

How long will you forget me

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[0 : 0 0] I would like to turn back to two different passages this morning as we study God's Word and taking words from Ephesians chapter 2 in the chapter that we read together and in verse 8 where we have explained to us the gift of our salvation. In Ephesians 2 verse 8 we're told, for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. And there we have described for us God's gift of salvation and his gift which is a three and a full gift both of grace and of faith. And I would like to look this morning for a short time at faith and our own faith and the characteristics of faith. And I would like to do so by looking at a psalm again, Psalm 13 in the Old Testament and a paradigm there or a picture of faith that we can study and be encouraged by, I hope, for ourselves. Psalm 13.

We'll just read the psalm. It's a very brief psalm. 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 my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God. Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest mine enemies say I have prevailed against him, and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy. My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me. And it's always good for us to go back to scripture as our foundation and our base and the place from where we learn about our own grace that has been given to us and about our own spiritual character and about the faith that is a gift of God. And it is important to remind ourselves that we are Christians, and I know we know this, but that we are Christians not because of anything we have done, not because of anything that we have earned any favour that we have gained before God, but simply by his grace and because of his favour.

And we remind ourselves, and we remind our children that they become Christians by accepting Jesus Christ and his free gift. Tremendous to see so many young people and children in God's house today.

And can I stress to you the great gift of salvation? I know children love receiving gifts, and it's easy for us when we bring up our covenant children to possibly, without thinking, imbibe within them a sense that they're becoming Christians or becoming believers by coming to church and by reading the Bible and doing all these things, however important these things must be.

[3 : 21] But I remember speaking to someone recently who said that they had been brought up within the church and didn't realise for a long time that salvation was a free gift that they could accept. And not only that, but that they needed. And so I encourage the children today to remember and to accept Jesus Christ, faith in Jesus Christ and grace from Jesus as his free gift. It's very difficult for us to live our Christian lives often. We often live it in the shadow of other people, or in the shadow of our own understanding of what faith is. And often we make our Christian lives very difficult. We flay ourselves because we're not reaching even the standard that we think we should have reached as people of faith. We have a model of faith that is very unobtainable and we feel we never reach that model of faith. And sometimes maybe on a Saturday morning of a communion, or in preparation for a communion, we feel particularly our weakness and our emptiness and our lack of faithfulness, our lack of grace, and indeed simply our lack of faith. I am empty, I have nothing to bring. Should I be at God's table? Should I take my place with him and with his people at his table? And as we examine ourselves it can be a bitter and a difficult experience. And sometimes that can be the case because our model of faith isn't necessarily biblical. It is one that we have molded in our own minds. It is a clear and perfect and trouble-free faith. A faith that knows no difficulties and no problems. But as we look at God's word we find that the truth is often very different. And here in the psalm, Psalm 13, we have a model of faith that I hope is one that we can be both challenged by and encouraged by today as we consider our own faith and as we consider our standing before God.

Because in this psalm, the psalmist with his faith feels free to ask questions of God. It is neither sinful nor wrong to do so. And his faith is open enough and real enough and honest enough that he can come into God's presence and say, why? What is happening? How long will this go on? And his faith indeed is a faith that is an extremity here. Things aren't plain sailing for him. Things aren't easy.

He is in desperate stakes here. He feels spiritually abandoned. Lord, how long? There is a dangerously accusative tone in his words. How long, God, sovereign of the universe, will you abandon or forget me? Will it be forever? He feels that he isn't blessed. That as we saw the other night, God's face, God's presence was turned from him and the difficulty that went along with that. He was full of doubt. There was sorrow and spiritual darkness in his soul. He felt opposed by the world. Each way he turned, wherever he looked, he was opposed by his enemies. And not simply that, but they were exalted over him. It seemed they were victorious and things for him were very difficult. And so this is someone whose faith questioned God, was bold enough to question God, and yet was faith that was stretched to the very very, very stretched to the very limit. Four times in this small psalm. He says, how long, Lord? How long will it be like this? And he is questioning his experiences before God.

And the danger for us in our lives is when trouble strikes or when we have difficulties that challenge our faith that we clam up and that we walk away from God and we don't speak to him. And yet he asks us and he requires of us and he expects of us like a loving father that we present our requests and our questions to him. Lord, life is a battle. I'm struggling as a believer. I don't see much evidence of faith.

I'm not as I was. I'm not as I should be. I'm not as I would like to be. And there are all kinds of questions and problems and difficulties and trials that we have. The worst thing we can do is remain silent through them and say, God doesn't want to hear my faithlessness. He isn't interested in my doubts. He doesn't want to know my poor and poverty stricken thinking. Far from it. We are asked to take our questions to God.

