When Life Is Hard, Lift Your Eyes
Psalm 13

Thanksgiving is one of those times of the year when we're encouraged to stop and count our blessings. We gather with family and friends, share a meal, reflect on the good things in our lives, and give thanks.

And we should.

But what happens when life isn't going the way we hoped?

What happens when you're facing a difficult diagnosis, grieving the loss of someone you love, struggling financially, or carrying a burden that doesn't seem to go away?

What happens when your prayers haven't been answered, your circumstances haven't changed, and you're not particularly feeling thankful?

It's relatively easy to give thanks when life is going well.

But how do we cultivate a thankful heart when we're discouraged, disappointed, or overwhelmed by sorrow?

Our text this morning might seem like an unusual place to turn for a Thanksgiving message.

Psalm 13 doesn't begin with thanksgiving. It begins with lament. David is hurting, discouraged, and wrestling with circumstances that have left him feeling forgotten and overwhelmed.

He brings this sorrow honestly before God.

But something happens as we move through this short psalm.

By the final two verses, David is expressing trust, rejoicing in God's salvation, and singing His praises.

What happened?

His circumstances hadn't necessarily changed, but David's perspective had.

He moves from lament to trust, and from trust to praise.

As Mark Vroegop explains in *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, lament is more than simply venting our frustrations. It is an expression of sorrow that brings our pain before God and leads us toward renewed praise.

Sometimes Christians have been given the impression that acknowledging sorrow is somehow a failure of faith. There are even false teachings today that suggest if we have enough faith, we should never speak negatively about our circumstances or acknowledge our pain.

But that's not what we find in Scripture.

The Bible gives us permission to grieve. It gives us language for sorrow. It teaches us to bring our questions and disappointments before the Lord.

But sorrow doesn't have to have the final word.

And that's what I want us to see in this psalm. As we follow its progression, we'll see how David moves from groaning to gratitude—from rehearsing his problems to remembering God's faithfulness and ultimately rejoicing in His salvation.

Main Idea: We can give thanks even in difficult seasons when we bring our pain to God, ask Him to renew our perspective, and choose to trust His steadfast love.

There are three key movements in this progression.

1. Bring Your Pain Honestly Before God

David begins by bringing his pain honestly before God. He starts with a question that many of us have probably asked at one time or another:

“How long, O LORD?”

Have you ever prayed that prayer?

How long will this sickness continue? How long will I struggle with this relationship? How long will I have to carry this burden? How long before things change? How long before I see an answer to my prayers?

David isn’t asking this question casually. He’s expressing deep distress.

“Will you forget me forever?”

Of course, David knows that God hasn't literally forgotten him. But he feels abandoned, as though God has hidden His face from him.

He continues:

“How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?”

In other words, David is emotionally exhausted, wrestling internally with his sorrow and struggling to find relief.

And then he says:

“How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

Whatever the specific circumstances, David feels overwhelmed by opposition. He sees no immediate relief, and he wonders how much longer he can endure.

I want you to notice something important.

David doesn't hide any of this from God.

He doesn't clean up his emotions before coming into God's presence or pretend to be stronger than he is. He comes without putting on a spiritual performance.

He comes honestly.

And that's one of the great lessons of biblical lament: **God invites us to bring our pain to Him, not hide it from Him.**

Sometimes we think that being a Christian means we always have to be upbeat, positive, and encouraging. We feel pressure to tell everyone that everything is wonderful, even when we're struggling.

But that's not biblical Christianity.

The Psalms are filled with honest expressions of sorrow and questions directed toward God.

God doesn't tell us to pretend we aren't hurting. He invites us to pour out our hearts before Him.

Now, there's an important distinction here.

Biblical lament is not the same as complaining that refuses to trust God. It isn't rehearsing our problems until our problems become the only thing we can see.

Lament brings our sorrow into the presence of God. It turns toward Him even when we don't understand Him.

There's a difference between simply venting our frustrations and bringing our pain to the Lord in faith.

One keeps us circling around our circumstances. The other brings our circumstances before the God who is greater than them.

And sometimes the most faithful prayer we can pray is simply, "Lord, I don't understand. I'm hurting. I don't know how much longer I can carry this. But I'm bringing it to You."

Maybe you're carrying a burden that others don't know about, or facing a situation you cannot control. Perhaps life hasn't turned out the way you expected.

Don't pretend it doesn't hurt.

Bring it to God.

And don't measure God's love for you by how quickly He changes your circumstances.

Sometimes God changes our circumstances. Other times, He gives us the strength to endure them and teaches us to trust Him while we wait.

But in every season, He invites us to come to Him.

That's where David begins. But thankfully, that's not where he ends.

