**Perspective changed through prayer** 31/12/22 dkm

Read: Psalm 13, Ephesians 2

Text: Psalm 13

Psalms: 89:13-25, 13, 18:46-50, 117

What is your world view? What is your ideology? This is a valid question although not a question heard much nowadays. Some fifty years ago communism and capitalism were popular world views. There was also concern about poverty and development in poorer parts of the world. Some of my fellow graduates in agriculture took government or non-government jobs in Africa and Asia. I recall looking into a NSW government project on Hainan Island, part of China. But I joined a mission, along with quite a number of other Christians, to go and help poor people while sharing the gospel. Young Christians are still interested in helping the poor, but many are more interested in saving the planet than they are in saving souls. Students are still interested in high paying jobs and a comfortable lifestyle, but many seek a career in activism and saving the planet; ‘activist’ was not even a job title a few decades ago!

What is your world view? As a believer, your world view will of course, include God. You will know and worship God as the creator of this world and as your redeemer. Your hope in God will extend beyond this world of time and space, while understanding that God has put you in this world to walk in obedience to his word and worship him. When Paul and his colleagues preached the gospel of Jesus Christ in the city of Thessalonica they we accused of ‘turning the world upside down’ (Acts 17:6). They had a different world view to other people in this city. Paul reminds us that those without Christ are without hope and without God in this world (Eph 2:12).

Many are entering the New Year without hope; and looking around and listening to the news, they have little reason to hope. Very little of what we hear and see in the media is positive or uplifting. No wonder spending on mental health in our society is increasing year by year. This makes our task of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, the hope of the world, all the more urgent. If you have a world view that includes hope in almighty God, and confidence that this creator God sustains his creation and also reigns over the nations, you have a message, a wonderful message for this broken world.

‘What about this psalm we are looking at?’ you might be asking. It is quite a short psalm, which like most psalms is a prayer, a prayer of David. But what it lacks in words it does not lack in lessons for us today. Psalm 13 begins with a ‘cry of distress’, and goes on to ‘consider and hear me’, before closing with words of ‘confidence and praise’.

**1. Cry of distress**

In the first two verses of this psalm we find the question, ‘How long?’, no less than four times. They are words we are familiar with. I recently spent a few days in hospital recovering from an operation and by the end I was asking, ‘How much longer?’ On day five the doctor said I could go home but left me on a drip of some kind. At 9.30pm the drip finished, so I called Elizabeth and asked her to come and get me from the hospital at 10pm. Can you recall a, ‘How long, O Lord?’ prayer? Was it, ‘How long till I get to sleep?’ or ‘How long till morning?’ David’s ‘How long?’ prayer was directed at the Lord of course, but he also refers to himself, and to his enemies.

David does not tell us the details of his plight, apart from a mention of death and of his enemies prevailing over him. David was the greatest king of Israel, but he spent much of his life on the run from enemies, enemies from his own house. First it was years running from Saul, and later during his reign he fled from his son, Absalom. The Philistines and other nations were also his enemies. God’s people in Ukraine, as well as in Myanmar and other places, must be praying, ‘How long, O Lord?’ as they suffer oppression and violence from enemies. People around us are suffering oppression from bullies in school, in the work place, and even in families. Domestic violence is a scourge in our society. Children are praying, ‘How long, O Lord?’

David must have been crying to the Lord for some time when he prayed this prayer because he felt the Lord was not listening. He felt the Lord had turned his face away from him. He felt the Lord had forgotten him (13:1). It is easy to feel this way in the midst of suffering and crying to the Lord for help; an hour seems like a day and a day like a week! We can feel so sorry for ourselves that we lose perspective of time and of reality itself. We may even start to focus on our demise or death.

David’s next ‘How long?’ takes focus on himself: ‘How long must I wrestle with my thoughts?’ (13:2 NIV). In the psalms David often refers to inner turmoil, and even to tears, as he shares his suffering (e.g. Ps 16:6). In times of pain and suffering it can become difficult to think clearly and keep everything in perspective. We might get impatient with our carers and even with God. David was showing signs of impatience but he kept on crying to the Lord. If we give up crying to the Lord in prayer for whatever reason, we enter a dangerous place. More often than not however, it is in times of prosperity, not affliction, that people stop praying.