[8 : 34] And you may say, well, this psalm is unusual. It's not typical. It's not typically biblical. It is not a model of faith that we see in the Bible. What about Joseph? What about Elijah when he was suicidal having seen the amazing victory of God against the prophets of Baal? What about Jeremiah?

Or Peter when he denied his saviour? Or Paul with his thorn? Or Timothy and his timidity? All the characters that we find in God's word have honesty marked throughout the revelation that we are given of them. We don't have these purple prose biographies of men and women of faith who simply rode on a white horse throughout their lives and defeated everything that came their way.

And I hope that we can empathise and sympathise with the psalmist and that we can say, well, I know. I know how he feels. I do feel at times, and I would never articulate it alone. I feel defeated. I feel weary. I feel opposed. I feel persecuted. I feel that my enemy, whether it's the flesh or the devil or the world, I feel that they are victorious over me all the time. Take these questions to God.

Take faith in its extremity to God. When it's stretched to the very limit, when we are considering walking away, take it to the living God and question him. Because that is exactly what the psalmist does in the psalm as we are exposed to his inner prayers and his secret thoughts.

He turns to God in verses 3 and 4. He comes and he turns to his God. Now, when you come away to do a communion weekend, it's very difficult if you're choosing sermons that you feel are right and you're prayed over them. But what invariably happens is you tend to take a same theme. Now, I don't know whether that's because you have sermons that you're more comfortable with or areas in your life that you feel more comfortable in sharing.

[11 : 08] But the theme has been clear in all the services that I've heard and both heard and preached, that there is this great need for us to turn to God in our own lives. And I'm sure congregationally, that is the case too, that, but in our own lives, that when we are living faith, this great gift of faith from God, that we are turning to him in our lives and turning to him in that private and personal and real prayer. In Hebrews 6, the writer says, without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

So we seek him, we come to him, we believe in him and we rest in him and we pray to him. The psalmist here says, despite his questions, despite his troubles, that he says, Oh Lord, my God. And there's a great testimony of personal relationship with the Lord here.

There is an affection here. My Lord, my God. In the same way that Christ on the cross, although he questions and he struggles in the darkness of the hour, is still able to say, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So that this link remains, this personal close link, even in darkness and even in extremity, he takes his feelings and his faith and his needs to God.

Where else can he turn? And in our lives, there must be that same urgency with which we will turn daily to the living God. My God, my Saviour, my Lord. That comes from having experienced his gift and his grace in salvation and his grace. Who else can you go to to deal with your bitter heart?

Who else can we go to to deal with our sins and our providences that are so difficult to cope with? Who else can answer them? Can we pray to anybody else? Of course not.

[13 : 23] And we are given strength as we come into his presence. Very often when people turn away from the Lord, as I think I said the other day, that they turn away from his house and they turn away from his people and they turn away from himself.

The place we must always be is in company with the Lord Jesus Christ. In personal prayer. And it was in pleading prayer. O Lord my God, lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.

Lighten mine eyes, Lord God, lest mine enemies say I have prevailed against him. Consider and hear me, he says. Look at me. Look towards me, he says.

You know, his troubles is that he feels God has turned his face. And so he wants God, God, turn back your face. Consider me. And the word that's used there is kind of the word that implies shine on me so that there is healing.

Whatever else is happening in my life, if I know that God is shining and turning towards me, then there's healing in that. Look at me. Simply heal me. Jesus Christ could do that. Could look on the person who needed healing and he would be healed.

[14 : 38] The favour, the blessing of God. God is the one who provides for our deep soul needs and we need his healing daily. Not on a one-off occasion when we came to the cross for the first time.

But on an ongoing daily basis, he asks us to come and seek forgiveness from him as a recognition of our dependence and of our need of him. Deep soul needs.

This is no perfunctory prayer. This is no prayer going through the motions. He's not simply bringing out from himself words that he knows he ought to pray.

These are deep-seated and passionate words from a soul who truly is in need and in contact with his God. Often our prayers, are they not, both private and public, tremendously neat and correct and right and orthodox, but passionless and devoid of need.

We go and rise from our knees and say, Well, what have I said? What have I done? What need have I exposed and expressed before my God?

[15 : 53] So there's great need in personal prayer. And he prays for healing and prays also for vindication. Lord God, he says, Consider me lest my enemy say I have prevailed against him.

So there's this great sense in which he is pleading God's promises for victory over the enemy. Now we know David was the king of Israel and he faced many physical enemies, many armies and many godless nations.

And he prayed for victory against them because he knew they were a challenge to God's promises and to God's justice. And we have the same promises that we can claim and we must claim in our prayer lives.

Promises for victory. Promises for deliverance. Promises that we will not drown. That we will not be in the darkness. That we will not be lost. And we pray them and pray them before God's name with boldness saying, God, you have promised.

Do not let Satan and his emissaries gloat over me and over God's church and over God's people. And we have this responsibility to know his promises so that we complete them.

