

“HOW LONG, O LORD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Psalm 13

Prayer: Holy Father, we come this morning to your holy Word, inspired by your Holy Spirit, preserved through the ages for the sake of our souls. This is your revelation, what you want to say to us. Help us hear, help us understand, help us apply it for our eternal benefit. Glorify yourself and your Word for the sake of your church. Amen.

Introduction.

Let me begin by stating the obvious. Covid has defined all our lives for nineteen months now. It has define us locally, statewide, nationally and internationally. It has defined our home life, church life, work life, student life, shopping life, health life, vacation life, wedding life, funeral life, political life, news life, and on it goes.

Don't nearly all our conversations get around to Covid at some point? It doesn't matter whether we think it is a public health crisis or a hoax; Covid has defined the lives of all of us for a year and a half, now, and I am convinced it will continue to do so for a long time to come. In other words, there is no safe place to go where you can escape Covid.

As a brief aside here, I was given us a bit of perspective to how all-consuming we think this Covid crisis has been in all our lives.

I was talking to a member of our church last week who told me how Covid reminds her of living through WWII in Holland. That consumed their lives daily not for a year or two, but for five years. The Nazi occupation was all around them every day, the threats, the fear, the deaths, the restrictions of freedoms. That gives us a little different perspective doesn't it? We really have not suffered all that long or all that much.

Perspective changes everything.

Earlier last year I preached several sermons about Covid. This morning I want to give a different perspective to this crisis and how we as Christians should live and act and speak and respond. Do we want to live according to our Christian faith or according to our political leanings?

Would you like to have a different way of thinking and talking about this issue? Is anyone weary of the constant arguing and debating, the faultfinding and name-calling, the division and strife?

Psalm 13, How long, O Lord?

Four simple words packed with a mountain of meaning. There are at least four life-ordering, perspective-changing truths in these four words.

First, there is a God. That is a huge confession, a huge statement of faith. That orients everything in life around a central point. In the midst of great trial and trouble, David has not abandoned his faith, he has not cast his soul adrift on an ocean of doubt.

If there is no God then we are on our own, it is every man for himself, everyone left to do what is right in his own eyes. If there is a God, then this is not all about us. Everything is from Him, by Him, for Him, through Him and to Him. Everything.

Is it obvious to you how differently people who don't believe in God are coping with this crisis? Is the way you are coping obviously different than their way?

Confidence in a supreme and sovereign being, a creator and sustainer of the universe is our sure foundation in the midst of this pandemic. There is a God and it is with Him we have to do.

Second, how long, O God is a prayer and this implies God is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. God is personal, He can be spoken to. God is intimate with His creatures, they can have a relationship with Him. He is not distant or disinterested.

This is an honest prayer. David's crisis is real and personal. In the midst of pain and suffering it is natural to our flesh to feel God has forgotten or abandoned us. Yet his feelings that God is absent, don't keep him from pursuing and seeking God who is present. God is still my God.

How often have you heard me say, when God seems most absent, that is when He is most present. God is here, and God is not silent.

Third, how long implies this God is a God of knowledge and wisdom, He is a God who knows things, He knows the duration of trials and troubles, He knows the end from the beginning. God knows everything about what we are going through. He knows things we don't know.

Four times David pleads with God, “how long?” It is hard when you don’t know how much longer you can hang on by your fingernails or tread water. How often has God missed our deadlines? God’s sense of time is nothing like ours. He doesn’t seem to appreciate when we are at the end of our rope. How long says we know time is in God’s hands.

Fourth, how long implies this God is a God of power, a God who is able to do something about his plea, his trial. God is not impotent, He is in control.

Psalm 13:3 Consider and answer me, O Lord my God.

He believes God has something to say about all that is happening to him and God has the power to do something about it, even when the problem comes in the form of enemies, of foes, of those who intend evil. God is greater than the greatest enemy.

