

PSALM 6

INTRODUCTION

I was brought up in Sunday school in N. Ireland, singing songs like I am H A P P Y. and Climb Climb up Sunshine Mountain. The only problem was that many Sunday's I was not HAPPY, and my face was not aglow. I was there because I was made to be there by my Parents; if it were left to me I would have been somewhere else. Therefore I wasn't going to be Happy for anyone. But of course I was not a Christian then. Can I say now that I am HAPPY? Well sometimes, but at other times that is not the case. There are many occasions when my face is not aglow with the burdens and concerns of life.

It's at these times when this Psalm is particularly helpful. This is the first of seven penitential Psalms, or misery Psalms as they have also been called. The other six are Psalm 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 147. They are basically Psalms of repentance. They are Psalms of burdened people; they are cries for help from frail and weak sinful human beings.

It is important that we think about these Psalms for we live in a day when society is geared towards feeling good about oneself, having a good self esteem is very important in today's world. In fact showing weakness is looked upon as bad, and there must be something wrong if you let your troubles get to you. Let me tell you that the David in this Psalm is not feeling good about himself, and he is not afraid to admit he is weak, fragile or in deep pain and sorrow (vs. 2-4 & 6-7).

You see the Psalms are true to all of life's experiences. The Psalms are big enough for all of life. Sometimes our Christianity may not be big enough, for example when we think or teach that Christians should always be joyful and never miserable. Such teaching is not true to life, and our own Christianity is not big enough for life itself. But the Psalms cover every experience of human life, and as we look through this Psalm David is not HAPPY or his face is not all aglow.

In fact sorrow from time to time is actually a sign of being a Christian. For a true understanding of sin leads to true sorrow which brings repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). When you are a Christian you are not perfect, you are still a sinner, but the difference is that you are more sensitive to sin and its consequences. Before you were a Christian you were not bothered about your sin, you never really felt genuine sorrow for it. But now as a Christian you know what sin does, you know how God views it and you know how it affects our relationship with God. Therefore you ought to be sorrowful over your continual sin.

1. THE CONDITION DAVID FACES (vs. 2-7)

"I am faint" David feels really weak at this time. His bones are in agony. Bones in Hebrew stand for a man's whole body and probably refer to some sickness he was facing. My soul is in anguish. He is being tormented within his inner being, possibly he is suffering from Physical illness and mental depression, for soul often carries the idea of mind in the Old Testament.

On top of this he feels as if the Lord has left Him and deserted Him (turn = return v 4), and fears that death will come upon him soon (v 5). He is exhausted, he cannot stop sobbing, and his eyes are failing through crying (vs. 6-7)

But why does the Psalmist feel like this? Well his enemies are certainly giving him a tough time (v 7) and for some reason he feels that God has left him, possible because of his own sin (v 1). He knows that He is facing the disciplining hand of God (v 1).

The first main lesson that we need to learn is that Christians are not immune from life's troubles.

God does not shelter or protect us from the bad things that happen to people. I think of a lady, a Christian who lost her teenage son in a swimming accident. I think of another young man in his 20's a keen Christian with keen Christian parents who was gunned down by the IRA in Belfast. I think of a young Mum who was a Christian and suffered from mental illness and ended up killing her own baby. Just think of the mental anguish she must be going through.

We have to be real this evening if you are a Christian you will not escape the pain of living in this world. If you are not a Christian but want to become one then remember you will not escape the agonies of living in this world. What as Christians we can understand is that God is working out all our circumstances good and bad for our own ultimate good (Romans 8:28).

When bad things happen to us or when we feel that God has departed from us, we must understand during such times something of the disciplining hand of God. God's discipline might come upon us because of our sin, or it might simply come upon us because of His love. When we feel like the Psalmist, a question that surely comes into our mind is; Is God finished with us, has He cast us aside. At such times it's so easy to lose our Christian joy and even assurance.

At such times we must remember the teaching of Hebrews 12:5-13. The Psalmist was asking God how long it would be before He acted to change things (v 3). Often that is our cry isn't it? How long before this physical pain is removed? How long before my circumstances change for the better. How long before you convert that family member? How long before my wayward son or daughter returns. Well the Psalmist understood something of God's purposes in discipline (v 1). It's not that he doesn't want to face the disciplining hand of God it's just he fears that if God does it out of wrath, then He might be done for. But Hebrew 12 brings us the balance concerning God's discipline.

