

How Long, O Lord?

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Date: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Rev. Murdo Campbell

[0 : 00] Well if we could, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Psalms and Psalm 13. Psalm 13, and we're going to read again at verses 1 and 2.

We're going to look at the whole Psalm, but if we just read again at verse 1. Where David asks, 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?

How long, O Lord? How long? How long, O Lord? How long?

This morning we begin our fifth week of lockdown, where we continue to be confined to our homes unable to visit our family and even our friends.

[1 : 00] And as you know during this coronavirus pandemic, the message which has been clearly and repeatedly given is that we're not to leave our homes. We're only to leave our homes if it's to go to work as a key worker, or to go shopping for the essentials, or for exercise once a day, or to help someone who's vulnerable.

Otherwise the message is still the same, stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives. But as we begin our fifth week of lockdown, the question which is on everyone's mind is how long is this going to go on for?

How long are we going to be in lockdown? How long are things going to be at a standstill? How long are we going to be off work? How long are the schools going to be closed for?

How long are the churches going to lie empty? How long are we going to be living in fear? How long until life gets back to normal?

How long is this going to go on for? How long? And you know that's a question which everyone is repeatedly asking. It's the question which the media is repeatedly asking, the government.

[2 : 13] It's the question which the government is repeatedly asking the scientists. How long? How long is this going to go on for? But as you know the truth is we don't know how long.

The media doesn't know how long. The government doesn't know how long. The scientists don't know how long. The other nations in our world facing the same worries and crisis as ourselves. They don't know how long this is going to go on for. But you know my friend as we come to Sam 13. Your Bible is reminding us that the Lord knows how long.

The Lord knows how long. And that's where our prayer needs to be directed in our time of distress. Because that's where David's prayer was directed in his time of distress.

David directed his distress to the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. David here in Sam 13 he directed his distress to the God who is sovereign over every aspect of creation.

[3 : 18] David directed his distress to the God who is the Alpha and the Omega. The first and the last, the beginning and the end. My friend David directed his distress to the God who has our times in his hands.

And you know Sam 13 it's reminding us this morning that we too need to direct our distress to the Lord. Because through David's experience in Sam 13 we're able to learn three things.

Through David's experience in Sam 13 we're able to learn about the problem of patience, the petition for patience and the promise with patience.

Through David's experience in Sam 13 we're able to learn about the problem of patience, the petition for patience and the promise with patience.

So if we look first of all at the problem of patience, the problem of patience. Now look again at verse one. David says, how long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

[4 : 27] 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?

You know in the opening verses of Sam 13, David he directs his distress not to the government's, kingdom's, empires or nations of this world but he directs his distress to the Lord, the covenant king. He says, how long, O Lord, how long? And as you know whenever we see this title Lord in capital letters, it's the title of the covenant king.

It literally means the one who keeps covenant, the one who keeps covenant. And when we see that title it should immediately emphasize to us that the God we worship is a covenant making and a covenant keeping God.

He's a God who makes promises and keeps his promises. He's the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who keeps covenant. And his covenant promise and pledge is his pardon, his peace and his presence to all those who trust in him.

[5 : 43] And you know the wonder of the Lord's covenant is that it's a covenant of grace. It's a covenant of grace which means that the Lord's promise and pledge to us, his promise and pledge is of his pardon, his peace and his presence.

And the wonder of it is that it's not based upon our obedience to the Ten Commandments. It's not based upon our ability, our ability to be a good person with good morals.

It's not based upon our baptism or our Bible reading or our behavior. It's not even based upon our fidelity or our faithfulness to Christ and his church.

You know my friend, the Lord's covenant of grace in which we're promised and pledged his pardon, his peace and his presence. We're able to receive it all when we rest upon the covenant king Jesus Christ by faith alone.

That's the beauty of knowing Jesus because he's the covenant king and he's promised and pledged to us what we don't deserve. He's acted in salvation according to his grace.

[6 : 56] Therefore my friend, the assurance the Bible gives to you this morning is that there's nothing you can do today or in the future to make Jesus love you any more than he already does.

And there's nothing that you can do today or in the future to make him love you any less. All he asks is that you come to him on bended knee, submitting your life to him and confessing him as your Lord and Savior.

And that's what's so wonderful about the Lord's covenant promises and pledges towards sinners that all of the Lord's promises and all of his pledges, his pledges and promises of pardon, peace and his presence, they're all signed and they're all sealed with this covenant title Lord, the one who keeps covenant.