2. Ask God to Light Up Your Eyes

David asked God to light up his eyes. After expressing his sorrow, David turns his attention toward God and prays:

“Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

The phrase “light up my eyes” is an ancient Hebrew expression associated with the restoration of vitality, strength, and life. David is asking God to revive him, restore his strength, and preserve his life. He’s desperate for God’s intervention.

But there’s also an important spiritual principle we can draw from this prayer. When sorrow overwhelms us, we need God not only to sustain us physically, but also to renew our perspective and help us see beyond the circumstances consuming our attention.

The Apostle Paul understood this. In Ephesians 1:18, he prays that God would enlighten the eyes of believers’ hearts so they might know the hope to which He has called them and the riches of His glorious inheritance.

Paul understood that we need more than physical sight. We need spiritual eyes to see the realities of what God has done for us and the hope we have in Him.

Have you ever noticed how discouragement can affect your perspective? You become so focused on what's wrong and what you wish were different that you overlook the goodness of God that is still present in your life.

This brings me to a thought from James Bell that I found particularly helpful:

“What if the life you’re waiting to enjoy is the life you’re already living?

We spend years waiting for things to settle down. Waiting for more money, better health, fewer problems, or some point when life finally feels the way we hoped it would.

Then the day comes when we would give anything to have another dinner around the table, another evening with the kids, or another ordinary day from the years we couldn't wait to get through.

Psalm 13 reminds us that we can spend our lives waiting for things to change or learn to recognize God's goodness in the middle of them.

There will always be something we wish were different. We can spend our whole lives focused on those things and miss much of what God has already given us.

Some of the days we're trying to get through will be the days we wish we could have back."

Think about that.

How much of life do we spend waiting for something better? We tell ourselves we'll be happier when we have more money, better health, fewer problems, or when life finally settles down.

And in the process, we can miss the blessings of the season we're living in right now.

We can take for granted the people God has placed in our lives and the countless ways He provides for us.

How many of you know, sometimes the very things we take for granted are the things someone else is praying for.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't pray for change or ask God to meet our needs. But we must be careful not to postpone gratitude until life becomes what we want it to be.

What if the life you're waiting to enjoy is the life you're already living?

That's a question worth taking seriously this Thanksgiving.

David needed to look beyond the circumstances consuming his attention and remember the God whose steadfast love sustained him.

And we need to do the same.

As we commune with God, we taste and see His goodness. In His presence, our perspective is renewed and our confidence in His faithfulness grows.

We cannot expect to see clearly if we don’t look to the Lord.

That doesn't mean every problem suddenly disappears or that we'll always understand what God is doing. But we don't have to understand everything to trust the One who holds everything.

We need Him to light up our eyes.

3. Choose to Trust and Praise Him

Now we come to the remarkable conclusion of this psalm. David chose to trust and Praise the Lord.

After all the questions, all the sorrow, and all the expressions of distress, David writes:

“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

What a change!

He begins with “How long?” and ends with “I will sing.”

He begins feeling forgotten and ends remembering God’s steadfast love.

He begins overwhelmed by sorrow and ends rejoicing in God's salvation.

What happened?

David remembered who God was.

Notice the words he uses:

"I have trusted in your steadfast love."

David's confidence isn't ultimately in his circumstances. It's in God's character.

The Hebrew word translated "steadfast love" speaks of God's covenant love, His faithful, enduring commitment to His people.

David may not know when his circumstances will change, but he knows the character of the God to whom he belongs.

Then he says:

"My heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

Notice where his joy is anchored.

It's not simply in what God might do to improve his situation. It's in God's salvation.

And finally:

"I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

David is remembering God's past faithfulness. He's looking back at how God has cared for him, sustained him, and shown Himself faithful.

His circumstances may not have changed, but he has remembered something more important: God has not changed.

This is the foundation of biblical thanksgiving.

We don't give thanks because everything in our lives is good. We give thanks because God is good.

And that distinction matters.

The Bible never tells us that Christians will be free from sorrow.

Paul understood this.

In 2 Corinthians 6:10, he describes himself as:

"…sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

I love that expression because it holds two realities together.

Paul was sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

He doesn't say he was never sorrowful. He doesn't deny the hardships he experienced.
He endured tremendous suffering for the sake of Christ.

But his sorrow didn't eliminate his joy.

And his joy didn't require him to pretend he wasn't sorrowful.

Christian joy is not the absence of sorrow. It is the presence of something greater than sorrow: Christ Himself.

Paul could experience genuine grief and still have reasons to rejoice because his deepest confidence wasn't rooted in his circumstances. It was rooted in Christ.

That's why he could also write in Philippians 4:11:

"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."

Notice that word: learned.

