

## Trusting God When You Cannot Find Him

### Psalm 6

Introduction: Adoniram Judson is one of my missionary heroes. Following the death of his wife Ann and daughter Maria, he dug an empty grave and sat by it staring into it for days. Three years following his wife's death he would write, "God is to me the great unknown. I believe in Him, but I find Him not" (Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore*, 391).

Psalm 6 is the first of the seven "penitential psalms" (Pss 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) (Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, TOTC, 60). VanGemeren says it is a prayer "in deep anguish" (*Psalms*, EBC, 123). Motyer describes it as a psalm of "deep danger, great deliverance" (Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day*, 19).

Superscriptions, of course, are not inspired, but they may contain helpful information. Psalm 6 is attributed to David. Its occasion is unknown. It is said to be "according to Sheminith." The term literally means an eighth, most likely "reflecting either a type of eight-stringed instrument or a particular instrument tuning" (Gerald Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1 NIVAC, 177). There are four movements to the psalm (1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-10). Each provides spiritual insight on how we should respond when God is silent, cannot be found, is long in responding to our pain.

## I. Ask God to be gracious while silent 6:1-3

There is no confession of sin in this psalm, but it seems clear the psalmist senses what he is going through is the discipline of the LORD. Throughout the psalm, beginning in verse one, the author uses, parallelism. Michael Wilcox reminds us, “Hebrew poetry ‘rhymes’ not in sound of its word-endings but in its meanings” (*The Message of Psalms 1-72*, BST, 33). Using the covenant name of his God, Yahweh, David pleads in beautiful parallelism in verses 1-2, “LORD,

do not rebuke me in your anger;

do not discipline me in your wrath.”

Verse two provides the positive corollary to verse one:

“Be gracious to me, LORD, for I am weak;

Heal me, LORD, for my bones are shaking.”

Verse three intensifies what he is experiencing and feeling in verses 1-2 and concludes with a cry of absolute brokenness at the absence of God, “my whole being is shaken with terror. And you, LORD—how long?” The abrupt ending is startling.

Rebuke and discipline. Anger and wrath (see Rom 1:18ff). Weakness and shaking.

Terror and no answer. LORD, if you do not come soon in grace and healing I will not make it. And yet, in the silence and absence of God, he prays and he waits.

Kidner writes, “‘all God’s delays are maturing’, either of the time or the man” (61).

This is a good word for our careful consideration and reflection. Allen Ross helpfully adds,

“So the psalmist was weak, terrified, and anxious; his suffering at the hands of his enemies had wreaked havoc with his health and well-being. What made it so frustrating was that the LORD was silent and apparently willing to let him languish in pain and depression. He knew his suffering was divine discipline, so all he could do was appeal for a gracious deliverance.” (*Psalms 1-41*, 264).

## II. Ask God for deliverance because of His faithful love 6:4-5

Verses 4-5 contain the petition proper with an appeal to the LORD’s “faithful love” (ESV, “steadfast love”), His *hesed*. David uses three imperatives to make his urgent request: 1) “Turn”, 2) “Rescue”, 3) “Save”. He is pleading with the LORD to act and to act quickly. Only the grace and power of God can deliver

him. David needs God and he needs Him now! There is a specific reason cited in verse 5 as to why he needs the LORD to “be gracious” (v.2) and act in accord with his “faithful love.” It is humanity’s great enemy “death.” Death robs us of the ability to acknowledge and praise God. Death silences our voice! *Sheol*, like most words, has several possible meanings, depending on the context. It can mean the grave, death, extreme danger, hell or hades (Ross, 267). Here the idea is that of the grave or death. If the LORD does not hurry and deliver him, he will not be able to praise Him for His rescue and salvation. Death would have rendered his voice mute. I appreciate Calvin’s helpful theological insight on verse 5. He writes “we know that we are placed on earth to praise God with one mind and one mouth, and that this is the end of our life. Death, it is true, puts an end to his praises; but it does not follow from this, that the souls of the faithful, when divested of their bodies, are deprived of understanding or touched with no affection towards God” (Commentaries, vol. IV, *Psalms 1-35*, 71). No, our voices may be silenced but our existence continues on. We see this in the NT which further develops what we call “personal eschatology.” Here we discover a wonderful promise for all who are in Christ. Paul summarizes it best in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “we are confident, and we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Death will silence your voice among the living, so praise the Lord while you can. But, do not doubt that though death

may silence your praise, it cannot rob you of the Lord's presence if you know Christ!

