

Series: Psalms

Title: Faithfulness Under God's Mighty Hand

Text: Ps 88:1-18

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This is why the high priests under the old covenant were taken from among men.

Hebrews 5: 1...ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, [one] that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: [two] 2: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

Christ is the High Priest who offered the gift and sacrifice for the sins of his people. He made his elect the righteousness of God in him. Since he suffered as a Man, compassed with the feeling of our infirmities, without sin, he has compassion on his ignorant, straying people. He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Christ was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. So he is able to have compassion and comfort us.

Psalm 88, beginning to end, is a Psalm of Christ suffering on the cross. Some call it the darkest psalm. Psalm 22 is full of Christ's suffering but in the end it turns to joy. Not this Psalm. But brothers were used to pen Psalm 88 and 89. So it seems these two psalms go together. Psalm 88 is Christ is suffering in perfect faithfulness in place of his people. Psalm 89 is Christ is yet suffering but Christ declares the covenant mercies of God freely given because Christ endured the cross.

This Psalm and the next were penned by Heman and Ethan, both Ezrahites. This Psalm is penned by Heman. Heman means "faithful". This Psalm shows Christ's faithfulness while suffering the sorrows of the cross.

Ethan pens the next Psalm. Ethan means "enduring." There Christ is enduring the suffering but he praises the Father's faithfulness in his covenant mercies toward Christ and his people in Christ. Christ speaks of the Father's covenant promise to him,

Psalm 89: 27: I make him, my Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. 28: My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. 29: His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

For now, we will look at Psalm 88. Here we behold again Christ's perfect faithful obedience as he suffered the cross in place of his people. By his obedience unto death he justified his people. Also, by his suffering, our merciful High Priest is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and able to have compassion on us and comfort us and strengthen us.

Hebrews 4: 15: For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF CHRIST

Psalm 88: 1: O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day *and* night before thee: 2: Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry

Hear Christ speaking. Hear Christ speaking as the representative believer of his sinful people. Hear Christ speaking even as he endured the curse of the cross.

“O LORD God of my salvation.” Christ cries, “Oh covenant God of my salvation, oh sovereign God of my salvation.” On the cross, Christ suffered the greatest agony any ever endured. But our Substitute Head was perfect faithfulness in perfect suffering. He begins by owning God the Father as the LORD God of his salvation. It is to no other he cries, no other upon whom he depends—*“I have cried day and night before thee.”* He cries in perfect meekness, asking God, *“LET my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry.”*

Heman probably suffered and cried to the Lord some of the things he wrote here. But Christ did so like no other, without sin, in perfect faith, under the most trying suffering any ever endured. And the only way Heman continued to cry in faith to the LORD God of his salvation is by Christ’s Spirit. It was only by Christ who interceded for us in perfection and whose intercession will not permit our faith to fail. Prayer is put into our hearts by the Spirit of God’s Son.

In Galatians 4:6 it is the *Spirit of his Son himself* within our hearts, crying Abba, Father,

Galatians 4: 6: And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

In Romans 8: 15 the Spirit of adoption make *us* pray,

Romans 8: 15: For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Then in Romans 8:26 the *Spirit himself* makes intercession for us with the Father,

Romans 8: 26: Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27: And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Is this not the only reason why the apostle Peter’s faith failed not, even when outwardly he denied knowing Christ and went back to his nets? It is why Heman’s faith failed not. It is the only reason our faith fails not. However low the child of God sinks, Christ in you will keep you believing he is the LORD God of your salvation. And its Christ at God’s right hand, who perfected his people on the cross by his perfect faith who is our Advocate and Intercessor with the Father through whose righteousness and faithfulness God hears us.

PERFECT SUFFERING

Psalm 88: 3: For my soul is full of troubles and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. 4: I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man *that hath* no strength: 5: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.