And you know it's into that backdrop that David directs his distress to the Lord.

But what David can't understand in Psalm 13 is where is the Lord? Where is this covenant King who promises and pledges his pardon, peace and presence to his people?

[8 : 17] Where is he? David's asking, where are you Lord? And you know it's knowing who the Lord is that David directs his distress to the Lord with this fourfold cry.

He says, how long 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? David's crying to the Lord and he's literally saying, how much longer is this going to go on for?

How much longer will you forget me? Will it be forever? How much longer will you hide your face from me? How much longer must I have sorrow in my heart?

How much longer is this enemy going to be against me? If you're the covenant King who says that he promises and pledges his pardon, peace and presence to his people, then how much longer is this going to go on for?

[9 : 23] And you know with whatever was going on in David's life at the time, we can be certain that it wasn't a pandemic, but there was a problem. And whatever the problem was, what David can't understand is that if his covenant King who promises and pledges his pardon, his peace and his presence to his people, if his covenant King is so like this, then why does he feel abandoned by him?

Why does he feel rejected by him? Why does he feel deserted by him? And David's asking the Lord, how much longer am I going to feel like this?

How much longer am I going to feel forsaken and forgotten by you? How much longer am I going to feel distant and so detached from you? And with all these feelings, David's problem of patience was that he was becoming irritated and impatient with the Lord.

And you know my friend, this is why the Bible is so real and so relevant for us. Because the Bible, especially in the book of Psalms, you know, they never portray to us that if you're a Christian, then you'll spend your life wrapped in cotton wool and you'll walk on clouds and everything in life will be rosy.

No, my friend, the Bible is so real and so relevant for us. No, my friend, the Bible is relevant for us because it's real and it presents to us all the realities of life.

[11 : 04] It presents to us the struggles, the struggles of sin, the struggles of sickness, the struggles of stress, the struggles of suffering, the struggles of sorrow.

And the Bible even presents to us all these feelings, feelings have been forsaken, feelings have been forgotten, feelings have been distant from the Lord, feelings have been detached from the Lord.

And these feelings, they cause us to question the Lord and question what the Lord is doing in our lives. Because like David, we know that he's a covenant king.

We know what the Bible says about him. We know that this covenant king promises and pledges to us his peace and his pardon and his presence when we trust in him.

But sometimes when we're struggling with all the sins, sicknesses, stresses, sufferings and sorrows of this life, when we feel forsaken by the Lord and forgotten by the Lord, when we feel distant and detached from the Lord and we question the Lord, we ask him how much longer is this going to go on for?

[12 : 07] Because I can't take much more. Of course, you know, who are we to question the Lord?

Because the pot is the pot to ask the pot or why have you made me this way? Who are we to question the Lord? But the reality is my friend, the reality is and the relevance of this Sam for us is that we do.

We do question the Lord and sometimes the problem of our patience is that we become irritated and impatient with what the Lord has put in our path.

We become irritated and impatient with what the Lord has put in our path. But you know, it's when we direct our distress to the Lord, it's then that we discover whatever is going on in our lives that the Lord has a purpose in it and his purposes are always for his glory.

You know, don't you love the opening words of Sam 115? I love that, these opening words, because you know, those words, they should be the life song of every Christian.

[13 : 25] They're the Christian's confession. Sam 115, verse 1, not unto us, Lord, not to us, but do thou glory take unto thy name in for thy truth and for thy mercy's sake.

That's the Christian's confession in Sam 115 and verse 1. But you know, the Christian's criticism, it comes in verse 2.

It says, oh, wherefore should the heathens say, where is their God now gone, but our God in the heavens is what pleased him he hath done. And you know, isn't that often the case that with the Christian's confession comes the Christian's criticism from the world, that when you direct your distress to the Lord, confessing that whatever is going on in your life, the Lord has a purpose in it and it's all for his glory.

But then the criticism from the world comes. Where is he? Where is he? Where is the Lord during your suffering?

Where is the Lord during this coronavirus? If your God is a good and gracious God, if he's loving and life-giving, if he's this God who promises and pledges his pardon, his peace and his presence, then where is he?

[14 : 44] Where is he? And you know, my friend, the answer to the Christian's criticism is that the remedy to our ruin, the solution to our sin, the cure to our chaos, it must be found outside of ourselves in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Because you know what Sam 13 is affirming and assuring to us is that the God of the Bible, he is in some distant deity. No, the wonder is that the God of the Bible became like us.