### III. Ask God to hear your cries and see your tears 6:6-7

These two verses of lament are descriptive and they are intense. The verbs and nouns are highly instructive. In verse six David says, "I am weary...I dampen...I drench." In verse seven, "My eyes are swollen...they grow old." In verse six he speak of his "moaning, tears and weeping" (ESV). In verse seven he speaks of his "grief" and his "enemies". He is on the verge of a complete breakdown. And the darkness and silence of the nights are especially difficult. Those who battle depression, or experience a period of grief and sorrow, often find the nights to be more than they can bear. P.C. Craigie notes, "For most sufferers, it [is] in the long watches of the night, when silence and loneliness increase and the warmth of human companionship is absent, that...pain and grief [reach] their darkest point" (Quoted in James Boice, *Psalms 1-41*, 53).

If we would be completely honest we all have had times when we were:

- too tired to get out of bed and get dressed
- too worn out to get into the car and go to work
- too exhausted to get the kids off to school
- too weary to clean the house

- too depressed to go to church
- too burdened to read the Bible
- too sluggish even to pray (Boice, 54).

We may feel no one cares and no one hears our cries of despair and pain. Be encouraged! You are in good company! David had been there. Other great saints have been there. But, rest assured, God is there and he hears your cries and He sees your tears. How do I know? The rest of Psalm 6 tell me so!

#### IV. Ask God to accept your prayer and deal with your enemies 6:8-10

David has suffered emotionally, physically and spiritually. Some of it may have been his fault (v.1). Some of it was the result of attacks from his enemies (v.10). Interestingly he does not attack back. Rather, he warns them (vs. 8, 9) and testifies to God's faithfulness (vs. 9-10). He tells them to "depart" (cf Matt 7:23; Luke 13:27), calling them "evildoers" (ESV, "workers of evil"). David does not specify their evil. He tells them they better run because "the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my plea for help; the LORD accepts my prayer." Three times he references the LORD! Three times he affirms the LORD has answered his prayer. Spurgeon is wise in his counsel in light of verse (10), "The best remedy for us against an evil man is a

long space between us both” (*TOD*, VOL. 1, 58). To this we might add the words of Calvin,

“David, it is to be noticed, repeats three times that his prayers were heard, by which he testifies that he ascribes his deliverance to God, and confirms himself in this confidence, that he had not betaken himself to God in vain. And if we would receive any fruit from our prayers, we must believe that God’s ears have not been shut against them” (p. 74).

David ends the psalm on a note of confidence, a confidence grounded in the assurance of answered prayer. Four affirmations are made about the future of his enemies. “All my enemies”: 1) “will be ashamed,” 2) “will shake with terror” (ESV, “be greatly troubled”); 3) “will turn back”; and 4) they will “suddenly be disgraced.” H.C. Leupold provides a nice summation, “just as certain as [David] is that his prayers have been accepted, just so assured is he of the complete overthrow of his enemies” (*Exp. Of the Psalms*, 89).

Conclusion: Patrick Reardon is theologically spot on when he writes, ‘The divine wrath is not some sort of irritation: God does not become peeved or annoyed. The wrath of God is infinitely more serious than a temper tantrum. It is a deliberate resolve in response to a specific state of the human soul...only

the grace of God can deliver us from the wrath of God” (*Christ in the Psalms*, 11). Perhaps we can fill out a bit further Reardon’s point and conclude our study of Psalm 6 like this:

Only the overwhelming grace of God,  
can deliver us from the righteous wrath of God,  
through the incredible mercy of God,  
because of the unfathomable love of God,  
manifest in the incarnate Son of God.

Trust God when you cannot find Him. He is there! Remember: sometimes He speaks loudest in His silence.