

Prayers

To God

Give praise to God for the wonder of His grace to you. Praise Him for all He has done in the past and all He will do in the future.

For myself

Weekly theme: Feelings about 'church'

Lord God, we pray for those who have been hurt by the church. Those who feel their gifts have been ignored or abused, those who have been passed over after offering their services, those who feel the Bible has been misused and misinterpreted, those who feel that the organisation of the church has failed, and many more. Open our hearts in love for each other, Lord God, so that we can all work for reconciliation and also be willing to address the true human failings of the church. AMEN

For others

Pray for the USA as it goes to the polls. Pray for the leaders of the nations that they will respect and work together with the leader elected, for the good of the whole world.

Meditation

This is a day of great liberty, O Lord;
You have set me free!

This is a day of amazing miracles, O Lord;
You have healed my soul!

This is a day of glorious service, O Lord;
You have given me my work!

This is a day of infinite opportunity, O Lord;
You have set the world before me!

This is a day of powerful insight, O Lord;
You have opened my mind!

This is a day of divine judgement, O Lord;
You have set Your standards!

This is a day You have given me, O Lord;
Your love will bring me through!

Bible Passage

Psalm 13

To the worship leader. A Psalm of David.

- ¹ How long will you forget me Lord? Forever?
How long will you hide yourself from me?
- ² How long must my soul be in anguish,
with sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy get the better of me?
- ³ Consider me 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 beaten him".
They will rejoice at my downfall!
- ⁵ As for me, I trust in Your faithful love;
and my heart rejoices in Your salvation.
- ⁶ And I will continue to sing to the Lord
when He does good things for me.

Review

This remarkable Psalm begins with a cry of despair from a believer who has known great trouble and distress. But the despair is not total, and as we read through Psalm 13, we find it moves towards hope, even joy; this reflects the true faith of the believer according to the Psalms. In summary, Psalm 13 begins by recording the believer's anguished appeal and heartfelt concern at the work of an '*enemy*' (13:4). But after a brief song of praise showing confidence in God (13:5) it ends with a promise of further worship (13:6).

This Psalm makes for fascinating study, and it has been used by countless people to express their faith from Old Testament to New Testament times and throughout the centuries until now. For example, more than two and a half thousand years ago, this Psalm would have been recited by Judeans in the Jerusalem Temple. It helped them express their frustrations at the nation's perils, which all but consumed God's people at the time of the Exile (see 2 Kings 23,24). But the Old Testament is witness that the Jewish people persisted in the historic faith of their fathers, as this Psalm indicates (13:5-6). Today, Christians find that the Psalm speaks to them in the midst of distress, offering hope in Christ and the assurance of their salvation. It is good to express confidence in the things of faith (13:5,6) when enemies appear intractable (13:4)!

If we delve into the Psalm in more detail, we will find more. It begins dramatically by describing a sense of hopelessness in the midst of trouble, and the simple human emotion of feeling forgotten by God and unsure how long this spiritual vacuum will last; *'How long will you hide yourself from me?'* (13:1). One who feels abandoned by God will naturally ask such questions. How long will God stay absent? When will God do something? When will God remember those who have trusted in him? Few have not said or thought such things, but to question like this is not to doubt, it is to long for God and reach out His salvation when in very difficult circumstances. Doubt comes only when such questions stop and people give up on God; but the person of faith simply longs for God to respond, and rejoices when He does.

Psalm 13 continues by saying, *'how long'*, for a third time (13:2), and we travel deeper into the heart of the human condition. The words, *'how long must my soul be in anguish with sorrow in my heart all day long'* describe no casual distress. Something traumatic has happened that is unresolved, and the pain seems interminable. But we are not told what this pain is, so as we read, we feel our own individual pain, perhaps on-going family distress, or the loss of employment.

But the Psalm then adds a fourth *'how long'* (13:2), going further still, to the source of the problem; evil has afflicted the soul, and an *'enemy'* has gained the upper hand. However strong our faith, if we feel attacked by an enemy, whether in the form of a human opponent or within a spiritual battle, we will feel very vulnerable. In its first two verses, Psalm 13 clearly expresses the feelings of the human heart at a moment of life-changing crisis and trial.

