But I trust in your unfailing love." Who are you, Lord? What is the content of your character? What is true about you? It is this: you are the Lord of unfailing love. As David has already demonstrated in Psalm 12, people will fail. But his Lord will not fail. Never. Ever.

This is not a declaration of the prosperity gospel. This is not David saying, "Lord, you owe me unbridled blessings and unending success, and I just know that sooner or later, and probably sooner, you are going to give me whatever I want." No.

This is a confession that because of the character of God, God's love for God's people never fails. This is David saying that no matter what happens, I know, Lord, that you are acting in love toward me. This is the only way you can act toward me, and this is the only way you ever will act toward me. Even though I feel you have forgotten me and hidden your face from me, I know that all of your dealings with me are loving dealings, because your love is an unfailing love. I trust in your character.

This is hard! You may rightly struggle to trust people because of their sin. And you may really struggle to trust God in this world of sin. The character of people changes. But the character of the Lord never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

As he lay dying, the missionary Charles Simeon said, "I am in a dear father's hands - all is secure. When I look to Him, I see nothing but faithfulness - and immutability (the fact that he does not change) - and truth; and I have sweetest peace - I cannot have more peace."

In life and in death, and in the days of life that make you feel like you are about to die, you wait well because of the character of God. Even as you wait, he is not failing. You may feel time has stopped. But as you wait for God to perfect his purposes in whatever you face, you trust in his unfailing love.

I trust - in your character. *I TRUST IN YOUR COVENANT.* David writes, "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation." David does not know if he will sleep in death now, but he knows he will sleep in death someday. Yet he knows the Lord is not just with him and for him in this life. Because he knows the salvation of the Lord, he embraces and enjoys the hope of eternity.

How does this help? This gives David a long-term perspective, even as he cries, "How long?" David knows the Lord has been faithful to his covenant promises in bringing him to the hope of salvation, and he knows the Lord will be faithful to his covenant promises in bringing him to the reality of salvation. His situation is real, and his situation is hard. But he knows it will not last forever. Even as he cries, "How long?", David knows that compared to eternity, this is not that long. So as he waits, he is confident in his covenant God, who is forever faithful.

A while back, I offered these words about hope: hope is the feeling you have, that the feeling you have isn't permanent. If "how long" is eternally long, David is hopeless. But David knows a day is coming when this feeling will be gone. His heart can rejoice in that saving day, even as he wrestles and struggles through this season of waiting.

It is the same for you and me. David looked forward to the cross and the empty tomb. We look back on them. They are the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to save a people for himself and keep a people for himself. All grace flows from these covenant realities. Because of the covenant God who planned them and provided for them, we have the perspective of the eternal hope of salvation, even as we wait.

I trust in your character. I trust in your covenant. *I TRUST IN YOUR CARE.* How far David travels in

just six verses! He ends the Psalm by declaring, “I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.”

What is David doing? He is reflecting on God’s care for him. He is looking back and seeing how God has blessed him, and he uses past grace as evidence to give him confidence in future grace. You have cared for me, you do care for me, and you will care for me. Because your character is sure, because your covenant is secure, I know you care for me even as I wait.

But there is even more here. Singing is an expression of joy. A joyful heart is a heart that sings. So David worships God because of God’s care for him. Even as he wrestles and struggles with the realities of his life, joy can burst through, because he knows he lives and breathes before a God who cares for him and has been good to him.

Matthew Henry once said, “There is enough in God to furnish us with matter of joy in the worst circumstance on earth.” The worst of times on this earth can be unspeakably awful. But by his grace, as he reveals his care for his people, the Lord still furnishes his people with joy, because he furnishes his people with himself and his care.

Do you believe this? Waiting can be a time of joy. This is not a mindless joy that ignores the realities of this life. This is a deep joy that sees beyond those realities to the God of goodness and grace. “I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.”

I trust in your character. I trust in your covenant. I trust in your care. David has no promise that all will quickly be well. Sometimes we wait and wait and wait, and the outcome is not our desire. Or sometimes we wait and wait and wait, and we must wait until eternity to know the outcome of our desire. God does not promise to always provide what you are waiting for. Instead, he promises his covenant care, flowing from the deep wells of his unchangeable character. We wait on the Lord by waiting in the Lord.

How are you waiting this morning? How long have you been waiting? How long may you have to wait? I do not come with a technique. I come to call you to trust - to wait on the Lord by waiting in the Lord, as you trust his character, his covenant, and his care.

This week I read the story of a man named Tom. He is over 80 now, and he has buried two wives and three children. He was asked how he has survived and even thrived. He said that after his first child died, he made a ring for his wife - a band with three strands - a strand for him, a strand for her and a strand for Jesus Christ, “who held us all together.”

What is this man waiting for? He is waiting for glory. In Jesus, we all are. Until then, we live in a fallen world where time seems to stop. We hold together through faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior whose character never changes, whose covenant never ends, and whose care never stops.

“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.”