

Darkness & Light

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[0 : 00] conducting the first part of the service. If you could turn with me once again in the Old Testament to the book of Psalms, Psalm 13, and we'll read this psalm once again. I think it's one of those psalms that its impact is greater when it is read aloud, whether that's reading it aloud on your own or hearing it read aloud in the church. Psalm 13. How long, Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, Lord my God.

Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death and my enemy will say I have overcome him and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love. My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise for he has been good to me.

I've called this psalm, I've given it the title Darkness and Light. And that motif of darkness and light runs like a thread, I think, through the entire Bible. Because all is darkness until God says, let there be light.

And we think of the day of the Lord. Weeping may endure for a night, which is obviously a metaphorical statement, but joy cometh in the morning.

[2 : 26] We must through much tribulation, says the writer, enter into the kingdom of heaven. And this psalm itself is a psalm of stark contrasts between darkness and light.

And therefore, this psalm is a cameo of the Christian pilgrimage, the Christian faith, the Christian experience, the Christian walk.

Sometimes one can be forgiven for wondering if modern Christianity knows little of what older saints used to call the dark night of the soul.

The kerygma or the thrust of the message pumped out at times seems so idealistic and almost cozy.

Also, it seems to me at times that slick and quick answers are the instant solution to any difficulty the believer may encounter.

[3 : 47] One might wonder why in general do we not encounter hardly any dark nights of the soul? Is it because we steer clear of the front line where the battle is raging?

After all, the writer also says all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Maybe. Maybe not.

God is clearly sovereign in this matter as in other matters. I love the Psalms. It's one of my favourite books in the Bible.

I love the Psalms because of what I call their raw reality. To me, they're more real in sometimes the kind of message that I hear.

To me, they register and connect with all of human experience. What is this Psalm?

[5 : 01] It's a voice for the voiceless, such as the Syrian refugees, the Rohingya Muslims, the people of Yemen. It's a voice for the people of Yemen.

It's a voice for those who feel they are not heard in the desperate plight in which they find themselves. What is this Psalm? It's a Psalm for those who are weary and worn out by the long night of their sorrow.

What is this Psalm? It is a psalm for those who feel abandoned and forgotten by God. What is this psalm? It is a psalm for those whose inner demons and struggles never seem to end.

What is this psalm? It's a psalm that reminds us that there is a place where we can safely be our real self.

We can take the mask off and be our real self and disclose our real thoughts and feelings before him who was touched with the feeling of our weaknesses.

[6 : 16] This psalm is a very simple structure really.

It has three stanzas. And in the first two verses you've got questions. In the next two verses you've got the answers that the petitioner is looking for.

And you know what you've got thirdly in this psalm? Light. Let's begin then by looking through this psalm. And first of all looking at the questions.

But notice that this phrase, how long, is repeated four times. And notice that the phrase itself indicates it's already been a long time in the mind of this person.

It's not a question of, he's not asking, why has it been so long? Well in a sense he is. But he's saying, how much longer is it going to go on?

[7 : 46] And this is stressed in this psalm. How long? How long must I be single?

How long must my singleness go on? How long must I be in a marriage that has nothing in it except that we exist under the same roof?

How long must I suffer this bullying in my workplace? How long must I experience the sorrow of my wayward and wandering children?

How long might those Syrian refugees say, will this war continue and we be rootless and homeless and in desperation?

Of course, the psalmist is addressing God. You can see that, can't you? This is not a cry out into the air.

[9 : 04] This is a cry to the very God who's the covenant God and the creator God. That is indicated by the fact that Lord is in capitals.

Will you forget me forever? Here is someone that feels God has forgotten him. That he's gone clean out of God's head, God's memory.

And this is how he feels. This is how it is for him. And there's no point. And it's been like this for a long time.

And you won't help this person by firing a little bow, some special text from Romans 8. Lord, it's even to the point that I'm saying, will you forget me forever?

This person feels that God has forgotten him. This person feels that God is hiding his face from him.

[10 : 21] It's like the two in the story. Remember the story of the person that was beaten up in the New Testament.

And the Levite passed by on the other side of the road. And the priest passed by on the other side of the road. Both hiding their face from this person. They wanted nothing to do with that person. They didn't want to get involved. It was too risky or whatever. And this is the kind of feeling that the psalmist, why are you hiding your face from me?

The God that I have served. The God that I love. And by the way, there isn't a trace here of any sense that he has sinned or anything like that.

But he feels abandoned. You ever felt abandoned by God?

[11 : 31] You ever felt that God has forgotten you? And I know that the patients that used to come and see me when I did the counselling role at Airdrie Health Centre.

I know that many of them had come after they had suffered a long time. And one thing that you find out is the longer that they're struggling with whatever it is that they're struggling with, the weaker generally they become.

Till they're worn out. Till there's nothing left in the tank. Till there's nothing left in the tank. There's another one who felt abandoned, isn't there?

Called Jesus Christ. My God, my God. Why have you abandoned me?

Why? And this is the thing. Christianity is more than capable of absorbing and taking the most difficult experiences in human existence.

[12 : 50] And he goes on. How must, how long must I wrestle with my thoughts?

What thoughts? Well, the thoughts that he's forgotten me. The thoughts that he's hiding his face from me. The thought of, does he care?

The thought that, will he ever come again and give me comfort?

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts? And day after day, have sorrow in my heart. You know, you get people coming up, don't you?

Christians and giving their testimony. And we're pretty quick, aren't we, in prayers to talk about the things that have worked out. You don't really hear people standing up and giving this sort of testimony, do you?

