

3-15-26

Pastor Bill King

Psalm 13

Cliffhanger

Sometimes we have questions that serve to uncover other questions. In other words, the questions we pose are sometimes superficial to the questions we want to ask, but we may not even realize it.

It's not that the ones we initially verbalize are off base, it's just that when we ask them, we soon discover other questions that when answered, may help us get closer to the heart of the matter, sort of like peeling back the layers of an onion.

Counselors are good at asking questions. Their job is to peel back the layers so that they can get a good view of what's really troubling the heart. When the cause of a person's angst is finally identified and acknowledged, life-long and permanent healing can begin.

Psalm 13 begins with David asking God four straight – from – the – hip questions. He asked them in rapid succession ~~not~~^{hardly} even giving God a chance to respond. This scene reminds me of my kids anytime I enter the house, even before I've had a chance to take off my coat:

Where have you been?

Did you get me anything?

Guess what I did today?

Want to play with me?

Granted, these questions aren't as heart-wrenching or thought-provoking as David's, but I assure you, they're asked with the same urgency, anticipating a ready answer.

And what's really interesting about their questions is that I can boil them all down to one thing - to one main category: What they really want to know is if their father loves them. ~~We~~ ^{we} may've ~~only~~ ^{gone} been ~~gone~~ ^{separated} for a few hours, but they want to know ...

Did you think of me?

Did you miss me?

Do you care about my accomplishments today?

Are you proud of me?

And now that you're home, will you spend time with me?

This is a case when our actions speak louder than words.

I think we can boil down David's four questions to God into one question as well, and it's pretty much the same questions my kids asked of me: Do you still care for me and love me?

It's the question underneath all the other questions. God, do you still love me? It's the question David desperately needs answering. It's a question each one of us wants answered. And if it isn't? Well, David describes the inevitable outcome in verse 3: *"Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death."*

The Bible says out loud what has crossed all of our minds: When we don't experience love or our love has gone unrequited, or our expectation for love has never been fulfilled, we do sometimes feel like we want to die.

Maybe not at first, but if rejection happens over and over again, and we feel like we're a failure at receiving and giving what is probably considered the strongest of all human emotions, then yes, we may feel like dying.

So when David seems to question God's insensitivity toward David's timetable by asking "how long" with every question, I'm pretty sure David's not so much interested in the "when" as he is the "why."

Why God are you putting me through all this pain?

How come I can't catch a break??

Why won't my mind shut off?

All I can think about is how my world is crashing in around me.

Don't you love me anymore?

Don't you care that my enemy is getting the best of me every day?

If you love me, why are you allowing these things to happen to me?

I think we've all been here, where David finds himself in Psalm 13, asking the question, "Do you still love me?"

For me, it was in 1990. I had just proposed to a young lady, and I felt confident that she was going to say yes. We had been dating through most of our college days. But in a surprising turn of events – she rejected my offer of marriage.

Needless to say, it put me into a complete tailspin. I went from dreaming about and planning our lives together to wondering how I was ever going to make it through another 8 hour shift at the factory. My world, as I knew it, had come crumbling down.

And I was asking God questions every day – not unlike the questions David asked God in Psalm 13.

Psalm 13 is actually a very short Psalm. It's comprised of only six verses, and takes but a few seconds to read it. But its message is powerful and eternal. I think we can summarize it like this – at least the first four verses:

Do you love me God?

I believe you do, because if I didn't believe it, I wouldn't bother asking you.

So here I am asking. And I'm asking because I'm really not feeling it right now. I'm not sensing the light of your face, the warmth of your smile. All I'm feeling is brokenness, defeat, failure, aloneness.

I dread waking up in the morning and trying to go to sleep at night because all I'm left with are these thoughts swirling around in my head reminding me that I'm in a place I don't want to be.

So answer me, God. Give me a sign that you still care, and that everything's going to work out.

Hurry! All looks lost.

Remember the movie Survivor with Tom Hanks who plays the FEDEX man who spends a couple of years on the deserted island talking to a volleyball? What changed his perspective? What was the turning point for him? Wasn't it when that plastic hinged panel washed ashore and he thought to himself, here's my sail, here's my salvation?

So I guess the big question for us this morning is how do we switch gears” How do we go from verse 4 to verse 5? Verse 4 is all about doom and gloom. My enemy is standing over me with a big smirk on his face reveling in my defeat. And in verse 5 David proclaims his undying faith in the Lord. He has hope again. He envisions God coming to his rescue.

But how did he make what seems like this quantum leap – from despair to hope? How did he transition from *“I will sleep in death”* to *“my heart rejoices in your salvation.”*?

