

Pulpit Exchange – Mint Hill Baptist

Sermon, January 29, 2012

Psalm 13:1-6

- 1 *How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD, forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*
- 2 *How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?*
- 3 *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;*
- 4 *lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.*
- 5 *But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.*
- 6 *I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.*

“How Long?”

Strong faith in God does not come all at once and it is not without its times of doubt. It is often gained through willing submission to His love and goodness in the midst of trials and tribulations. The Psalmist starts out asking the same question that you and I have asked God times and time again.

Today we are experiencing times in our lives when we feel completely alone and afraid. Who among us today has not felt our faith weighted down by severe struggles that left us wondering what in the world God was doing?

Despite our songs and prayers we find ourselves wondering if God knows about our pains, struggles, unemployment, and fears of losing our jobs on a weekly basis. Our current situation reminds me of Andre Couch’s song entitled We Need To Hear From You. “*We need a word or two. If we don’t hear from you, what will we do?*”

I don’t know about you but I believe in God even when He doesn’t speak. David starts off in this Psalm pouring out his soul to God. He thought that God had forgotten about him. He thought that God had forgotten His promises to him, His covenant with him, His former loving-kindness which he had shown to him.

It is not our choice, or right, to pick the road of life that we are going to travel. We don’t know how God is going to allot life to us. Some people seem to have an easier road to travel on in life than do others. When we consider our plight right now, some of us have never known the agony of being forced to sleep outdoors; we have not had to deal with the knowledge of not eating or homelessness.

Some of us know nothing about being behind on our bills, wondering if we will ever catch up. Some of us never experienced borrowing from one charge card to pay off another card. Some never experienced having all the major charge cards and you have exceeded your limit on all of them. Some of us know nothing about sickness, and there are others who have been sick most of your lives. I want to tell you today that regardless of what you are going through, God is there in all of our trials and tribulations.

Sometimes we are in so much pain that we may not sense God's presence. He is present even though He may choose not to do anything. It is God's permissive Will that forms character in us and through us. Sometimes God will wait before He reacts, heals, delivers, and set us free. We must see the other side of God in this Scripture where God allows David to suffer. It is a fact of life that God allows suffering.

There are five reasons:

1. God allows suffering to prevent us from exalting ourselves
2. God allows suffering to produce patience
3. God is at work in our suffering perseverance
4. God allows us to suffer to appreciate our deliverance
5. God allows suffering to punish us and to prevent us - Hebrew 12:5-10

David cries out: *How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD, forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?

David is blinded and cannot see God having to deal with the pain and agony of Saul and the stuff that Saul is putting on Him. But there is never a time when He cannot see us. God knows where we are because *His eye is on the sparrow and I know that God is watching over us.*

I know that we are struggling due to the hard times that all of us are going through. We have periods when we are alone and afraid and ask *why me?* There are times we grow weary of what we are going through and we also cry out *O Lord, how long?*

There are times that we cry out to God, *what have I done to deserve this?* What do you do when God seems farther away than time is from eternity, than faith is from doubt, than the east is from the west, than right is from wrong?

David felt that God was on vacation or leave of absence – but it is a mind game that the devil plays on us to get us to view our situation wrong. We can celebrate our deliverance when you and I accept God's timing and God's purpose in our lives. Celebration is believing that this current recession will eventually end and that you are not going to lose your home, mind, or your reason for believing in God.

It is not always easy not knowing how God is going to work things out in your life. God is still working and you just don't see Him because some of us want to live easy and comfortable lives. We do not want the stress or drama that has complicated the lives of so many. But the truth of the matter is that some struggles are unavoidable.

The adversary will bring the fight to us to see if our faith is real and if our God is real. He will try us at work - entering our thoughts. Evil wants all the territory it can claim. But we must stand firm for the things that we believe in.

Regardless of what we are going through, our faith must remain strong. The Lord knows what we are going through; however, when we walk by faith and hold up under pressure, we can convince others that God is real. This is the time for us to know that although the storms of life are raging, that our faith must stand firm believing that God is present in every situation to lead us through.