Notice the two levels to this Psalm. You can see this in nearly every Psalm. There is the human level and the divine level. On the human level there is a crisis, a troubling problem that is vexing his spirit, real enemies of some kind. And with that, there are the Psalmists thoughts and emotions and reactions to what is going on in his life. This is all real and personal.

But there is another level, the divine level. Behind what is happening on the human, earthly level there is God, a personal God with wisdom and understanding, power and control.

Another way of talking about this is to say there are secondary causes and primary causes. This is always true, this is always going on all the time in everything that happens in our world. There is what we see and there is what we don’t see.

Joseph was able to see beyond the sin and evil of his brothers when they sold him into slavery, secondary causes, and see the primary cause. What you meant for evil, God meant for good. The sinful designs of sinful people are all under God’s providential control so that His own redemptive purposes are accomplished.

So what is going on in our world? What are the secondary causes and the primary causes? What is God doing that would change our perspective on all that is happening around us? If we saw this would it change how we talk about and react to Covid?

Let’s apply this to Covid.

Instead of talking about what politicians and scientists and bureaucrats have said or done, let's talk about what God has said and done. It is very troubling to me how all of this have become so politicized and because it has become so politicized it has become so polarizing. Is there another perspective besides the political perspective? Is there a spiritual perspective?

Let's begin at the beginning.

God created a perfect world. He called it very good. But we sinned, we rebelled against God and ruined His perfect world. Sin ruins everything. Sin didn't just corrupt our souls and bring about physical and spiritual death, but God's curse corrupted the physical world as well.

This is clear in Romans 8 where we read all creation was subjected to futility at the fall and the whole creation groans in the pain of childbirth waiting eagerly for the coming redemption.

Sin has ruined everything. Everything bad, evil, dark comes from sin. All evil and wickedness, all suffering and pain, all disasters and tragedies, come from the fall. It has spiritual roots. Sin, evil and death are part of God's judgment on a rebellious world.

The coronavirus teaches us the truth about our world. We live in a broken, fallen world where terrible evil exists. But this is God's world, and He is sovereign over it, over every square inch. There are no maverick molecules, no stray viruses, no rogue rulers.

Here is the perspective I want us to get this morning. Covid is at its roots spiritual, not political. All through human history, pestilence, plagues and pandemics have been part of God's judgment on sin and evil. They come from the hand of the sovereign living God of all the universe. Nothing is that doesn't come from Him, nothing happens without out His sovereign will and purpose

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

Amos 3:6 When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?
When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?

Luke 21:10-11 Then Jesus said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

Understanding Covid is spiritual will change our perspective on what is happening now and how our government is dealing with the crisis and why it is going the way it is going.

In the face of this pandemic, how have those in authority responded?

Whatever one might say about how poorly or with how much overreach, they have tried to save lives. In this battle against an invisible plague their only weapons are restrictions, facemasks, vaccines and mandates. That's all they got so they keep using them. They are secular leaders using temporal, secular means.

I don't find any solace in casting blame on politicians and scientists. They are trying everything they know to stop it, but they don't know what they are up against. They have used every weapon in the book, restrictions, masks, vaccines, mandates.

The problem is they have the wrong book. And who can fault them for that, they are secular idolaters using the book of secular idolatry. And God is toppling all the idols of our land one after the other, all those idols we have put our trust in.

The god of science, the god of medicine, the god of health, the god of money. Who would have ever imagined our trusted supply chain could be so disrupted?

Some people think the reason the tools aren't working is because the tools are bad, others think the reason the tools aren't working is because everyone isn't using them. What if the reason they aren't working is because God isn't letting them work. They could if He made them work.

God's judgment is not turned back by secular means. We need a King Josiah revelation when he found the book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses. When the king heard the words he tore his clothes and repented in sack cloth and ashes and cried out to the priests.

II Chronicles 34:21 "Go, inquire of the Lord for me ...concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

The only solution is spiritual. Our only hope is to cast ourselves in complete humility and submission, in repentance before the holy and sovereign Lord of the universe.

