

HOW LONG, O LORD? (Psalm 13)

Life of David in the Psalms #6

Jim Pattridge had a dream. He wanted to learn a martial art. But every time that he tried to enroll in a class, he was turned down. Now Jim had strong arms and had some coordination. But it was his kicking that was his drawback - Jim just wasn't a good kicker. But Jim was persistent. He kept applying to class after class until he was turned down 12 times. Finally, Scott Keifer who was the master instructor at an academy called U.S.A. Karate told Jim that he could enroll in his class as long as he did so to assist his son, Brandon. So on his 13th try, Jim Pattridge became a formal karate student.

Jim was such an enthusiastic student that he was soon passing most of the other students, even though they were far younger than he. To make a long story shorter, after 3 years of study, Jim had learned more than 300 different martial art techniques. Scott made him an assistant instructor. And then on June 23, 1990, Jim Pattridge at 42 years of age received his black belt in 3 different martial art forms.

Jim never did learn to kick - nor would he ever be able to. But through his patience and hard work, he learned to compensate in other ways. For you see, Jim Pattridge had left Vietnam as a Marine in 1966 on a stretcher with a purple heart pinned to his chest. Jim had stepped on an exploding booby trap. But today, because of his enthusiastic attitude, patience and hard work, Jim Pattridge is a black belt in Karate - even though he is deaf in one ear, legally blind, partially paralyzed on his entire left side, and has nothing below his waist - for both of his

legs were blown off by the land mine.

We live in a day when natural abilities are exalted. Many people excuse failures and limit their successes by complaining. If only I had a mind like Bill Gates, or the jumping abilities of LeBron James, or the musical abilities of Russ Miller. But the one virtue that we all possess is often completely overlooked - and that is patience. For no amount of natural abilities will ever overcome the lack of patience and character - but with patience, many natural handicaps can eventually be overcome and even mediocre abilities can become very proficient.

An admirer once asked the gifted pianist Ignace Paderewski, *Is it true that you still practice every day?* Yes, answered the veteran musician. *I play that piano at least 6 hours every day. You must have a world of patience,* continued the fan. *I have no more patience than anyone else,* answered Paderewski. *I just use mine.* There is a great deal of truth in Paderewski's words. Everyone has a potential for patience. There is not one person here in this sanctuary who doesn't have a potential for patience. Now it's true that some people have temperaments that tend to be more tolerant. But all of us share in our potential for patience. Some people just develop it and use their patience more than others.

God knew that David would need to have a great deal of patience if he were to become the great king that God intended for him to be. So in addition to the many other lessons that God taught David in preparing him for the throne, he also added patience to the list.

We have been looking at lessons that God taught David during his decade in exile from his home and family during these past Sunday as revealed in the Psalms

that he wrote. We have already seen:

*David's learning to trust in God to provide all of his needs and to lead and guide him through life as a shepherd provides for and leads his flock – Ps. 23.

*David's growth in the knowledge and trust of a Sovereign God whose character would never change so that he would not become disillusioned when the foundations of life appeared to be crumbling all around him - Ps. 11

*David's suspicion of opportunistic people who would try to use and bend situations to their own advantage so that they might climb career ladders dealing with Doeg the Edomite - Ps. 52

*David's ability to endure slander and false accusations that could discredit him - Ps. 57

*David learning not to trust in that little game that so many people in Politics play - trusting in people and favors rather than trusting in God - Ps. 54

*Now this morning, we come to another invaluable lesson - the lesson of patience. We don't know exactly how long David was in exile from his home and family running for his life from Saul, but by figuring out the chronology of David's life we can assume that it must have been 10 - 12 years. A decade is a long time for anybody to endure exile from his or her home and family. But it is especially long for a young man who has been anointed to be the next king who is just chomping at the bit to get started on his career. But God knew that David would never be able to reach his fullest potential unless he became a patient man. So he allowed him to be in exile year after year until this lesson was learned.

Now we don't want to imply that this lesson of patience came easily for

David. Patience never comes easily. The bible tells us that tribulations develop patience in our lives. Nor do we want to imply that David never became frustrated in impatience. In fact, the brief Psalm that we are looking at this morning reveals some of David's frustration and impatience. No one is naturally patient and we all have a tendency towards impatience. We all naturally rebel when we are forced to be patient.

There was a locksmith who had a sign in his window that read “Keys made while you wait.” Business was slow, so he hired a consultant to evaluate his business. The consultant made an interesting comment. Why don't you change your sign – people naturally are impatient. They don't like to wait. So the locksmith changed his sign to read “Keys made while you watch.” And he noticed that business picked up.

David didn't like to wait. We can identify with this because we don't like to wait either. But God had to instill patience into David's character in order to make him the kind of person who would become a great king. So David had to change his perspective from just waiting to watching God develop him personally. Happily, David allowed God to develop more patience in his life so that he could become a great king.