[17 : 06] Why often are we repetitive in our prayers and wonder what to pray for? Because we don't know his promises. His promises are the feeding and the ammunition and all that we have for our prayers because they enable us to plead what God himself wants us to pray before his throne.

And we pray for victory. And we pray for our faith to grow and for our strength to be built up. So faith in this psalm is faith that is not afraid of asking questions of God.

But it's faith which turns to God. And as believers, we must be people who turn to God. But it's also faith which has experienced God.

And if we're looking at faith in our own lives, then surely this is a key foundational pillar in our experience. That he has experienced God. He says in verse 5, I have trusted in thy mercy.

My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. See, there's a progression in this psalm. If you look through many of the psalms which are prayers, you'll find this progression. And as I look at our own prayers, we may also find the same progression.

- [18 : 30] That there begins with great darkness and great wrestling and great trouble. And as the psalmist or the praying person comes into God's presence, things begin to unravel.
- Things begin to become clear. And they begin and we begin to see things from God's perspective. That is why prayer is so central. Because it takes us where we can see things from God's perspective.
- And end up rejoicing in him and with him. So this faith has experienced God in the past. And he remembers that as he comes into prayer.
- Prayer is a great thing for spurring our memory. The other day I was praying about being on holiday in Glenelg. And my father taking me for a walk across the hills. Well, the few times that now sadly I'm able to get back to Glenelg, immediately as you drive over the Bialych and come down in towards the Glen, the memories flood back of times that I was there.
- And the people that we saw and things that were done. Being there brings back memories and experiences that we'd had in the past. And even coming up here to Stornoway or moving to Edinburgh to St. Columbus and you're in the church there or you're meeting with people here you haven't seen for a long time.
- [19 : 51] Memories come back. Experiences come into our minds of things that have happened. And as we come into God's presence, we remember our experiences of him.
- Our memory is triggered and we give thanks to him for what he has done. There's progression here and there is an ongoing development.
- He trusts and has trusted the psalmist in God's covenant love. I have trusted in your mercy, in your covenant love, in your promises of grace, in your hope in the past.
- I have done that. I have been there and that is where my foundation lies. And as we come into God's presence as people of faith, we can say as we look back, yes, I, I have trusted in his covenant love.
- I have come to Christ. I have been at the cross. That place where there's the bond in blood sovereignly administered. I know his everlasting love.
- [20 : 53] I recognize my name in the palm of his hands. I have experienced his forgiveness. And as we come into his presence, we can know that experience.
- That is what faith is about. That is why he gives us the table. Do this in remembrance of me. And that is the tremendously significant part of our experience.
- It is remembering what God has done. There are two different ways of remembering. Isaiah 43 and Isaiah 46. They contradict each other entirely. In Isaiah 43, the prophet says, Do not remember the former things, for I will do a new thing.
- And in Isaiah 46, he says, Remember the former things. Two entirely different challenges that are presented. But that is because there's two different ways of remembering.
- In Isaiah 43, he's saying to the people, Don't rely simply on old experiences. Don't simply rely on what has happened in the past, because there's nothing happening now. Because he says, I will do a new thing every day in your experience.
- [21 : 59] But in Isaiah 46, he's saying, Remember the former things, because you're forgetting where your foundations are. You're forgetting who I am. My covenant, my promises, my experiences.
- Or your experiences of me in the past. There's no good leaning simply on something that's happened in the past, because there's nothing happening now. Difference in the world to leaning on something which strengthens us for continual service and faithfulness now.

Remember, do this in remembrance of me, he says. And there's time when we feel abandoned and lonely as Christians. And it can only be as we go back to the cross, we remember, He has given me His Son.

My word, He can't give any more. He has expressed and shown the depth of His love. He can't show or give or express any more commitment to me.

He has given me His beloved Son. What more is there? And so we remember and we rejoice in what we have experienced of His mercy.

[23 : 13] But along with that, remembering there is a future aspect of expectation. My heart, the second half of verse 5 says, shall rejoice in thy salvation.

And that's very similar to the promises of the, that the Lord or the commands that the Lord gives with regard to the Lord's table. Remember, do this in remembrance of me until I come.

because there's this great future expectation. We have received, we have been given, we belong, but we are going somewhere.

We're in a road. We have a home to expect and we look forward and rejoice in the future salvation that is yet to be ours. The fullness of the salvation. When the trees clap their hands with us and when we rejoice in the freedom of creation and we are free and full forever.

See, that is the hope that takes us through the dark times. Do you see the difference between someone who despairs in their experiences because they have no hope and somebody who has the hope of Jesus Christ?

[24 : 18] You will know that from your experience and from the experience of those who have gone through deep trials. We have a deliverance that is yet future. David says, my heart shall, will rejoice.

