

From Screaming to Singing

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- [0 : 0 0] Well folks, good afternoon and welcome to the Lunchtime Bible Talks. A particular welcome if you're here for the first time today. Please don't rush away at the end of the service. There's a chance to have some fellowship and chat together at the back there.
- There's a sandwich lunch that's served at the back for three pounds and we'd welcome you to do that. Sorry about the dust. I assure you, Billy Bradford has been cleaning this week.
- But just with the words that's gone on next door, some of the dust is overspilling into the place. So we apologise about that. But remember Paul Brennan's sermon for Numbers a few weeks ago.
- We're not to be grumblers. Well let's turn to our reading today. Our reading today you will find in page 453 of the Pew Bible. Psalm 13.
- Page 453. And we will read the full psalm together. Let us hear then the word of God.
- [1 : 0 0] To the choir master, a psalm of David. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
- How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God.
- Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed over him. Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love.
- My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. Amen.
- And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. Let's have a short prayer together. Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. Father, we thank you that you use weak and feeble and frail men like me to preach from your word.
- [2 : 0 6] Father, in our time together this afternoon, we pray that indeed your voice would be heard and your character would be clearly seen. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. On Sunday, the 2nd of September, 2012, a middle-aged man dressed in a black suit walked into the Kelvin Grove Park, which is just a couple of miles west of here.
- He stood by a bench that overlooks a children's skate park area where about 50 children were playing at the time, cycling or playing on their skateboards. The gentleman took a bottle of vodka from his bag, which he proceeded to drink, after which he produced a can of petrol, which he used to douse himself.
- And then he set his cell on fire and became a human fireball. No one knows why he did it. Though those who witnessed it said they could hear him crying, I just want to die.
- I can't live with a pain any longer. No one knows what was causing him so much pain. Was it the death of a loved one? Maybe a spouse or a child?
- Maybe the pain of watching a loved one that was at one time so full of life, but now can't do anything for himself, and life is slowly, agonizingly ebbing away.

- [3 : 32] Was it the breakup of a marriage? Or maybe living with the pain of a terminal illness? Or maybe the excruciating pain of living with guilt and shame? Whatever it was, it was real. It was real pain. It's a terrible story. A terrible story of real anguish and real pain that many people face daily. Not just in this city, but all around the world.
- They just want to die because they can't live with the pain any longer. And friends, we know that as Christians, we are not immune from pain. Life is full of hardships, horrors, and heartaches for the non-believer and the believer alike.
- But surely as Christians, we are immune. Immune from the type of pain that would make us think and say, I can't stand this pain any longer. I just want to die. Well, I think this is why generations of God's people love the book of Psalms so much.
- For in the Psalms, the writers pour out their hearts before God. And their outpourings contain frightening honesty, refreshing openness, and a very large dose of realism about the life of faith.
- [4 : 47] It's no wonder then that as we read, we often take great comfort and great assurance from the experience of the psalmist. And if we're honest, the honesty, openness, and realism that we read in the Psalms, we often don't hear too much from each other.
- Maybe it's because we're scared to say anything as everybody else and their family all look so happy. They all look as if they've all got it all together. It's as if we're scared that thinking or feeling this way is somehow unspiritual or shows a lack of faith.
- Well, I'm so glad that David didn't just think these things or say these things. He was inspired by God to commit these things to writing in order that they would be part of Scripture and would help bring great comfort to generations of God's people.
- The psalm splits into three, verses one and two, personal pain, personal pain, verse three and four, personal prayer, personal prayer, and thirdly, verse five and six, personal praise, personal praise.
- Well, firstly then, verses one and two, personal pain. Note this psalm as written by David, the great warrior king of Israel, the same David who defeated Goliath, who penned Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- [6 : 13] Well, here in this psalm there is definitely a want with David. He wasn't having a good week. I think it's fair to say that this wasn't his best day. He is definitely somewhat under the weather. Four times in two verses he screams to God, How long, Lord, is this going to go on for?
- How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
- These are the cries from the heart of a man who definitely can't stand the pain any longer. These four, how longs, make up three complaints. Three complaints that center on God, himself, and his enemies.
- You could say his complaints are theological, psychological, and sociological. Well, firstly, the theological, the complaint that centers in God.
- Verse 1, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? He feels deserted. Deserted by God in that he is totally on his own.
- [7 : 25] He feels forgotten and forsaken. What a dark and distressing experience to feel that God has forgotten and forsaken you. But these cries could only come from a heart that had previously known fellowship with God.
- Someone who had never previously enjoyed fellowship with God would never say that this was the problem. And you see, friends, that's what real faith does. Real faith comes to God with its doubts about God.