The word became flesh in order to reach down and relate to us. Our Jesus, my friend, our covenant king, he was touched with a feeling of our and infirmities.

He was forgotten and forsaken. He was he embodied our sin. He endured our sickness. He experienced our stresses. He entered into our suffering and he encountered our sorrow. And it was all so that we could be assured that our covenant king, he certainly promises and pledges to us his pardon, his peace and his presence when we come to him by faith alone. [15:57] And that's why we can come. That's why we need to come. That's why we need to come with a problem of patience and direct all our distress to the Lord.

Because today he is our covenant king. My friend, have you come to him? Have you come to this covenant king who will deal with you not as your sins deserve, but will deal with you according to his grace?

And so through David's experience in Psalm 13, we're able to learn about the problem of patience. But then secondly, we learn about the petition for patience.

The petition for patience. We'll read again in verse one. How long will 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.

[17:07] Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him, lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

You know, when it comes to asking the question, how long, O Lord? He wasn't the only servant of the Lord to ask that question.

Because Asaph, he wrote in Psalm 79, he wrote, how long, O Lord, will you be angry? Habakkuk, he asked, how long, O Lord, shall I cry for help when you will not hear?

The prophet Zechariah, he also asked, how long, O Lord, will you not have mercy on Jerusalem?

But you know, it's when Isaiah asked this question that it really made me think.

When Isaiah was called to be a servant of the Lord, you read about it in Isaiah chapter 6, we're told there that Isaiah received a vision from the Lord and the Lord asked him, to whom shall I send and who will go for us?

[18:12] And Isaiah gave those famous words of commitment to his call, here am I, send me. But it's when Isaiah is encouraged and exhorted by the Lord to keep preaching to the people and keep calling them to repent and keep urging them to see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn to the Lord.

It's then that Isaiah asks that important question, how long, O Lord? How long? How long am I to preach to this people for?

How long am I to pray for this people? How long am I to plead with this people? How long, O Lord? How long? And what the Lord says, until no one is left, until no one is left.

And you know, my friend, it's a real reminder as a church, isn't it? That as a church, we're to keep preaching and to keep praying and to keep pleading until there's no one left.

We're to keep preaching the Gospel and keep praying for blessing on the Gospel and we're to keep pleading for people to repent and believe in the Gospel until everyone has heard the good news of Jesus Christ.

[19:29] We're to keep pleading, to keep praying, to keep preaching until no one is left. But you know, as David knew and as Asaph knew and as Habakkuk knew and Zechariah knew and as you know, my friend, waiting upon the Lord, isn't easy.

Because as we said, when we encounter the struggles of sin, sickness, suffering and sorrow, they can cause us to have these feelings, feelings of being forgotten, feelings of feeling forsaken, feelings of being distant or detached from the Lord.

And these feelings, they often lead to questions. When we question the Lord, we question what the Lord is doing and we question the Lord because, well, we know what he's like.

We know that he's a king, a covenant king who promises and pledges his peace, his pardon and his presence. But you know, as David directs his distress to the Lord, he knows that he can't rest and rely upon his feelings.

He can't rest and rely upon his feelings. And he wants an answer. David's problem of patience was that he was becoming irritated and impatient with the Lord and now his petition for patience is that he wants an answer from the Lord, where he says in verse three, consider and answer me, O Lord, my God, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say I have prevailed over him, lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

[21 : 08] David's petition for patience is that he feels that if the Lord doesn't answer him, he will remain in this darkness.

And his darkness will cause him to doubt and drift like a ship without direction. But more than that, you know, David, he describes his feelings of darkness.

He says that his darkness is like death. His darkness is like defeat. His darkness is like being dishonored and being disgraced.

But as David directs his distress to the Lord, this covenant king, he knows that he can't rest. He knows that he can't rely upon his feelings, which is why he wants an answer.

And he knows that his answer won't come from anyone else but the Lord. And that's why he prays in verse three, light up my eyes.

[22 : 05] Do you know it's a beautiful prayer? Because in his darkness, David is praying for direction from the word of God.

And he's saying, light up my eyes. And I say that it comes from the word of God because this phrase, light up my eyes, it's how David described the word of God in Psalm 19.

In Psalm 19, David, he describes first of all how God speaks to us through creation, that God speaks by declaring his glory through the heavens.

