

MSS – Psalm 89
The Unfailing Covenant

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

As we are in the fourth Sunday of the Advent Season, and we have been looking at several of the key psalms in the psalter of the OT that speak of the Messiah's coming, we turn today to Psalm 89.

It is a most lovely Psalm that extols the magnificent attributes of Yahweh God and opens up our understanding of the great covenant he made with King David to place one of his descendants on the throne of the everlasting kingdom of God. One of David's descendants would be the king of the kingdom of God, the kingdom that would have no end.

All of this is based on the covenant promise made to King David through the prophet Nathan. We read in 2 Sam 7:16-17 the words he spoke to the king:

16 ^ωAnd your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. [Ⓜ] [Ⓜ]Your throne shall be established forever.'"* ***17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.**

Notice that Nathan stresses this word "forever." This promise to David to seat one of his descendants on the everlasting throne of the kingdom of God was not something temporary, but something permanent.

Psalm 89, at least the first $\frac{3}{4}$ of it, through verse 37, is a restatement of this covenant and it is based on the fidelity, the integrity, of the character of Yahweh himself.

But when we read the last fourth of the psalm, from verse 38 to the end at verse 52, we are thrown us for a surprise, for after extolling the greatness of Yahweh's faithfulness we are suddenly confronted with what seems to be Yahweh changing his mind about this covenant. He, in fact, turns against the prophesied descendant of David and pours out his indignation, his anger, his wrath upon him. What happened to the gracious covenant that he had established with David? This is the great question we will seek to answer as we study this psalm. I believe there is an answer, and I hope to build your understanding of this psalm today.

Let us pray:

Father in heaven, your scriptures speak the truth that comes from your throne. We need your help today to understand this Psalm. We want to grow in the knowledge of you and your ways. You alone are God, you created the heavens and earth and sent your Son to save us from our sins. So, by the ministry of your Spirit, teach us your Word today. We pray in our Savior Jesus' precious name. Amen.

This is a long Psalm – 52 verses and we cannot cover it in detail, so I want to break it up for us in four major parts. Here they are:

I. Yahweh’s integrity is unfailingly dependable. v.1-18

II. Yahweh’s covenant with David was backed up by Yahweh’s unfailing integrity. v. 19-37

III. Yahweh is questioned about his seeming rejection of his covenant with David. v. 38-51

IV. Yahweh is to be blessed forever. v. 52

Let’s read the first section, v. 1-18. Hear the Word of the Lord:

89 I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

² For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”

³ You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:

⁴ ‘I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.’” *Selah*

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord,

⁷ a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,
and awesome above all who are around him?

⁸ O LORD God of hosts,
who is mighty as you are, O LORD,
with your faithfulness all around you?

⁹ You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.

¹⁰ You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

¹¹ The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

¹² The north and the south, you have created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.

¹³ You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.

¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁵ Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,

- who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,
¹⁶ who exult in your name all the day
 and in your righteousness are exalted.
¹⁷ For you are the glory of their strength;
 by your favor our horn is exalted.
¹⁸ For our shield belongs to the LORD
 our king to the Holy One of Israel.

There are certain key words in this Psalm that I want to point out. It is very useful when we are trying to discern the teaching of a passage of scripture, to write down key words which are repeated or emphasized. In the 52 verses of this psalm one of the most repeated words is "Yahweh" himself. It is stated 11 times. That is about once every 5 verses, which, I think, is somewhat normal for many of the psalms.

But this frequent use of the word "Yahweh," which is the personal, covenant name of the one true and living God, tells us something here. It tells us that he is the main character, the most important person in this psalm. This psalm has a lot to say to us about Yahweh, his nature, what he is like, his attributes, and how he relates to humanity, and especially to David and the promised coming one that Nathan the prophet spoke of.

Another important word is that word that Nathan used, it is "forever;" it is used 9 times. But importantly it is in 3 of the first 4 verses, so it sets the stage here to describe the nature of God's relationship with his people and of his promises to them, it is "forever." God doesn't usually do things temporarily or haphazardly, but he does things to last permanently; he works with specific intention.

There are other important words in this psalm that are used repeatedly such as steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness – words which describe Yahweh's nature. Plus there are words describing this great promise God made to David – it is called a "covenant." What is a covenant? It is a stated purpose of God to carry out his will among people in a specific way. In this case, his covenant with David was a statement of God's purpose to place one of his descendants everlastingly upon the throne of the kingdom of God.