*Psalm 13 is divided into 3 sections of 2 verses each making up the total of 6 verses. In the first pair of verses, David reveals his problem - frustration and impatience. In the second couplet, David prays to the Lord and asks for his help – so here we find David's petition. And finally, the last 2 verses reveal David's choice to trust in the Lord and allow Him to develop patience in his life. Look

now with me at those first 2 verses in which some of David's frustrations and impatience are revealed.

1. DAVID'S PROBLEM - 13:1,2

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

David's problem was that he was becoming impatient. He cries out “How Long” to the Lord 4 times in just these 2 verses. How Long, How Long, How Long, How Long? Oh, he had probably been able to console himself during those first few weeks and months that the trial would quickly pass. But then as year piled upon year, and as Saul continued his rule of insanity, and as David appeared to be farther from the throne than ever, the natural tendency would be to become more and more impatient.

But it is interesting to note that David's impatience was not over what we might think. It was not the inconvenience of his living conditions in the cave that he mentions here. That must have been horrible for David trying to raise a family with the inconvenience of jumping from cave to cave. No stability. None of the modern conveniences that the other Israelites took for granted in their homes. Never a clean floor or a wall on which to hang a picture. You would think that David would have become very impatient with such living conditions, wouldn't you? But he doesn't mention this as the source of his impatience. It is not even his separation from his other family members. It's hard to be separated from family members. And David's situation was so severe that he had to actually

move his family from their home in Bethlehem outside the country to Moab for their safety. So David's family was so far from him that he couldn't see them for years. But David doesn't mention this either as the source of his impatience. Rather, it was his feeling of God's absence that bothered him so much. It seemed like God had forgotten all about him out there in the Negev region. It seemed like God had hid his presence and fellowship from him. It seemed like God had taken all the joy from his heart. Where was God? It just didn't seem like David could go on any longer feeling like God had deserted him.

The same feelings that David had are usually at the root of the impatience that we often feel as well. When we become impatient in life, we usually wonder why God isn't moving faster than he is. We wonder if God has deserted us or forgotten all about us. We wonder why God doesn't appear to be working in our lives. It is amazing how almost any trial can be endured as long as we sense God's hands at work, developing and building us. But when we don't sense his presence, when we feel like He has deserted us, when we feel all alone, we have a tendency to become impatient with our circumstances.

2. In the midst of his feelings of impatience, David cries out in prayer to God. Notice DAVID'S PETITION with me - 13:3,4

³ Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; ⁴ my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

David's prayer is 3 fold:

***Look on me** - notice me. Here I am all alone out here in the wilderness.

Don't forget about me out here in the deserted desert region. Look on me.

***Answer me** - pay attention to my cries. Show concern for my plight. Show compassion for me in my helpless condition.

***Give light to my eyes** - help me to see the purpose in all of this. Show me the path to safety. Help me to see the meaning in what is happening to me.

David felt so alone and deserted. It was as if he had become lost out there in some forgotten cave in the Negev region. It was as if God were so busy with the other parts of the world that he had forgotten all about little David in this remote region. David felt like a little child on an observation deck at the airport frantically waving his arms as the plane carrying his mother is soaring off into the sky. Look at me, notice me down here - but in his heart realizing that he was just a spot amongst many spots and that his mother probably couldn't see him.

Many times we feel like David in life. When the stresses of life begin to overwhelm us like waves on a troubled sea, we wonder if God really sees us and notices our plight. After all, we are so insignificant in the overall life of this planet. We are not famous people. We are not world decision makers. We are not the highly visible. Does God really notice us sitting in the corner of our little cave? Does God really see us; does he really hear and answer our prayers; will he really shine the light of his truth and wisdom upon our path so that we can know what direction to take in life? It is during times like these that we can so easily become impatient. When is God going to work? When is he finally going to act? When is God going to notice us?

3. We can all identify with David's feelings as he was writing this Psalm because

we have all been there. How we respond when we feel so rejected and impatient is critical to our growth and success in life. I want you to notice how David responded for his response tells volumes about his character and spiritual maturity.

You see, David realized that his feelings didn't always reflect reality. He realized that God hadn't disappeared just because he couldn't feel His presence. He realized that God's ears weren't deafened to his cries just because he didn't feel like he was getting through. David realized a very significant truth that God's purpose was being fulfilled in his life even when he didn't feel like it was happening. So David made a choice - it was a choice to trust in the Lord even when he was feeling impatient with God. Notice how David concludes this Psalm.

DAVID'S PATIENT TRUST IN THE LORD - 13:5,6

⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

*In the midst of doubt, David chose to trust.

*In the midst of feelings of abandonment, David affirmed God's unfailing love.

*In the midst of feelings of sorrow, David chose to rejoice.