Here we see the fulness of suffering which Christ endured on the cross on behalf of his people. Here we see the fulness of perfect suffering and perfect faith by which Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Under the fierce wrath of God, our Savior suffered soul trouble—and he suffered it to the full. He said, "*My soul is full of troubles.*" This is not hyperbole with Christ. Christ soul was full of troubles. On the cross he had troubles heaped one upon another. His soul was filled full with troubles till it could contain no more. This is the perfect fulness of soul trouble which his people deserved for our sins.

We sorrow over our sin. But we never sorrow so as to perfectly sorrow as Christ did when he bore our sin and the curse we deserved. Our repentance is full of sin. Christ is the perfect righteousness of our repentance and sorrow and shame. Whatever we suffer consider how Christ suffered it far greater and know he is our perfect righteousness in it. Considering Christ in the midst of our suffering will give greater value and appreciation to what Christ suffered on our behalf.

Also, because Christ suffered so, he is able to comfort us and will be our consolation in our trouble.

He said, "*I am counted with them that go down into the pit.*" It means Christ was imputed, numbered, with them that go down into the grave as transgressors. When Christ was made to bear the sin of his people, Christ was numbered with transgressors. Sinners counted him such. But by God making him sin for us, that he might suffer divine wrath justly, God counted him such. God looked not to his people, only to our Sin-bearer and Substitute.

On the cross, though Christ was alive, yet he suffered the second death. The second death which God's law demands be poured out on those who bear sin is a living death. It is hell which shall last forever. In order to satisfy justice and deliver his people from the second death, Christ suffered that living death on the cross. It was the sorrow of being cut off from and by God's hand—"*whom THOU rememberest no more: ...cut off from THY hand.*"

Yet, in that fullness of soul trouble, in that cutting off, in that living death, the Faithful One continued praying to the Father with unwavering faith.

Our faith and prayer are not our righteousness. It is not even acceptable except in Christ our Righteousness. Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the Faithful ONE! In Christ, our little mustard-seed faith trusts. But Christ suffered perfectly. He prayed perfectly. He did it as he justified us from all our sins, including the sins of our unbelief and the sins mixed with our feeble faith. Christ alone is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is our eternal salvation. The Holiness and Righteousness in whom we are accepted of holy and righteous God is Christ Jesus alone!

GLORIFYING GOD

Psalm 88: 6: Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. 7: Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted *me* with all thy waves. Selah....14: LORD, why castest thou off my soul? *why* hidest thou thy face from me? 15: I *am* afflicted and ready to die from *my* youth up: *while* I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. 16: Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. 17: They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together.

Christ glorified and honored God by owning all his suffering to be of God's hand. Notice it in the words in the passage above. Indeed, Christ suffered at the hands of ungodly sinners. But Christ honored the Father by acknowledging this was God's eternal purpose. It was God's

hand of righteous judgment upon Christ on the cross. He was judged by God on behalf of God's elect. He bore the fierce wrath of God in place of his people. All God's waves of justice went over our Substitute. The questions asked in these verses are for our benefit. It is as Christ said after asking why God forsook him, "For thou art holy; and I am a worm and no man." God cast him off because Christ bore our sins and God is holy and his justice must be satisfied toward his people in Christ. God poured out the waves of justice upon Christ in place of his people that God might be merciful and justify us from all our sins—and do so justly.

When God the Father chastens his child, we may think it is God's fierce wrath. And if it be for our sin, it is certain, God is displeased with our sin as he was displeased with David. But it is never wrath. Christ suffered God's fierce wrath to the full satisfaction of justice. God shall never pour out his fierce wrath on his believing child since Christ has borne it and satisfied justice on our behalf.

God's chastening is the loving hand of our Father—teaching us by experience—making us know that it is God's everlasting love for which we are not consumed. He is turning us to Christ to keep us partaking of Christ's holiness. God's chastening hand is God keeping our hearts purified by faith in the Lord our Righteousness. Spurgeon said, "Our griefs are waves which wash us to the Rock." We see that in the Canaanite woman whose need made her cry more earnestly to Christ.