Another very important word in this psalm is the word "anointed." It is used at least 3 times in this Psalm:

Verse 20: I have found David, my servant;
 with my holy oil I have anointed him,

Verse 38: But now you have cast off and rejected;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.

Verse 51: with which your enemies mock, O Lord,
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

This word “anoint” or “anointed” is very important in the OT. Whenever a prophet, priest or king was being initiated into his office of holy service, he was anointed with oil; it was poured out on his head. It seemed to be a physical picture of the Spirit of God coming on that man to equip him for service in that office.

You remember that the prophet Samuel was directed by God to go and anoint one of Jesse’s seven sons as the new king of Israel, to replace Saul. It turned out that David, the youngest son, who was a shepherd boy, was the one chosen by God. We read in 1 Sam. 13:16:

13 Then Samuel took [ⓐ]the horn of oil [ⓑ]and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. [ⓒ]And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.

Oh, blessed anointing by the Spirit of the living God! It is what equipped David for his service to Yahweh and to Yahweh’s people. The Holy Spirit does the same thing today: he rushes upon each believer and equips him or her for service in his kingdom. How we need that “rushing” of the Spirit in our day, in our lives. Paul, in fact, says in Ephesians 5 :18-19: ***...be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in [ⓐ]psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,***

It was good enough for David; and it is good enough for us, if I may put it that way.

So, let’s consider the first of the four sections of this psalm:

I. Yahweh’s integrity is unfailingly dependable. v.1-18

I am using the word “integrity” here as a fresh way to describe God’s character. When we speak of humans, and we say that a man has integrity, we mean that he operates his life according to certain moral principles of a high standard. He does not succumb to the evil behavior and practices that many people engage in, but he is honest and upstanding – he treats others with fairness and justice and compassion. Whenever he speaks, he speaks the truth, he does not lie or deceive. He is a man of integrity. These are the kind of people we would want to be our politicians – our mayors and governors and presidents – our neighbors and friends.

Yahweh’s integrity means His love is steadfast – it’s not wish-washy, like human love sometimes.

This is one of the fundamental foundation stones of God's character and his relationship with his people. There are many things in life which are uncertain, but Yahweh's rock-solid faithfulness to his people in loving them is more certain than the rising of the sun ever morning.

His love lasts forever – as long as God lives- he will never die – so long will his love abide with this people.

His faithfulness extends to all generations – to end of human history and beyond.

His power is unlimited – there is nothing God cannot do by the word of his power – the only thing he cannot do is sin or tempt people to sin and be deceptive or untruthful.

He calms the raging seas – this is God's work. That's why when we saw Jesus calm the storm on the Sea of Galilee by the command of his mouth it was a revelation of his deity.

He smashed, he cut to pieces Rahab (Egypt) – reference to his destruction of Pharaoh and his army by drowning them in the Red Sea.

He created the heavens and the earth. All we see around us and as far into outer space as our telescopes will reach – all this is done by the hand, the command of God.

He created the mighty mountains – the hill country of central Texas and the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and the Himalayas in Nepal.

His throne is founded upon righteousness and justice. Often human thrones are obtained by bribery and deception and murder but God's throne is pure and holy and without any taint of evil.

Those who know him exult in him (v.15), his name, righteousness, strength, and protection. This is why King David loved Yahweh so much. Psalm 63:1-3:

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
 my soul thirsts for you;
 my flesh faints for you,
 as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
 beholding your power and glory.

³ Because your steadfast love is better than life,
 my lips will praise you.

I. Yahweh's integrity is unfailingly dependable. v.1-18

II. Yahweh's covenant with David was backed up by his unfailing integrity. v. 19-37

Hear the Word of the Lord again:

- 19 Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said:
"I have granted help to one who is mighty;
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
- 20 I have found David, my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him,
- 21 so that my hand shall be established with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
- 22 The enemy shall not outwit him;
the wicked shall not humble him.
- 23 I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.
- 24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.
- 25 I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.
- 26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'
- 27 And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
- 28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.
- 29 I will establish his offspring forever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.
- 30 If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my rules,
- 31 if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
- 32 then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with stripes,
- 33 but I will not remove from him my steadfast love
or be false to my faithfulness.
- 34 I will not violate my covenant
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.
- 35 Once for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.
- 36 His offspring shall endure forever,
his throne as long as the sun before me.
- 37 Like the moon it shall be established forever,
a faithful witness in the skies." *Selah*

Yahweh chose David and anointed him as king.