[14:03] Yet, the interesting thing is, and this is happening right here. The most authentic prayer to God. The prayer that actually comes, as C.S. Lewis puts it, from the real you.

As the prayer that's out of the depths I cried to you. How long will my enemy triumph over me? My besetting sin. My inner demon. My inner demon. Those people that are bullying me at my work. Those difficult neighbors. The difficult pain and struggle that those that struggle with mental health are going through. How long, sometimes they say, will I wrestle with my thoughts. I sometimes get tired, you know, and weary.

[15:17] This is a real part of our pilgrimage.

This is a real part of the Christian walk. So there's the questions. But he goes on to talk about the answer. And he says, look on me and answer, Lord my God. Instead of hiding your face from me. Instead of turning your face away from me. Because that's what it feels like to me, God. And God's big enough to take these questions and those sentiments.

[16:20] Don't think he isn't. Look on me and answer.

And notice in the first two verses, he begins by Lord. And now he's adding something else. Lord my God. Lord my God.

Is the light just beginning to creep in? Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death. This person really has a deep sense that they're on the way out. Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death.

The sleep of death. This person is, his eyes are heavy.

[17:46] His eyes are sunken. His eyes are red with tears. With crying. Day by day.

And night by night. And week by week. And month by month. Look on me. And answer. Lord my God. I have no one else to turn to. No one else can give any answer except you.

Give light to my eyes. Bring that life back to me.

Our relationship has been disrupted by this. My perception of you is that you don't care. That you've forgotten me.

[18:49] And my well-being has been disrupted. Because I wrestle with my thoughts.

And day after day have sorrow in my heart. Look on me and answer. Give light to my eyes. And then if we go to verse 5.

But I trust in your unfailing love. I've heard some people say that the last two verses must have been added later to this psalm before it was presented to the director of music for use in public worship.

I've heard people commentators and academics that write about these things. And that's because that they can't see how these two things can sit together can be juxtaposed together.

They can't see how that can be. How can he have this amount of darkness as reflected in the first four verses and yet suddenly say but I trust in your unfailing love.

[20:38] And sometimes these academics will also say that this actually reflects a different experience. and it's been pasted into this psalm.

Or that there's been a time interval between verses one to four and verses four to six. And that four to six come from a different experience.

I don't believe that at all. see the psalms are a prayer book as well as a song book.

And people talk about the prayer of confession, the prayer of thanksgiving, the prayer of praise, the prayer of adoration, but there's also the prayer of these questions.

These are questions, as I said a moment ago, addressed to God. And I said perhaps the light is creeping in when he said, Lord, my God.

[22:00] But it seems to me that in this experience that the psalmist had, that however it panned out, I obviously don't know, that the light did burst in.

And that's why I'm calling the last two verses light. And that's how I get the idea of the title, darkness and light. And what was that light that burst in?

It's what Alan was praying about in the very opening words of his prayer. That love that will not let me go.

That love that sent Jesus Christ for you and I to Calvary. That love that is from everlasting to everlasting.

That love that knows no boundaries nor no limits. God made a universe that is contingent, that is in a sense fragile, as well as orderly.

[23 : 17] There's disorder, as well as things that are fruitful and good. There are things that are not fruitful and good, like tsunamis and earthquakes and tornadoes and everything else.

And God made free people in his own image and placed them in that universe. And if we want to ask, is this the best possible universe of all possible universes that God could have made?

It's a kind of rhetorical question in a way, because the answer is obviously yes. Surely he wouldn't have made anything but the best. And it's a universe where love is possible.

And the light that has crashed in for the psalmist is that I trust in your unfailing love.

love. I may not feel as if I am loved right now, but I know enough of you, God. I know enough of your character.

[24 : 38] You've revealed enough of yourself on that cross where Christ died for me that you know something? I don't believe that these things have been taken away necessarily, even though we have verses 5 and 6 there.

I believe that the light has crashed in. Give light, he said, to my eyes. Well, here it is, says God. My unfailing love.

love. And not only this, can you believe it?

Darkness and light. Now he says, my heart that was sad every single day, day by day, day in and day out, rejoices in your salvation.

How come? People that have no faith and in particular Christian faith, they have only two dimensions to their lives.

[26 : 05] One, at one pole is shots of happiness. At the other pole is shots of sorrow.

They have nothing else. But the pilgrim, the believer, the Christian has something called the joy of the Lord.

happiness. That is something that is beyond happiness. My heart rejoices in your salvation.

Seeming I can drag my heart away from all of this, even for 15 minutes. And I think of all the love that sought me and all the blood that bought me and all the grace that brought me to Calvary's cross and to the Savior.

My heart rejoices. When I think of the future that I have, my heart rejoices. when I think of the Savior I have, my heart rejoices.

[27 : 38] When I think that the everlasting God loved me and if I were the only person in this planet, he would have loved me and gave himself for me.

the one that has sorrow daily ends singing.

I will sing the Lord's praise for he has been good to me. can I ask as we close, do you have this rejoicing in your heart that is the joy of the Lord?

Is that your strength? Do you tonight rejoice even though your life is surrounded by many sorrows and that salvation?

And do you have a testimony like this man? I mean not just the side of his testimony of darkness but please can I ask do you have this side of his testimony the light the Lord has been good to me may it be so for each and every one of us may the Lord bless his word for his glory and for our eternal good we're going to conclude our service by singing in the hymn 757 have to see here