From the movies, we all know how this transpires. Our hero is down and out, bruised and beaten so badly that he can neither walk nor see straight. But then, in his mind, he catches a vision of someone he cares deeply about and it causes him to muster the strength he didn’t even know he had. He rises from the ashes like a phoenix and dispenses his enemy in a way that would make even Rocky proud. And as the credits roll down the screen, my daughters would be quick to say, “That was so cliché.” And they’d be right.

I don’t want Psalm 13 to be a cliché for us. I want it to be as realistic as the page it is written on. Verses 5 and 6 say, *“But I will trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.”*

I want these verses to be as true for you and me as they were to David in the midst of his season of despair, because some day we will feel like we’re in the pit of despair if we haven’t already and we’re going to need a rope to pull us up to safety, and Psalm 13 is that rescue rope!

These words of David helped David, and so they can help us. Not that the words are some magic formula, and all you have to do is repeat them like saying seven Hail Mary's. Hardly! It's not the words, but it's the reality behind the words that can save us.

The meaning of these words are the foundation of the Christian life that once woven together into our lives, become our strong rope that can pull us to safety in our times of crises! Look at them, read them, remember them!

"But I will trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me."

"But I will trust in your unfailing love": In other words, cast your eyes above and beyond your current circumstances and crisis and see Him who offers a love that can never fail us, no matter what's facing us.

But you protest: That's what David did and he saw neither hide nor hair of God! True, but he saw a shadow. And as my good friend's painting is entitled, "You can't have a shadow without light."

David saw the shadows and that was enough for him to believe in the light. We live in the shadow of the cross. We do not see God, but as Peter put it in his letter, *"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."* but we see the results of his love.

I praise God that we live in the shadow of the cross. It reminds us daily of what John wrote at the beginning of Gospel when he described the Son of God: *"In him was life and that life was the light of men – the true light that gives light to every man."*

Many who reject Christianity are quick to question Christianity's central symbol, the cross. They wonder why a world religion would ever adopt such a gruesome instrument of torture and death as their trademark.

It's actually not a bad question, and it deserves a well-thought out answer: My response is that the cross represents how far God was willing to go to love each and every one of us. His son Jesus was willing to go to his death which becomes all the more amazing when we understand that death is only reserved for sinners.

"The wages of sin is death", the Bible teaches, *"but the gift of God is eternal life."* God can offer us eternal life because his Son who didn't deserve to die did it anyway for us so that we could have eternal life! This is why Christianity holds up the cross as a beacon of hope and light to the world. It's the perfect and poignant reminder of God's sacrificial love for the world.

"My heart rejoices in your salvation." When a Hebrew writes about the heart, he is talking about the part of him that controls all of him. In other words, all of me rejoices because all of me has been saved. Our faith is not to be compartmentalized. When God saves us, it affects every aspect of who we are and what we do. God didn't save us so that we could live for him on Sundays for an hour before kickoff of the football game.

God saved our business selves, our married selves, our parent selves and child-like selves, our weak selves and our strong selves, our weekly selves and our weekend selves. Our grumpy and fearful selves, our confident and invincible selves, our practical and day-dreamy selves. Every fiber of who we are now given over to God's salvation when we finally believe in his perfect rescue plan.

When all the logs had been lashed together and the wind has finally shifted directions, and Hanks was finally able to clear the giant breakers that guarded the shores of his island, there was no turning back. And it's the same for us. Once we've hitched ourselves to God's redeeming love, there's no turning back. He wants every part of us going in his direction.

And what will keep us afloat? David tells us: *"And I will sing to the Lord for he has been good to me."*

It will be our past experiences with the Lord when He showed up when we needed him most.

We will recall God's goodness to us even in the midst of our terrible struggles. We will remember the times when we struggled to just get out of bed because we feared for what the day ahead offered, but God gave us the strength to do so.

We will remember the times that we dreaded being alone because we knew our minds would race to places that would only bring us more sorrow, and yet God spared us the worst of it, by providing a subtle distraction, an opportunity to serve rather than sulk, a moment of beauty that reminded us that God's still there.

We'll remember times when we were surprised to learn that we hadn't spent all day focused on our problems, but that God had given us reprieve and some time to be human again, to feel normal again - to enjoy life again. We'll remember these times and say with David, *"He has been good to me."*

We'll remember, and then a song will slowly but surely rise from our hearts – a song of praise that will address our deepest question: Yes, God does love me, and I love him.

Prayer of Saint Patrick

I establish myself today in:

The power of God to guide me,
The might of God to uphold me,
The wisdom of God to teach me,
The eye of God to watch over me,
The ear of God to hear me,
The word of God to speak to me,
The hand of God to protect me,
The way of God to lie before me,
The shield of God to shelter me,
The hosts of God to defend me,
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ at my right, Christ at my left,
Christ in breadth, Christ in length,
Christ in height, Christ in the heart
of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man
who speaks to me,
Christ in the ear of every man
who hears me.

Confident in Christ.