The central section of the Psalm (13:3,4) now dwells upon what it means to feel defeated by an enemy. A cry for help goes up; *'consider me and answer me O Lord my God'* (13:3), because without God's help, death stands ready to pounce; *'give light to my eyes or I will sleep the sleep of death'* (13:3). This is not just any crisis, it is the ultimate crisis, in which life and death hang in the balance. But what kind of enemy can cause this distress? What kind of circumstances might give rise to this Psalm, and how does it say to us today?

The life of David gives us some clues to answer this question. Early in his life he was in danger while on the run after being evicted from Saul's royal court (1 Samuel 19f.), hounded through Nob to the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 21,22) and pursued in the desert by the jealous Saul (1 Samuel 23). But out of this experience, David writes not to glorify himself, for none of this refers to him directly. He has written abstractly, so that each one who reads it can 'insert' his or her own critical circumstances. Surely, David writes here for every believer, and the Psalm expresses the difficulties of every person of faith.

Psalm 13 is about life at its extremes. Because of this, we are right to recall that our ultimate enemy is Satan and the evils of this world. Satan loves to divert God's people from Him, to challenge them when life is difficult and tempt them to believe that God has 'gone missing' for periods of time (13:1,2). He likes to disrupt the faithful and make them feel miserable, and to distort faith by arguments and never-ending trials. Ultimately, Psalm 13 exposes Satan and his evil afflictions, and it offers the believer a template for how to withstand his attacks and remain firm in faith.

The last two verses of the Psalm 13 explain this. Verse 5 is a song of trust in God, reflecting faith from before the time of Christ; *'as for me, I will trust in Your faithful love ...'*. This phrase uses the great Biblical word for God's covenant love, 'cheseth', translated here as 'faithful love', by which God has blessed His people since the time of Abraham (Genesis 15:6f.). This quality of God's love is timeless, and in these words, David asks the reader to trust that God is greater than any of life's evils. His hand guides His people, and will always be faithful. The verse continues by encouraging the reader to be joyful, *'my heart rejoices in Your salvation'* (13:5). So, the Jew gives thanks to God for deliverance through the Red Sea, but the Christian gives thanks to God for eternal salvation found through Jesus Christ alone.

Lastly, verse 6 records something a fascinating challenge, in the form of a vow. Here, the believer promises to continue to worship God, in these words, '*I will continue to sing (worship) .. when He does good things*' (13:6). However, this is not an exclusive promise, as if the believer will only worship when something is received from God. A pledge such as this was intended as a special promise to God, or a 'vow', to give Him additional worship when real victories occur in everyday life. This is a special and lively promise to God to make sure that over and above the regular formal worship, the individual honours God for what ever He does and whenever He does it. Surely, any one of us would benefit from making such a vow!

Psalm 13 leads the believer through understandable distress to real, practical faith, and can be a great blessing for all who use it.

Discipleship

Application

Dealing with the attacks of the enemy

No one who attempts to live the Christian life is immune from the attacks of the 'enemy'. In the midst of trials struggles, it is easy to forget that Scripture has given us good spiritual ways and means to keep close to the Lord and ensure that we do not succumb to the enemies temptations. Ultimately, this Psalm invites us to make a vow that we will give God our special worship, indeed, to 'sing of the Lord', when He delivers us from the evils we experience. Whether or not we find it easy to sing, we can surely enter into the abandonment and selflessness of worship when we 'sing to the Lord'. The time will surely come when He will do this, so we had better be ready!

Ideas for what to do

- Consider carefully what it would mean for you to make a vow to the Lord to worship Him when He blesses you. What would you do to worship the Lord? How easy do you find it to think about worshipping the Lord by yourself, and not within a service of worship at church or at a meeting or event?
- Pray for any who you know, who are experiencing great difficulties in life at the moment. Pray Psalm 13 as if for them. Of course, you cannot make a vow for someone else, but you could make a vow to worship the Lord yourself when you see that someone else has been saved from trouble!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How easy do you find it to ask the Lord for help in the midst of trouble? What manner of trouble will afflict you before you feel that you should pray?
2. What does this Psalm teach you about how to face adversity?
3. What is meant by a vow today, and would you be ready to make a vow to the Lord God, such as the one in this Psalm?

Final Prayer

May God the Father bless us, may Jesus Christ take care of us, and may the Holy Spirit enlighten us all the days of our life. The Lord is our defender and the keeper of our souls and bodies, both now and for ever, to the end of ages. AMEN