*In the presence of his enemies, David focused on God's salvation and deliverance.

*In the midst of his discouragement, David sang a song to the Lord.

*When he felt impatient, David chose to focus on the goodness of God.

What a model David is for all Christians. Christians are not people who never have doubts. In fact, it could be argued that doubts actual reveal the reality

of faith. Christians are not people who never feel abandoned. Christians are not people who don't have any fears. Christians are not people who never become discouraged or depressed.

But Christians are people who know God. Christians are people who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore have a living, personal relationship with God. Christians are people who have the ability to rise above their feelings of the moment for they know that their feelings are not the measure of reality. Christians are those who can trust in a Sovereign God knowing that He is able to build character and strength into their lives even through adversity. So Christians are people who have the ability to be patient even when tempted towards impatience.

People in general love to complain about the weather. Last week, it was the dryness of not having any rain for a long period of time. Today, it's the heat and humidity. It is really a fruitless hobby, because no amount of complaining is going to affect the weather. But the weather is something that many people love to hate - especially in Michigan, where we can experience 4 seasons in one day, people enjoy taking out some of their frustrations on the weather.

As more and more research is being done, experts are finding that the aspect of the weather that has the most affect on us is light. When the days are shortest in the winter, when we go for long periods of time with the skies being overcast, when we are cooped up in a house or office for day after day out of the sunlight, we have a greater tendency towards feeling down or depressed. We have a syndrome called SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder – that has been coined in an

attempt to describe the negative affect that a lack of light can have on us. There are even special lights that are being marketed now that we can sit under in an attempt to lift our spirits.

Now a person might go outside on an overcast, cloudy day and feel somewhat downcast. After all, he can't see the sun in the sky. He can't feel the sun's warmth. He can't see his shadow on the ground behind him. But that person would be considered very foolish, even irrational, if he allowed his feelings to cause him to doubt the existence of the sun. Just because he can't see the sun for the clouds, just because he can't feel the sun's warmth on his skin, just because he can't see the evidence of the sun reflected in his shadow doesn't mean that the sun has ceased to exist. The sun is still out there. And if he could be lifted above the clouds in an airplane, he would see the sun shining just as brightly as ever. So even when we might feel discouraged or down, the sun is still doing its job, warming the earth and sustaining our lives. And there will come a time when the clouds will separate and we will be able to see the sunshine clearly and feel the warmth of the sun on our skin again.

So it is with our relationship with God. There will be times when we don't feel his presence. David reflects one of those times in this Psalm. David was a spiritual person. He was a man whom God chose to write a good portion of the bible. He was a man whom God chose to become king of Israel. Yet David experienced times of impatience, when he felt like God had abandoned him, when he felt like God wasn't moving fast enough in his life. But David was also a person who learned a very important spiritual lesson. David learned that his

feelings were not always a barometer of reality. That just because he didn't feel God's presence didn't mean that God had ceased to exist. That just because he didn't feel that God cared about him didn't mean that God didn't hear and answer his prayers. That just because life wasn't moving fast enough for him didn't mean that God wasn't fulfilling his purpose in his life.

So David chose to trust in God's unfailing love. David chose to believe God's promises and rejoice in his deliverance even before it had occurred. David chose to wait upon the Lord even when feeling impatient, realizing that one day the clouds would separate and the sunshine would be clearly visible again.

Even though Michelangelo lived 500 years ago, he is still considered one of the greatest artists who ever walked on this planet. His marble sculpture of David that stands over 14 feet tall is breath-taking to behold. His painting of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel where he had to lay on his back on scaffolding for 4 years continues to attract millions of visitors every year. Michelangelo's versatility as a painter, sculptor, poet and architect makes him a primary contender for the model Renaissance person along with Leonardo DaVinci.

A story is told of a friend who one day visited Michelangelo's studio. The artist took time to introduce the friend to the many projects that he was working on. Several months passed and the friend dropped by the studio to visit Michelangelo again. As he looked around, the friend remarked that the artist had not been able to make further progress on a certain sculpture that had caught the friend's eye the first time. "Oh no, no," Michelangelo protested. "Look at how I rounded the arm here and smoothed out a rough edge over there and put more

expression into the face.” Somewhat embarrassed, the friend backed off and said that he had meant major progress and not such little things. Michelangelo then made a famous and wise observation. “It’s the little thing that is needed to make perfection, and perfection is no little thing.”

God has committed himself to the perfection of each and every one of his children. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church of Philippi that we can be confident in the fact that the same God who began a good work of grace in our lives will not be satisfied until he completes it.” (Phil. 1:6) As God is knocking off an edge here or sanding a rough spot over there, it might not appear that much is being accomplished. We might become impatient and wonder why God is taking so long? But God is at work. As the ultimate creator and master artist, we need to trust him to complete that work that He has started in our lives, even though it might take longer than we think it should take.