Why are we shaking our fists at our leaders when we should be trembling before a holy God? Too many Christians are ranting and raving against secondary causes. Maybe it

makes them feel better, maybe it makes them feel like they have done something. I find no peace for my soul in 90% of what I read on social media about Covid.

Psalm 13:2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long must I take council in statistics and opinions, in this study or that study?

Am I saying you shouldn't voice your opinion or conscience about what's going on? No. You can exercise your freedoms and rights. You can chose whatever battles you want to fight.

But don't lose sight of the fact this is fundamentally a spiritual problem in our nation and in our own hearts. We shouldn't be focusing only on resisting the government, we should be focusing primarily on repenting of our decades of resisting or ignoring God. We should be repenting of all the sins that will keep us out of the kingdom of God for eternity.

My goal here this morning is to clear our vision, to change our perspective, to help us consider what no one out there in the world is talking about. We won't hear any of this on CNN or Fox, we won't hear any of this from Washington DC or Olympia. We don't even hear a lot of this in the church across America.

The consequences of Covid on our human society should by now have driven all those who fear God to plead with Him for mercy, that He will use this discipline to call all men to Him in faith and repentance, and remove this plague He has sent us.

If this season of trial in our nation doesn't make us have a more eternal perspective on life, if it doesn't cause us to humbly submit to God and trust Him more deeply and desire to follow Him and serve Him more faithfully we aren't paying attention, we are being spiritually blind.

Here is the bottom line. All disasters whatever the cause are a call to repentance and a return to believe in God and trust in Him alone. I can say that emphatically because Jesus said that in Luke 13. Repent lest you perish.

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (C.S. Lewis).

Every generation gets a warning, a wakeup call. Covid is a call to repentance for all people everywhere, for our nation, for our church, for our families and ourselves.

It's a call to repent of our trust in idols, in government, in science, in medicine, in health, in money. It is a call to repent of our complicity or lack of concern for the moral evil that is in our land, for abortion, for sexual immorality, for pornography, for lack of righteousness or interest in godliness.

For this reason I have changed the focus of our prayer service this evening. Normally we focus exclusively on the new church year. Tonight I have included in our prayer time, a time for repentance, both for our own sins, but also for the sins of our nation.

I urge us all to take this opportunity to do something completely different from what most people have been doing during Covid. Let's change the focus of our attention, let's lift our eyes to heaven and call on the name of the living God. Let's do it together, united in one voice.

II Chronicles 7:13-15 When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, 14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.

Will you join me in doing that this evening?

Application and conclusion.

Let me conclude with the hope that the Psalmist concludes with.

Psalm 13:5-6 I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

The Psalm ends with faith, hope, and comfort, it ends with the Gospel.

God is always up to something and what He is always up to is salvation, redemption, restoration. In the face of God's wrath and in the face of all present suffering, we must never forget the goodness of God. He is faithful and He does no wrong (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Ever since the fall God has been taking action to reverse the dreadful effects and the root cause, sin itself. God is long suffering, slow to anger and quick to mercy. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. He extends salvation to all who repent and believe.

He has a new perspective and that changes what he trusts in. His eyes are lifted up above his present crisis and what he leans on, to cast off earthly crutches, earthly props, idols and gods. He has a God-centered perspective.

His faith was shaken at first, but his God is not shaken, the covenant remains. The Psalmist turns his attention from his own soul and faith, to the object of his faith, God and His hesed, His steadfast love.

This is his great joy in the midst of trouble. He is confident that when he looks back on all that has transpired, he will have a song to sing. “My heart will rejoice in your salvation.” I am confident when believers get to heaven and look back on these days they will see God’s salvation. That is worth singing about.

There is a future hope that involves singing, joy, gladness.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Next time you talk about Covid or post something about Covid, talk from this new perspective. Answer fear with faith, answer anger with peace, answer political arguments with spiritual truth, answer statistics with Scripture. Instead of looking around, look up. God is in control and He is up to something. Rejoice in God’s redemptive purposes that cannot be stopped. Let’s beginning this evening to get a spiritual perspective in praise, repentance and prayer.