Maybe I can't rejoice very clearly now because I can't see. But I shall rejoice in your salvation. And for us, our darkness and our difficulties and our self-examination that sometimes leave us thinking, wow, where is that faith?

He's able to rely on the Lord God and look forward to his own purposes where he's molding us and drawing us in, deepening our experience to bring us to himself.

And lastly, and in conclusion, we see in this psalm that faith isn't something only that asks questions of God and turns to God, nor is it something that experiences God alone.

but faith is something that fashions praise to God and that expresses praise with some of these characteristics and elements of praise.

[25 : 30] Verse 6, I will sing unto the Lord because he hath dealt bountifully with me. You see, the progression in the psalm has already come to its fullness before he ends.

He says in verse 5, I will rejoice in your salvation. In verse 6, he is rejoicing. He is singing. And he says, God has dealt bountifully to me. What a change from the beginning of the psalm where he says, you've forgotten me.

You've turned your back on me. I'll never see your face again. And by dint of a few verses, as he comes and pours himself out before God, he is able to praise God.

There's joy and depth as he is in God's presence. It's a wonderful reality that he is able to praise because his praise has been fashioned and molded by his experiences and his troubles as faith is being tested and tried.

It's a faith that, to put it crudely, it's a faith that sweats out praise. Comes from wrestling with God, from spiritual endeavor, spiritual perspiration, spiritual work in his presence.

[26 : 45] It's gold praise. Gold that is wrought from the rock. It's not cheap praise. It's tried and tested praise. Praise from the heart.

That is why praise is such a significant part of our faith experience and why it should matter so much to us that when we come to God's house, we are expressing what is from our hearts.

It's not a mouth thing. It's not a verbal thing, primarily. It's not a musical thing. It is a soul expression where we are able, both in our praise and in our lives, to express that God is good and God is faithful and God is bountiful in our lives.

That confounds the world. It means that when you gather in worship, you're confounding the whole philosophy of the world outside, which says you can only be happy and praise and rejoice when things are going swimmingly and well, when you have money and possessions and you're healthy and things are good, God says, no, no, no.

He says, your praise comes from something far greater and far deeper. It's not just what's enabled the apostles to praise God having been beaten up and near death in prison for their saviour.

[28 : 12] It is real praise from real experience, heartfelt, deep-seated experience. It's not entertainment praise. It's not praise simply because, well, it's moving and it must be good.

It's not just emotional praise. It's praise. It's not praise just because it's fun or uplifting. It's praise because it's tried and tested.

Praise from a broken heart. Where have, in my own Christian experience, some of the most moving and powerful expressions of, say, for example, Sam singing, have been in the most extreme circumstances of sadness.

the death of a young person, funeral of a young person where there were many people who were believers. Faith that can't be explained and praise that can't be explained but simply is deep and genuine, made deep, fashioned deep in the soul.

we look for that and we strive for that in our worship so that when people and visitors come into your congregation, come into my congregation, they don't necessarily say, oh my goodness, how musical or how lovely is the singing but they'll say, how real.

[29 : 35] My word, how real is the praise and the worship and the experience of the people here. they know their God, they are speaking to him, they have faith in him and there is participation at that level.

We look for in our worship that we come experiencing him, knowing him, not asking whether the next person is prepared and knows and experiences him but am I in his presence ready?

We have this glorious picture of faith, this wonderful, tremendous structure that is given to us here of the person of faith and these are characteristics that I hope if you're maybe a bit downcast today or feeling empty spiritually you can honestly look and say, well yes, that gift is in me.

God gives me that desire to be in his presence. I want to be here. I look back and I have experienced him and I expect him to work again and even this day I expect him to work.

I can say in this prayer that I have wrestled through doubt and darkness and have been able to end in praise and in glory.

[30 : 55] Keep our Christian experiences on a short leash, the short leash of a prayer and go through the whole gambit of experience there and then and know and experience and enjoy the pleasure and the privilege of returning into his presence.

Faith is God's gift and faith is something that must enable us to praise. We must be a praising people both in our public worship and in our lives and I hope and pray that tomorrow will be a day of great praise, great thanksgiving where we consider our past experiences of God and look forward expectation to many more blessed experiences and that you will pray that many people would receive the gift of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ tomorrow as we worship that honour and glory will be given to him.

Faith is his gift. Young people and old people alike, I encourage you if you're not yet Christians to accept his free gift full and complete and absolute as it is.

It's a gift and it's the most glorious gift that will ever be presented to you and he provides all that we need through his spirit to maintain and develop and to see that gift grow and may it be if there are those who having heard these words and examined their own heart and seen well yes God indeed is my Lord and my Saviour and you haven't yet professed that may you do so in his strength because it's his gift relying on his provision to take you through tomorrow and every day that he by his gift and by his grace bestows on you.

Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.