Contentment doesn't always come naturally. It's something we learn as we grow in our confidence in God's goodness and sufficiency.

Paul continues in verse 12:

"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."

What was the secret?

Verse 13:

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Paul wasn't saying that Christ would give him whatever he wanted. He was saying that Christ would sustain him in whatever circumstances he faced.

His contentment wasn't dependent on having everything he wanted. It was rooted in the sufficiency of Christ.

And that is something we need to learn.

We need to learn how to give thanks when life is going well, but we also need to learn how to give thanks when life is hard.

Sometimes thanksgiving is easy. Sometimes it's a sacrifice.

Hebrews 13:15 says:

“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.”

Why does the writer call it a sacrifice?

Because sometimes praise costs us something.

Sometimes we praise God through tears. Sometimes we give thanks while we’re still waiting for an answer. Sometimes we sing even though our hearts are heavy.

We aren’t pretending everything is fine. We’re declaring that God is still worthy of our praise.

And that’s an important distinction.

Biblical thanksgiving doesn’t deny the reality of our pain. It refuses to let our pain become greater than our vision of God.

I witnessed a beautiful picture of this just a few days ago.

Thursday night, I was at the bedside of our dear brother Luis Pagan. He was battling cancer and the doctor had just told him and his family that he likely had only hours to live.

Shortly after, Luis had told his son, with tears in his eyes, how much he was looking forward to seeing the face of his Savior.

Then, as we played some of the hymns Luis had requested on his playlist, he began singing along.

One of those songs was “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” The chorus says:

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand.
I’m tired, I’m weak, I’m worn.
Through the storm, through the night,

Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Think about that for a moment. Here was a man facing the end of his earthly life. His circumstances hadn't changed. His healing did not come this side of heaven. And yet he was singing.

He wasn't singing because he was certain he would be healed. He was singing because he knew the One he was about to meet.

And that's the same beautiful truth Paul describes: We can be sorrowful and yet always rejoicing. We can be weak physically and yet strengthened spiritually. We can face uncertainty about tomorrow while resting in the certainty of God's steadfast love.

Charles Spurgeon understood the importance of gratitude in the Christian life. He wrote:

"Thanksgiving is the preface to a holy life, the foundation of obedience, the vestibule of sanctity. He who would serve God must begin by praising God, for a grateful heart is the main-spring of obedience… our lives should be anointed with the precious oil of thankfulness."

What a beautiful picture.

A grateful heart doesn't simply produce songs of praise. It produces a life of obedience.

When we recognize how much God has done for us, gratitude begins to shape how we live.

We become less entitled, less demanding, less consumed with what we don't have. We become more generous, more joyful, more willing to serve, and more content with what God has provided.

Thanksgiving changes more than our attitude. It changes our lives.

And ultimately, our greatest reason for thanksgiving is not the material blessings we enjoy. It is the salvation we have received through Jesus Christ.

Think about what God has done for us.

We were sinners, separated from Him, unable to reconcile ourselves to Him. But God, in His mercy, sent His Son.

Jesus came into this world, lived the sinless life we could never live, and died on the cross in our place. He bore the penalty for our sins. He was buried, and on the third day He rose again.

Through repentance and faith in Him, we receive forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and the promise of eternal life.

We have peace with God. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have the hope of resurrection. We have the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And none of those things depend on whether our present circumstances are comfortable.

Our health may change. Our finances may change. Our relationships may change. Our plans may change.

But God's saving love remains.

That's why David could say:

"My heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

And that's why we can give thanks even when life is hard.

We have a Savior who has not abandoned us, a Father who loves us, and a future that is secure in Christ.

So let me ask you:

Have you allowed your present circumstances to consume your attention?

Have you become so focused on what you wish were different that you've stopped recognizing what God has already given you?

Have you postponed gratitude until life gets easier?

Maybe this Thanksgiving, we need to ask God to give us **eyes to see** what we've been missing and recognize His goodness, even in difficult seasons.

Conclusion

Church, I want to return to that thought from James Bell:

"What if the life you're waiting to enjoy is the life you're already living?"

Some of the days we're trying to get through may one day be the days we wish we could have back.

So don't postpone gratitude. Don't wait until every prayer is answered, every problem is resolved, or every circumstance is favorable.

Thank God today.

Thank Him for His daily provision, for the people He's placed in your life, and for the ordinary blessings you may have overlooked. And above all, thank Him for Jesus and the salvation we have through Him.

Remember, we don't give thanks because everything in our lives is good. We give thanks because God is good.

And when life is hard, and when life is good, let's learn to pray as David did:

“Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes.”

Whatever season of life you find yourself in, ask God to help you see His goodness, trust His steadfast love, and rejoice in His salvation.

Sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with you.