There are three things that I want to encourage you to do while waiting on God:

- I. Do something while you are waiting. As we wait on God to do something in our lives, we should not spend our time staring at the calendar. There is an old saying, “*a watched pot never boils.*” Do something while you wait!

It is true that occupied time feels shorter than unoccupied time. If you have applied for a job, don't sit and watch the phone all day. Those who busy themselves in Kingdom building activities find that the time will pass quickly.

If while we wait we begin to doubt our decisions, the wait seems longer. When we place a matter in God's hands, don't waste time worrying about your decision. If you are going to worry, then give it to God. If you give it to God, don't worry, He will work it out.

- II. Don't place a date and time on God. If God gives a time, expect it. When He told Israel to prepare to leave Egypt in the morning, they packed and waited – and when morning arrived they left. Usually God gives no specific times. Even when Christ came to earth, the Scriptures report that he came in the fullness of time, or when God was ready. When we place a date and time, we expect God to act; we become frustrated when God does not act. God does not move by our time.

I know that we don't like to see people cut in front of us at Wal-Mart or the grocery store. When we see others that have not waited as long as we have get blessed, our wait seems longer, but is it? The 37th Psalm warns us to “*Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious of the workers of iniquity.*” Worry makes your wait seem longer because you perceive that you are being treated unfairly.

I want you to remember what David discovered in Psalm 37:25 – “*I have been young, and now am old; yet, have I not seen the rightness forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*” No matter how life cuts in front of you, God won't run out of blessings before we get to check out.

- III. Don't give up. Be willing to wait longer for what you really want. If we perceive the value of an object to be great, then we will endure and wait to achieve it. If we think a college education is essential, then we will plunge into the four or eight years needed because we value the outcome. When the last version of Harry Potter was released, the lines formed a day before.

When the Apple iPhone was released, we had lines wrapped around the buildings; people waiting because they wanted what was being offered. What does God offer us? He offers us His blessings on our lives if we are prepared to wait for Him to bless us.

Finally, we must consider that those who patiently wait on the Lord will not be disappointed, because what He has for us is well worth the wait!

Every believer is going to wait on something in this life. It is not whether we are going to go through a lot of waiting. Isaiah reminds us that *“they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”* When we wait without the Lord, we will wear ourselves out asking *“how long?”*

This is not the first time that David asked God *how long will I have to tolerate this? How long will you allow this to happen in my life? How long before I get my breakthrough?* David asked how long four times in our Scripture which shows his intense desire for relief and deliverance. If we examine the Bible, there are other instances in which he cried out *how long?*

Psalm 6:3 *My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?*

Psalm 35:17 *How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue my life.*

Psalm 74:9-11 *How long will the enemy mock you O God?*

Let us close with a story of an adult Sunday School class that had been asked the question: In your time of discouragement, what is your favorite Scripture? A young man answered, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*

A middle aged woman answered *“God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in the time of trouble.”*
Psalm 46:1

Another woman said: *“In this world, you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33-35

Mr. Johns who was 80 years old stood up and said with as much strength as he could muster, *“and it came to pass is found in the Bible 85 times”*. The class began to laugh thinking that Brother John’s lack of memory was getting the best of him. When the laughing stopped, he said, *“at 30, I lost my job with six hungry mouths to feed. I didn’t know how I would make it. At 40, my oldest son was killed in the war. It knocked me down. At 50, my house burned to the ground. We lost everything. At 60, my wife of 40 years had cancer. It slowly ate away at her. We cried together many a night on our knees in prayer. At 65, she died. I still miss her.*

The agony and pain I went through in each of these situations was unbelievable. I wondered where God was. But each time I looked in the Bible I saw one of those 85 verses that said *‘And it came to pass.’* I felt that God was telling me that my pain and my circumstances were also going to pass and that He would get me through it.”

Whenever you are going through, instead of crying *“O Lord how long?”* – remember the 85 verses that state *“And it came to pass . . . ”*