The last ‘How long?’ focusses on ‘my enemy’ exalting himself over me (13:2). David seems to be suffering a severe illness, or it may be his enemy closing in on him. He feared that if he died his enemy would rejoice. David was a servant of the Lord. He was man of prayer, as we see. Many would view his sickness as a result of sin, as they did the sickness and suffering of Job. The heathen would view his death as his God being powerless to save him. This is the narrow and distorted view of many. David was not afraid of death but he was afraid that his enemies, who were also God’s enemies, would seek to shame the name of the Lord.

**2. ‘Consider and hear me’**

David’s prayers were not all about himself; they were about his life in relationship to God and to the world, or more specifically, his enemies. David knew that he and the nation of Israel were God’s witness to the world. David wanted other nations to see that the God of Israel was not only all-powerful but also gracious and merciful. As he prayed he pleaded with the Lord to consider him, David, and his witness as a servant of the Lord. Sure, he pleaded that he not go down to the darkness of death, that he not ‘sleep the sleep of death’ (13:3). But as we just said, his plea was related to the glory of God in the midst of his enemies. We do not know just how his enemy was prevailing against him, but David did not want his fall or demise to be an occasion for rejoicing, rejoicing over David or his God.

In the last two verses we hear David expressing confidence that his prayer has been heard and answered. But do pause a moment and consider your prayers, and the perspective from which you pray. In our daily life we often lose the divine or heavenly perspective. We worry about family, about friends, about the future or even about the past. When we read the Bible, including psalms like this one, and when we pray to the Lord, our perspective on life changes. We get re-orientated to consider matters of death and eternity. Life and death are matters for everyone, but for David, and for you who trust in the Lord like David, your time of prayer will refresh and re-orientate your soul.

**3. Confidence and praise**

As David poured out his heart before the Lord he remembered the covenant the Lord had made with him. When the Lord anointed him king, ‘the Spirit of the Lord came upon David’ (1Sam 16:13). The people of Israel were God’s covenant people; through Moses, God made them his covenant people. God has made a covenant with us through the blood of Jesus Christ. We declare this truth every time we share the Lord’s Supper: ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you’ (Luke 22:20).

A child leaving home and going overseas tends to forget home; but a letter or phone call from mum or dad reminds them of home and of the love of their parents. As David prayed, he was reminded of the covenant love of the Lord; the Hebrew ‘*chesed*’ is translated ‘mercy’ in verse 5. In the midst of his prayer, David’s thoughts turned to the steadfast and unfailing love of the Lord. And what a blessing came over his soul! There is no indication that his circumstances changed, but his heart and his perspective upon his situation certainly changed. ‘My heart rejoices in your salvation’ (13:5). It was by God’s grace that he was saved, and nothing had changed with regard to his standing before God. It was God who made a covenant with him and nothing had changed with regard to that covenant.

I love hearing the word ‘but’ in the Bible because mostly it refers to the Lord answering a prayer or stepping into the life of one of his children to set things right- as only God can do! We see this in Ephesians 2 which begins, ‘Who were dead in trespasses and sins’, and then in verse 4, ‘But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)’; Paul sounds just like David, doesn’t he? It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

This is grace, the grace of God. This is the grace that David knew, and was reminded of, as he cried out to the Lord in prayer. ‘God opens our eyes to himself. Once again we get in touch with His mercy from the past and have assurance of his salvation for the future, bringing forth songs of praise’. So what about your prayer? Are you reminded of this wonderful grace when you read your Bible and pray? Do you pray in faith, saying with David, ‘But I trust in your unfailing love’ (13:5 NIV). In coming to God in prayer we must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him (Heb 11:6).

David’s changed perspective on his situation leads him to praise. Yes, even as he concluded this cry to the Lord to hear him and consider his desperate situation, David is praising the Lord and saying, ‘The Lord had dealt bountifully with me’ (13:6). ‘Bountiful’ has the sense of completeness, and of the Lord giving beyond what we can ask or even think. God does not give by halves; he gives bountifully, a ‘good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over’ (Luke 6:38). ‘Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, to all generations, for ever and ever, amen’ (Eph 3:20,21).