And that's what David is doing here. He's screaming, Lord, I feel forgotten by you. You're the God who remembered Noah. You remembered Rachel. You remembered Abraham. You told your people never to forget you, never to forget your character and all that you've done.

And you told us not to forget your commandments. But Lord, I feel forgotten and forsaken by you. If David had thought there was an end in sight or there was light at the end of the tunnel, he could maybe have hung on in there.

But being forgotten by God, he feels will last forever. God's face seems hidden from him. Verse 11, Psalm 11, verse 7 also says that upright shall behold his face.

[8 : 37] Beholding God's face, looking in God's face, God's face being hidden from him. This is all to do with being in the presence of God. God's face being It's common for us to say to family or friends that we maybe haven't seen for a while.

I long to see your face. Well, I suppose depending on the face. We do long to see them. But what is really meant by that expression is this.

I long to be in your presence. David feels totally forgotten and forsaken by God. Well, can God forget us? Well, best to let the scriptures answer for themselves from the book of Isaiah.

But Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me and the Lord has forgotten me. That was Zion's complaint. But what was the Lord's answer?

Can a woman forget her nursing child that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget yet I will not forget you.

[9 : 40] Behold, I have engraved you on the palm of my hands. Well, friends, how do we square these two things up? Well, I think it's fair and I think it's true to say that pain and grief can have a way of clouding our thinking and our judgment.

But I think, too, the Lord allows for us to go through these times in order to refine us so that we will walk by faith and not by feelings so that we will walk by faith and not by sight in order that we might mature and trust Him in the darkness.

David feels deserted by God. His second complaint is he feels depressed within himself. Verse 2, How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day long?

He's saying, God, you're not listening and I'm wrestling with my thoughts over and over again. He feels totally cut off and isolated and he feels that there is no one who cares.

He has become turned in on himself and it's like he's going over the situations and the circumstances that he's in over and over again all the while increasing the turmoil that he's in and he's talking to himself in ways that are totally unhelpful.

[10 : 56] Now, there are times when speaking to ourselves is called for and can be really helpful. In Psalm 42 and 43 the psalmist speaks to himself in a helpful way. Why are you downcast, O my soul?

He's giving himself a talking to. But here in Psalm 13 it's unhelpful. He has turned in on himself. He is taking counsel in his own soul. He is, as we would say, stuck in his own head and it's constant.

There are no breaks from this depression, sorrow in my heart all the day long. Sometimes throughout any day we can go through different emotions. Maybe feeling good in the afternoon, down in the morning and then up again in the evening.

But not here. Sorrow in his heart all the day long. David feels deserted by God, depressed within himself. And his third complaint, well, he feels defeated by his enemy.

Verse 2. How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? We're not told who or what the enemy was, which is really helpful as we can fill in the blank ourselves.

[12 : 05] But maybe as David is the king, he's facing opposition against his service to God. And you don't need to be the king to face this kind of opposition. His enemy is exalted over him.

There is nothing worse than the sound of laughter coming from an enemy. It's horrible. It's hard to take in, isn't it? An enemy rejoicing over your demise. Maybe this fits perfectly with circumstances that you face personally.

Well, friend, what we need to understand is this. Sometimes God allows this to happen to his people in order that we learn to trust him. That we might be taken into a deeper relationship with him and learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

Well, you would maybe think that David has done for. He is drowning and he will sink. But all hope hasn't gone. David is still talking to God. Faith hasn't disappeared.

Faith is being exercised. Listen to this quote. When we begin to speak to God about the fact that he has deserted us, we are no longer at our lowest point.

