

May 31, 2020

“Out from Despair” Psalm 13

FCF: Times of despair for the Christian

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord guides us out from despair.
(magnet) We must learn to walk that path.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678. It is regarded as one of the most significant works in English literature, has been translated into over 200 languages, and never been out of print. It is the allegorical tale of a man named Christian. Over the course of his journey, he meets another man, Hopeful. One day, the two men decide to take a shortcut, only to be taken captive by the giant Despair and held in Doubting Castle as his prisoners. This was a dark place where the giant treated them harshly, beating and urging them to end their misery by taking their own lives, pressing on them so as to break their spirits and to crush their hope.

This is one of the most profound scenes in the book. And it raises a question. Where do we turn when we feel trapped by despair, imprisoned with no way out? What do we do?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Psalm 13](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

“Despair” comes from the Latin “desperare” (“de” plus “sperare,” meaning hope). So it refers to the utter loss of hope. It is a despondent forlornness. To despair is a serious thing. How do we deal with it? There are three basic options. The first is simply “Ignore it.” Suppress it, drown it, distract yourself. Binge on something. That’s the secular path. The moralistic path is, “Get over it.” Put on your big boy pants. Other people have had it much tougher than you.

Neither of those will work. Neither takes the problem seriously which can lead to terrible harm. So where does that leave us? The third option, the Christian approach, is very different. It is to face reality and to look to someone outside ourselves to pull us out. It looks to Jesus.

Which brings us to our text. That’s what we see in Psalm 13. We know we can’t simply ignore our pain. Nor can we simply get over it. It’s too much. We need to be freed. David’s message is that the Lord guides us out from despair. And so we must learn to walk that path.

This path involves a series of steps, a climb out of the mire to a higher vantage point. What are those steps? There are three. First, from the pain of desolation. Second, through the prayer of supplication. And, third, to the peace of resolution. That’s the path we are given.

I. FROM THE PAIN OF DESOLATION

First, from the pain of desolation. This is how the journey begins ([READ Psalm 13:1-2](#)).

A) Time of Anguish

1. Pressing the question

David is describing a time of great anguish. “How long?” He presses the question four times. Four times. You cannot help but feel the weight in the repetition. It’s strongly emphasized.

2. Hearing the question

What are we hearing? This is not about a need for information. This is about an expression of dismay. His endurance has run out. The tank is empty and he's running on fumes. "How long?"

B) Feeling Alone

1. Lost connection

This is a time of anguish in which David is feeling alone. The connection has been lost. He feels forgotten by the Lord, as if He has hidden His face. Something once known has been lost.

2. Deep disruption

And this lost connection has led to a deep disruption. His thoughts are in turmoil. His enemy is on the rise. That means a threat to his rule and a struggle with the meaning and justice of events.

This is where the journey begins. We start the climb from the bottom, in the deep pain of desolation. And David shows us very clearly that it's good to be transparent about this.

Illustration:

Some of you may be familiar with Earnest Shackleton's expedition to Antarctica in 1914. The accounts are harrowing. It's said he took out this ad in the newspaper ([READ quote](#)):

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success.

The point being that we need to know what we're getting into. We need to count the cost.

Application:

We need to be clear about what it means to follow Christ. Despair will seek to drag you away. Doubt will threaten to encircle you. The struggle is real. We ought never to assume that a disciple of Jesus is somehow immune from such things. History tells a very different story.

Jesus guides us out from despair. We must learn to walk the path. This is how we begin.

II. THROUGH THE PRAYER OF SUPPLICATION

But how do we move forward? How do we start to make the climb? That brings us to the prayer of supplication - asking and pleading, humbly and earnestly ([READ Psalm 13:3-4](#)).

A) His Fears

1. Personal

You can hear David's fears at two levels. At the personal level, he fears for his life. He may be referring to an illness or even an assault. Either way, he knows he is dependent upon the Lord.

2. Covenantal

But his fear is at a covenantal level too. David is the king of Israel, the one to whom the Lord has made great promises of a salvation and a lineage. If he is snuffed out, what will that mean?

B) His Pleas

1. Humbly

So out of these fears, David lifts up his pleas. Humbly. Without God's help, he has no hope.

2. Earnestly

Humbly and earnestly. You hear the boldness. “Look at me! Speak to me! Restore me!”

This is the way forward, how we make the climb - the prayer of supplication.