The skies, they proclaim his handiwork. But then in the second half of Psalm 19, David explains how God speaks to us through his word, his special revelation.

And David describes God's word using six different words. He uses the words law, testimony, precepts, commands, fear and rules.

[23 : 08] And David says about the word of God. He says, the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.

The rules of the Lord are true and righteous all together. David said, the word of God is pure because it enlightens the eyes.

The word of God is pure because it enlightens the eyes. And that's what David is praying here in Psalm 13. Light up my eyes.

In his darkness, David is directing his distress to the Lord and praying for direction from the word of God. In his darkness, David is praying for direction from the word of God.

[24 : 07] And as you know, my friend, the word of God, it's the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Because we can't rest and rely upon our feelings because our feelings will fail us. Our feelings will fail us.

That's why the 16th century German reformer, Martin Luther, that's why he said, and his whole life, you could say, was determined and directed by the word of God.

Everything that took place in Martin Luther's life was because he was determined and directed by the word of God, not his feelings. Luther who said, feelings come and feelings go.

And feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the word of God, not else's worth believing. Though all my heart should feel condemned, for want of some sweet token, there is one greater than my heart whose word cannot be broken.

[25 : 10] I'll trust in God's unchanging word till soul and body sever, for though all things should pass away, his word, his word shall stand forever.

You know, my friend, as we learn from David's experience in Psalm 13, we see that his problem of patience was that he was becoming irritated and impatient with the Lord.

But then his petition for patience was that he wanted an answer from the Lord. But David discovered, like we all need to discover, that we must learn to wait upon the Lord, resting and relying not upon our feelings, not upon our feelings of feeling forsaken or forgotten, feelings of being distant and detached from the Lord, but we're to rest and rely upon the word of God, because the word of God is the promise with patience.

The word of God is the promise with patience. You know, that's why the psalmist could say in Psalm 130, and it's one of Martin Luther's favorite Psalms.

I wait for God, my soul doth wait, my hope is in his word. More than they that for morning watch, my soul waits for the Lord.

[26 : 35] My hope is in his word. That's where your hope is today, my friend. Your hope is in his word.

And so through David's experience in Psalm 13, we're able to learn about the problem of patience, the petition for patience, and then lastly, the promise with patience, the promise with patience.

David says in verse five, 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.

You know, in the closing verses of Psalm 13, we see that having directed his distress to the Lord and having received direction from God's word, you could almost see that David's distress, it turns to delight.

David's distress turns to delight, where he confesses that he's no longer trusting in all his feelings, because David is now trusting in the faithfulness of the Lord's steadfast love.

[27 : 47] He says in verse five, I have trusted in your steadfast love, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. You know, the problem of patience and the petition for patience, it was all answered by the promise with patience.

Because the promise David now leans upon with patience is the promise of the Lord's steadfast love. And his steadfast love, it's found in the word of God.

In fact, that word, steadfast love, it's one of the most important words in the Bible. In Hebrew, it's the word chesed. Chesed.

And for centuries, you know, for centuries translators, they had a difficulty translating this biblical word into English, because there's no English word that can really encapsulate and express the true meaning of the Lord's chesed.

And as a result, chesed is translated in a variety of different English translations. It's translated as love, or steadfast love as it is here, or unending love, or constant love, or mercy, or even compassion.

[29 : 01] There's a variety of different translations that are used to try and encapsulate and to express the Lord's undeserved, unbreakable, unrestricted, unconditional, unchanging, covenant love.

And you know, it was the Old Testament scholar, Dale Ralph Davis, who said that the word chesed is a word that describes love that is surprising and sustaining.

It's love that never lets go. It's love, he says, with superglue on it. It's love with superglue on it. Do you know my friend, the Lord's chesed, his steadfast love, is all because of who he is.

He's the one who keeps covenant. He's the one who promises and pledges his pardon, his peace, and his presence to those who trust in him. And his promises and pledges, where were they revealed finally, but on the cross.

God demonstrated his chesed to us, his covenant love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God demonstrated his love.

[30 : 18] Even through what Jesus said, greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.

My friend, the Lord's chesed is his steadfast love, and it's all because of who he is. He's the one who keeps covenant.

That's how David's distress turned to delight when he learned to wait upon the Lord, not by trusting in his feelings. No, no, no.

But he trusted in the faithfulness. The faithfulness of the Lord's steadfast love, and where did he find it? In his word. In his word. My friend, if you're distressed this morning, go to God's word.