[13 : 13] The tide has turned and we are on our way up again. You see, friends, that's the difference between unbelief and belief. Unbelief turns from God in anger.

But belief turns to God in anguish. And as it turns, faith is being exercised. Firstly, personal pain. Secondly, verses 3 and 4, personal prayer.

Personal prayer. Well, what do you do when you're facing personal pain? Part of which you feel is that God has forgotten and forsaken you. Well, I don't know about you, but I would stay in bed and opt for the death by duvet approach.

But what does the psalmist do? Well, the psalmist goes on praying. What else can he do? Where else can he go than back to the one whom he feels forsaken by?

Look at verse 3. Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. He hasn't given up in the Lord. He is hanging on to him, O Lord my God.

[14 : 14] All the way through this, Sam, David uses the covenant name of God, Yahweh. And any time you see the name Lord in capital letters in your Bible, it's referring to the covenant name of God, Yahweh.

He is the promise-making, promise-keeping God. The God who has bound himself to his people in covenant love. The God who has promised to save and redeem his people.

David is praying, consider and answer me. Turn and listen to me, Lord. David is crying for God to listen to him, to look at him according to the character of God, according to what God has already promised.

And friends, we need to do this. We need to store up the promises of God in our hearts, like a wee squirrel does getting ready for winter. We need to store up the promises of God so that when, not if, but when the dark times and the hard times come, we can stand in those promises by faith.

That's what the words of the hymn encourages to do, isn't it? Standing in promises, words that can't fail. When in the storms of doubt, dark fears assail.

[15 : 25] My hope is anchored fast within the veil. Sure in his living word, I always prevail, standing in God's promises. Well, what does David pray for?

Well, he prays for light, verse 3. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep, the sleep of death. Give light to my eyes, Lord. I'm going to die. Maybe he felt that he was actually going to die.

Maybe there's someone here this afternoon that feels exactly like the man that walked into the Kelvin Grove Park two years ago. Well, I want to tell you, there is one to whom you can cry.

If you want light to come into your darkness, then you can cry to the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

David prays, light up my eyes. He says, Lord, let me see clearly your hand in all of this. Illumine my understanding that I may see your plans and purposes in all of this.

[16 : 27] David doesn't pray, take these battles and difficulties away. No, that's not my greatest need. My greatest need is to see all that you are doing through this. And friends, that was the case with the Apostle Paul when he was in prison.

Many of his friends were distressed and discouraged by his imprisonment. But Paul was able to comfort them and encourage them with all that God was doing. He wrote to the church in Philippi, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me being imprisoned has really served to advance the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole Imperial Guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Being in prison brought Paul great opportunities for sharing Christ.

And friends, it can be the same for us during the darkest and hardest times in our lives. Things that we would never volunteer for can often provide great opportunities for sharing the gospel.

Maybe the death of a loved one giving us opportunity to speak of the eternal hope we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe a debilitating illness that prevents us from working.

[17 : 52] And now we have to make endless trips to hospitals and doctor's appointments. Something we would never have volunteered for. But now gives us opportunity to speak of our trust in a sovereign God who loves us and orders all our days.

Seeing these opportunities and all that God is doing, it doesn't come easily to us. And just like David, we need our eyes enlightened, illumined, to have a divine perspective on our situation.

Sometimes we won't see it for years, if at all, what God's plans and purposes have been. That was certainly the case for Joseph as we read his story in Genesis.

Thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery by them, falsely accused of rape, thrown into prison for 13 years. I'm sure during all these years of darkness, Joseph felt deserted by God and cried out many times, how long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

But by the end of Genesis, in chapter 50, verse 20, Joseph could say of that whole dark period in his life, as for you, you meant evil against me, but the Lord meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

[19 : 14] That may be our experience too, friends, as individuals or collectively as church congregations. God's plans and purposes in the darkness and the difficulties that we go through might only be understood by us years later, if at all.

David prays for light and he prays for victory, verse 4. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him, lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. David is praying, Lord, don't let me die.

I don't want that mob dancing at my funeral. But tied up in this victory is a concern for God's glory, for God's honour. David is reasoning in his prayer. He says, if I die, they will triumph.