Illustration:

There is no room here for a stiff upper lip. The Bible never counsels or encourages stoic emotionless passivity to events. The psalms do not square with scenes as in *Downton Abbey* or *Belgravia* where everyone is so polite you're hard-pressed to know how anyone actually feels.

Application:

That makes for great drama and high ratings. But lousy prayer. Prayer demands honesty. The plain open speaking of the psalms is what the Lord desires. Remember this is the songbook and prayer manual from God gladly given to the people of God. That should tell us something.

Jesus guides us out from despair. We must learn the path. This is how we move forward.

III. TO THE PEACE OF RESOLUTION

We start from the pain of desolation. We then move through the prayer of supplication. Where does that bring us? The peace of resolution (**READ Psalm 13:5-6**). Consider two things.

A) Looking Back

1. His personal trust

First, a past reference as David is looking back. He calls upon his personal trust in the Lord. There is a rich relational history here. His is a settled confidence and reliance upon the Lord.

2. God's good care

But not just that. David calls upon his memory of God's good care. The Lord has treated him so well. There is a rich past between David and the Lord. That's what David sees as he looks back.

B) Moving Forward

1. Even at that moment

And that rich past that David sees as he looks back is what he pivots from as he moves forward. Even at that moment, he says that he will rejoice and he will sing. He will exult and celebrate.

2. No matter what comes

No matter what comes. His is a trusting expectation. Note that, in terms of his circumstances, there is no word of any change here. It is David's heart that has changed. It has been mended.

This is where the journey ends, the peace of resolution. This is where the journey of the climb takes you. But you have to go through the journey of the climb to actually get there.

Illustration:

Let me take you back to Christian and Hopeful as they lay trapped in Doubting Castle. This time of despair has been an opportunity for Christian to rediscover the gospel. The two men have prayed through the night. That morning, Christian remembers he has a key (**READ quote**):

“What a fool! I have a key in my bosom called Promise; that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle.”

Then said Hopeful, “That's good news; good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom, and try.”

Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom and began to try at the dungeon door; whose bolt (as he turned the key) gave back, and the door flew open with ease: and both Christian and Hopeful came out.

What you see here is a very interesting dynamic, something we could call “active patience.” On the one hand, we must wait upon the Lord. But on the other hand, we must take out the key.

Application:

You see, as we go back to Psalm 13, we see that David keeps praying. He doesn’t give up. He presses through the journey, looking back that he might then move forward from the pit to a higher vantage point. Again, these words are of the Lord and that should tell us something.

The Lord guides us out from despair. We must learn to walk that path, all the way to the very end. And there we will find that, even though our circumstances may remain the same, we will not. We will find ourselves to have discovered, with the key, the peace of resolution.

CONCLUSION:

Lighthouses are the pioneers of social distancing, the subject of many photo shoots. They capture the imagination. But long ago, they were more than that. Case in point, the Two Lights lighthouse at Cape Elizabeth, ME, keeper Marcus Hanna, and the rescue of the *Australia* in 1885. The ship had run ashore in a terrible winter storm, just 100 yards away. The captain had been swept to sea. Two crewmen clung to the mast. Hanna had come off his shift and was sick. But his wife saw the ship on the rocks. So he got out of bed, sent his assistant for help, and crawled on his hands and knees in the snow. He tried to throw lines to the crew but ended up wading into the water. The eyes of the first man were iced shut, his jaw frozen. Hanna pulled him to shore. He got the rope to the second man and had started to haul him when help arrived. Marcus Hanna was later awarded a gold lifesaving medal for his bravery. That’s a rescue.

When we say the Lord “guides” us out from despair, we need to think in such terms. Who is the source of this salvation? Whose is this steadfast love? Isn’t that where Psalm 13 is pointing us? It is to Jesus. When David speaks of being forgotten and God’s face hidden from him, know that Jesus experienced this for us to the uttermost. On the cross, the Father forgot Him, hid His face from Him. How should that impact our current trials and times of despair?

Christian, your experience of despair, hard as it may be, is but fleeting and an impression. His was eternal and real. Stay with me here. Jesus experienced the true depths of despair. Why? So that we never would. And that is our assurance in all our sorrows, our joy in all our pain, no matter what it may be. Jesus went through ultimate despair. Which transforms our own.

Again, it is Him, Jesus, who guides us out from despair. We must learn to walk that path.

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