If you're downcast, go to God's word. If you're worried, go to God's word. If you're lacking assurance in your salvation, go to God's word.

[31 : 20] My hope is in his word. We can't trust in our feelings, but we need to trust in the faithfulness of the Lord's steadfast love found in his word.

And that's what David did. He patiently trusted in the promise of the Lord's steadfast love. I know the amazing thing is David wasn't alone. David wasn't alone.

You look at Abraham, Abraham patiently trusted in the promise of the Lord's steadfast love and he trusted in it for 25 years before Isaac was born. Joseph, he patiently trusted in the Lord's steadfast love for 13 years before he was released from prison.

Moses, patiently trusted in the promise of the Lord's steadfast love for 80 years before the Israelites were delivered from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

Simeon, that New Testament character we see right at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. Simeon, he patiently trusted in the promise of the Lord's steadfast love and he trusted in it his whole life before he saw the Lord's Christ.

[32 : 31] And you know, not once did the Lord break his covenant promise with his people. Why? Because he's the covenant king. He's the one who keeps covenant.

He's the one who promises and pledges to his people. He promises and pledges to you, my friend, his pardon, his peace and his presence when you come to him by faith alone and trust in him with all your heart.

He's the Lord, the one who keeps covenant. He's the one who keeps covenant. My friend, David's distress turned to delight when he stopped looking at his situation and started looking to his savior. And he trusted the promise of the Lord's steadfast love found in his word and he trusted in it with patience. And you know, that's what we need to do today.

We need to learn from David's experience and trust in the Lord's steadfast love, his covenant love, his unchanging, unfailing, unrelenting covenant love.

[33 : 38] We need to trust in it with patience. With patience. How long, oh Lord? How long?

How long is this going to go on for? How long are we going to be in lockdown? How long is the church going to remain empty?

How long are we going to live in fear? How long, oh Lord? How long? How long are we going to struggle with the sins, sicknesses, stresses, sufferings and sorrows of this life?

My friend, we don't know. But this morning our Bible is reminding us, the word of God is assuring us that the Lord knows.

And that's why we need to direct our distress to the Lord, because when we do, our distress will turn to delight. Because we learn just like David learned, we learn to patiently trust not in our feelings, but in the faithfulness of the Lord's steadfast covenant love that's found in his word, the word of God.

[34 : 53] Oh my friend, may we seek to do so, to wait upon the Lord, trusting upon his word. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray.

O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word, that it is so real and so relevant, that even the questions that are asked by thy people from long ago, and yet Lord, how we often find ourselves asking the same questions, dealing with the same worries, being confronted by the same problems.

And Lord, we give thanks to thee that thy word is a living word, it is able to speak into any and every situation in life, and remind us and assure us that the word of God who is not distant from us, or a God who is detached, but a God who loves us, who cares for us, and who has provided that new and living way in and through thy Son Jesus.

Lord help us then, we pray to come to him, help us to wait upon him, that we would be able to say with a psalmist that my hope is in his word.

O Lord we ask that thou wouldst bless thy word to us, thy word that even assures us that they that wait upon the Lord, they shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

[36 : 23] Lord help us to look away from ourselves, and to look to our Saviour, a Saviour who has never changed, who remains our constant, that he is our rock, and Lord help us then to confess with a psalmist that he only my salvation is, and my strong rock is he, he only is my sure defence much moved, I shall not be.

Bless us then Lord we ask, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well we are going to bring our time to a conclusion by singing the words of Sam 13.

We are singing Sam 13 in the Sing Sams version and we are singing the whole Sam. Sam 13, how long will you forget me Lord, will you forget always, how long Lord will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze, how long must I be sad each day in deep perplexity, how long will my opponent stand in triumph over me.

I am going to sing to the end of the Sam but still I trust your constant love, you save and set me free with joy I will extol the Lord who has been good to me.

So Sam 13 in the Sing Sams version to God's praise. How long will you forget me Lord, will you forget always, how long Lord will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze, how long must I be sad each day and ponder painfully, how long will my opponent stand in triumph over me.

[38 : 54] O Lord my God, consider me and give me your reply.

Light up my eyes, all I will see, the seek of those who die.

And would my enemy be fair at last I made him whole?

And so my throat would sing for joy to see my overthrow.

But still I trust your constant love, you save and set me free with joy I will extol the Lord who has been good to me.