SUFFERING ALONE

Psalm 88: 8: Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: *I am shut up, and I cannot come forth...*18: Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, *and mine acquaintance into darkness.*

Notice, Christ suffered the winepress of God's fury alone—of the people there was none to help. So Christ gets all the glory. God alone is just and Justifier! Man has no part in putting away our sin and making ourselves righteous. It is all Christ alone! Notice, again, he acknowledges it was God who put away his friends. So it was as Zechariah prophesied.

Zechariah 13:7: Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is* my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

God determined before that his sheep would scatter when he smote Christ. It was God who put his apostles and brethren far from him. Christ did not look to second causes. He did not blame his apostles. Christ acknowledged God as the first cause. It was for the purpose of glorifying Christ that he must suffer the cross alone and get all the glory.

In all our chastening, God keeps us acknowledging it is of God's hand. We will find no correction for ourselves and no comfort looking to second causes. God will not allow his child to go on looking at second causes. Everything God brings upon his child in this life is to *shut us up* to Christ alone. It is to leave us with no one else to comfort us but Christ, that our help might come from Christ alone. It is that God might keep Christ preeminent in our hearts as our only Salvation, our only Help.

If we are opposed, God is the first cause and it is for our good. David said that Shemei was sent of God, let him cuss me, it is for my good. When a loved one dies, it is God's hand to shut up his believing child to Christ that Christ might remain preeminent in our hearts. He

shuts up so that we have none to deliver but Christ. God does it to show us Christ's compassion that he might wean us from this world and from all secondary comforts. It is to bind our hearts—to make us know more clearly—that the strongest tie is Christ's everlasting love and unbreakable union. It is Christ our High Priest who has compassion on us and turns us to him to keep us partaking of his holiness through faith in him.

So long as sinners think things happen by chance or look to second causes to put the blame on second causes, there is no turning to Christ, no forgiveness in him, no comfort in him, only a bitter root springing up against others. We only worship and repent and pray to God when we own God to be absolutely sovereign, owning that it is his hand turning us to Christ. Then we find all in Christ and will walk in the Way by faith, waiting on God to work.

KEEPING GRACE

Psalm 88: 9: Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. 10: Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise *and* praise thee? Selah. 11: Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? *or* thy faithfulness in destruction? 12: Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? 13: BUT unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer [go before] prevent thee.

As Christ bore our sins and our curse—as he prepared to give up his Spirit to the Father and his body be laid in the grave—Christ believed God's covenant promise that God would raise him from the dead. Notice, the rhetorical questions declare it is impossible for a dead man to praise God. But then there is a conjunction, "But!" There we see Christ's faith in God's word. We see Christ faith in God's covenant promise to raise him. He says, "*But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; AND in the morning I SHALL ARISE and my prayer come before thee.*"

Psalm 16: 9: Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. 10: For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 11: Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

Child of God, believe God, believe on his Son. In all suffering, look to how Christ endured it so much greater—IN PERFECTION FOR US—and we will behold his love for us more. He is our Righteousness. Christ is the perfection of sorrow, of faith, of suffering who justified us from all our sins.

Look to God's hand and acknowledge that in your suffering God is the first cause. It is for our good, our correction. By sending affliction, he makes us see that sin is even in our repentance, our faith, our prayers. He makes us learn obedience by the things which we suffer, showing us our need of Christ (Heb 5:7-9). He keeps us obeying his commandment to believe on Christ, to trust him alone to be our perfect acceptance with God and our strength to persevere. He has saved us, is saving us and shall yet save us. Flee to Christ, confessing your sin to him and your need of mercy. This is the obedience of faith which Christ makes us learn over and over through suffering.

Christ will be our Consolation and Strength and will see to it that joy comes in the morning. Peter experienced this. He tells us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, casting all our care on Christ, that God may exalt us in his time. Peter said after we suffer awhile, God

will raise us up and strengthen us. It is God's covenant promise to his elect in Christ. God's promises are yes in Christ and in Christ amen to the praise of God's glory.

God proving this to us over and over makes us sing. He is even able to make us sing though we yet suffer, even as Christ did on the cross. God always brings us to sing of his mercies.

Psalm 89: 1: I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. 2: For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. 3: I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, 4: Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.

Amen!