

Sunday 10 May 2020

Songs from the heart: Psalm 13

Today I'm beginning a new series of reflections centred around some of the Psalms, particularly the songs of lament.

Loving God, as I draw near to you, draw near to me. As I seek your face, speak to me. As I confess my faults and failings, cleanse me through the saving love of Christ. As I am reminded of all you have done for me, challenge me to make my response. As I recognise my lack of vision and courage, inspire me through your Holy Spirit.

I rejoice in the quiet security of God's powerful arms and praise him in the words of Psalm 147:1-6a.

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
- ² The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
- ³ He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
- ⁴ He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
- ⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
- ⁶ The LORD lifts up the downtrodden.

The Book of Psalms shows me not only how to praise God, but also leads the way in expressing those darker emotions I sometimes prefer to hide. Praise is good, but it is not all that I am. Questions and doubts come to all of us, even Jesus (see Matthew 26:36ff). If I deny these thoughts I must bear their pain in other ways. In Psalm 13:1-4 a believer cries out to God:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
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?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

Whatever situation the Psalmist faces, however alone, fearful or depressed he feels, he turns to God in prayer. His complaint (yes, this is a complaint) is simple: "You said you would look after me, but see, I am in trouble. How long are you going to leave me like this?" Isolation and uncertainty take

their toll. Why is this happening? Is this really part of God's plan and purpose? How long must I live with this? How am I to answer those who ask and challenge me, "Where is your God now?"

The Psalmist asks his questions, but it seems to me that his plea is not for information but for action. "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." (Isaiah 64:1) But there is a gentle twist in this Psalm. Having faced the dark reality of his feelings the Psalmist is reminded of past grace. The situation is not resolved. God does not rend the heavens. But the Psalmist's heart is changed. He concludes his song from the heart with the final two verses:

But I 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.

Lord God, in a situation I neither like nor understand, may your will be done. I ask that, by your grace, I would know the privilege and reassurance of seeing just a little of your plan, which works for my good, even in the dark times. Help me to say again, even when the pain is most severe, "I trust in your steadfast love."

Pause and pray

The Apostle Paul knew dark days. He too voiced his feelings and he too knew the sustaining power of God's steadfast love, shown in Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-11 he writes:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

*As I go from here, may God go with me. May he shine a light on my path, and lead me into a deeper friendship with himself, so that I might better know his heart, and feel my own being renewed.
Amen.*

If you have a few more minutes take a look at this video: ['Psalm 13' by Alisa Turner](#)