And if I die, it will be because you won't deliver me. Lord, it will reflect on you, your reputation. So vindicate your servant and make yourself known.

Personal pain, personal prayer and thirdly, personal praise, verse 5 and 6. But I have trusted in your steadfast love.

[20 : 23] My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. I don't know about you, but I read these verses and I think to myself, what's going on here?

Is this the same guy? I mean, one minute he's given it how long, how long, how long, and now he's declaring, I will trust, I will rejoice, I will sing. What's going on?

Does this guy have a spiritual bipolar or something? I mean, one minute he's down in the depths and now he's up in the delights. There is a total turnaround in the tone of these verses from that of verse 1 and 2.

In verse 1 and 2, he was overwhelmed with grief. But now in verse 5 and 6, he is overwhelmed with goodness. He has changed from a man who is screaming, how long?

And now he's really declaring, as long as it takes. Well, why this change? What has happened between verse 4 and verse 5? What has changed in his circumstances?

[21 : 28] Well, look with me. You'll need to look closely. See it there between verse 4 and 5? Look carefully. Can you see it? No, neither can I. Because there is nothing to see.

Nothing. Nothing has changed. But he has changed. His prayers of verse 4 and 5 may not have changed his circumstances, but they've changed him, which is always a far better result.

He gets a hold of himself with God's help and says, the hand I've been dealt is the hand I've been dealt. But with God's help, I'm going to trust, I'm going to rejoice, and I'm going to sing.

The man who was wrestling is now trusting. Why? Because of the Lord's hesed, his steadfast, covenant, unfailing love. Instead of sorrow in his heart all the day long, his heart is filled with rejoicing.

Why? Because of the Lord's salvation. The man who has been screaming to the Lord will now sing to the Lord. Why? Because the Lord is good and he has dealt bountifully.

[22 : 38] He has been good to me. And friends, I want us just to note there has been no deliverance yet for the psalmist. No, that is still way off down the road. But it's like it's already taking place in his experience.

But what is the basis for this? Well, friends, it's the character of God. The psalmist has remembered Yahweh and he is trusting him. It's not about how much faith we have, but the object of our faith.

Where our faith is placed. What our faith is resting on. And David is declaring here in praise to Yahweh, I am leaning on your proved, tried, and tested character.

That's the basis of my praise because that is the way you are. God's character is the basis of his praise and God's character is the basis of his assurance. And friends, that's one of the greatest needs that we all have.

To know what kind of God God really is. He is the God whose character has been proved, tried, and tested. Friends, some of you may be going through real darkness, real difficulties, just like the psalmist.

[23 : 49] You may feel that God has forgotten you and forsaken you. Well, let us learn from the experience of the psalmist of what got him through the difficulties in the darkness. What brought him through pain through prayer to praise?

What changed him from screaming to singing? The psalmist remembered and trusted himself to the character of God. The circumstances you face may not change, but standing on God's word, storing up his promises in your heart and standing in them, remembering his unfailing love, rejoicing in his wonderful salvation, and singing to the Lord because you have been overwhelmed by his amazing goodness to you.

These things will see you through. But there are some here today that these truths won't get you through the darkness. These truths won't do you any good.

And do you know why? Because you have yet to taste and see that the Lord is good. You come to this service often, you may come every week. You're convinced by the truth of the gospel.

It looks good. But you've never tasted. Why don't you taste a thing and experience the goodness of God? The goodness of God that was fully expressed and the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 18] He really was forsaken on the cross so that we might be forgiven. He really did face the darkness of God's wrath so that he may bestow on us the light of God's love.

Today would be a good day to trust him. Why don't you do that today? Let us pray. Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

Father, we give you great thanks for your great goodness to us. we ask that you would help each of us to store the truth of this psalm deep in our hearts. We may not be experiencing the darkness of feeling forgotten by you today, but one day we will.

So help us, Father, to know that when shadows arise or when clouds fill the skies, you can turn all the darkness today. In the midst of our tears and our doubts and our fears, you will keep us as we trust and obey.

In Jesus' name, Amen. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, be with us all and those whom we love now and forevermore.

[26 : 48] Amen. Amen.