You see God doesn't want us to be like spoilt children, He knows that we need the restraining arm of God's discipline. This discipline is always done out of love (Hebrews. 12:6). That doesn't mean that there is no wrath in discipline. God is wrathful with our sin and disciplines us, but his discipline is always full of love. So discipline has both anger and love. God doesn't discipline us because He enjoys watching us suffer He does it for our own good (Hebrews. 12:10-11). Discipline is actually a mark that you belong to God (Hebrews. 12:7-8).

It is so easy to have a false view of God's love, thinking that only joyful things come from a God of love. The truth is that bad things come from a God of love, for in a strange way those bad things are good for us. The Psalmist needed to learn that and we too need to learn that.

2. GOD'S DISCIPLINE DRIVES THE PSALMIST TO PRAYER

Obviously the Psalm is a prayer. The Psalm arose out of the Psalmist situation, when the chips are down, when you have to face your foes, when you think God has departed from you, then that must drive us to prayer. In fact sometimes the very purpose of God's hand of discipline is to drive us to our knees. God will do almost anything to get us to pray. Go on be honest, when have been the times in your Christian life that you have felt the desperate need for prayer. Prayer that involves passion, weeping and a pouring out of one's heart to God. In my life it has mainly been when I'm desperate, in great need, at my wit's end. When I feel totally powerless to change the situation. Well certainly in the Psalmist case his situation drove him to prayer. But notice three things about his prayer

a) It's Honest (vs. 1-7) - He speaks from the heart, he is not trying to impress God, He admits he is weak, He doesn't say that He shouldn't be disciplined, he cries out for healing, he says his soul is in anguish. He appeals to God's unfailing love (v 4). It is a very honest prayer. How much of our praying is honest. So often we pray in our evangelical language, we say what we think we should say the sort of thing that you would expect a Christian to say. But very often we are not as honest

as we should be in our praying. And remember the only praying that God hears is prayers that come from the heart, prayers that are honest. The Psalmist reasons with God (v 4), he tells God exactly what is on his heart. Don't be afraid of speaking honestly to God, tell him how you feel, reason with him, and plead for mercy.

b) It's Patient (v 3) - This prayer is not answered immediately. How long is this going to last (v 3). Day after day the Psalmist waits for his situation to change. This was the watchword of John Calvin in his final illness, he never once complained to God, but he did raise his eyes to heaven and ask how long O Lord How long.

The Nat West Bank had a slogan once which said Access takes the waiting out of wanting. But when it comes to praying, access to God does not necessary take the waiting out of wanting. We may know that He has heard our prayer, we may even know in our hearts that He is going to answer, but God doesn't always take the waiting out of wanting. Some times He makes us wait and wait and wait. At such times all we can ask is how long O Lord, how long.

c) It brings new hope and confidence (vs. 7-8) - The noticeable thing about this Psalm is the contrast between verses 1-7 and 8-10. In these last few verses The Psalmist now has found confidence to declare that the Lord has heard his weeping, his prayer has been accepted, God will act to change his situation and to answer his prayer. You can only find this sort confidence in daily praying to God. When you are feeling like the Psalmist and at first when you pray you feel no different then continue to come before the Lord daily in prayer, and you will find a renewed confidence to face our enemies. You will eventually have an assurance that God hears your prayer.

A good time of prayer gives you confidence in prayer (v 9). A good time of prayer ought to be like a good holiday. A good holiday means that you long to get back to work. A good time of prayer means that you long to pray. The only people, who have confidence in prayer, are those who pray. People who have no confidence in prayer, simply do not pray

So as I conclude, let's remember that life is not a bed of roses, for some of us and indeed for all of us at some time in our life, we will know something of trying circumstances. We may even get as low as this Psalmist. At such times we must remember the disciplining hand of God. We must return to our knees, and honestly lay our thoughts before God. We must be patient in praying and we will know the confidence and hope that praying to our God brings.

Amen