Yahweh gave David decisive victory over his enemies. v. 21-24

The Father established a solid personal, tender relationship with him (v.26)

Yahweh gave him the honors of the firstborn.

Yahweh promised David his offspring would be established in kingly rule unendingly.

Yahweh declared that if his descendants were disobedient, they would be punished.

The failure of David's descendants would not cancel the covenant with David to have a descendant on his throne forever. (2nd or 3rd time this promise made....)

II. Yahweh's covenant with David was backed up by his unfailing integrity. v. 19-37

III. Yahweh is questioned about his seeming rejection of his covenant with David. v. 38-51

³⁸ But now you have cast off and rejected;

you are full of wrath against your anointed.

³⁹ You have renounced the covenant with your servant;

you have defiled his crown in the dust.

⁴⁰ You have breached all his walls;

you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

⁴¹ All who pass by plunder him;

he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes;

you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴³ You have also turned back the edge of his sword,

and you have not made him stand in battle.

⁴⁴ You have made his splendor to cease

and cast his throne to the ground.

⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth;

you have covered him with shame. *Selah*

⁴⁶ How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?

How long will your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁷ Remember how short my time is!

For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

⁴⁸ What man can live and never see death?

Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? *Selah*

⁴⁹ Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,

which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked,

and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,

⁵¹ with which your enemies mock, O LORD,
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

III. Yahweh is questioned about his seeming rejection of his covenant with David. v. 38-51

v. 38-45 – the power at work is “**you**” – Yahweh himself is doing all these things to his anointed. Who is or who are the anointed?

- A. It cannot be King David because Yahweh prospered his kingship.
- B. It could refer to the mindset of the nation after the Babylonian captivity in about 586 BC.

Some refer to the fact that young King Jehoiachin at age 18, after ruling only 3 months in the throne of Israel was carried into captivity in Babylon and wore prison garments for the next 37 years (Kidner).

- C. It could have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army under Titus in 70 AD.
- D. Or it could have its ultimate fulfillment in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins.

When he faced the looming march to the cross of Calvary he prayed, that if at all possible, his heavenly Father would save him from having to go to the cross.

And on the cross...about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you **forsaken me?**”

From Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

.....

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

⁸ “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

As we see here in Psalm 89, Yahweh’s hand of blessing and protection has been withdrawn and every calamity imaginable has befallen the anointed one (s).

-the covenant renounced

- walls of protection thrown down

- defeated in battle
- everything thrown down in the dust
- life has been cut short
- death is approaching and humanity has no power to defeat it
- the covenant with David to have a kingly descendent forever seems thrown away on the trash heap of broken promises.

Upon whom are all these curses falling?

I would submit to you that the ultimate and primary fulfillment of Psalm 89 is in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

III. Yahweh is questioned about his seeming rejection of his covenant with David. v. 38-51

IV. Yahweh is to be blessed forever. v. 52

This is the 2nd great surprise in this psalm:

The first was the apparent failure of Yahweh to keep his promise to David

This one now is seeing how the anointed one, in spite of suffering the rejection and wrath of God, could now exhort all to bless Yahweh forever.

How can a man in such suffering and seeming rejection by Yahweh, still exhort us to worship and bless Yahweh?

Because his belief and confidence in the nature of God has not changed.

In spite of his suffering, distressing circumstances, he knows Yahweh has not changed. His nature is still as dependable, as ever, his steadfast love and faithfulness have not lessened in the least; his justice and righteousness are just as pristine, reliable and unfailing as ever.

And he knows that his covenant he established with David will be fulfilled in spite of his suffering, even his being deserted by his Father.

Isa. 53:10-11

Yet [⊗]it was the will of the Lord to crush him;

he has put him to grief;

[⊗]when his soul makes an offering for guilt,

he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;

[⊗]the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;

by his knowledge shall [⊗]the righteous one, my servant,

[⊗]make many to be accounted righteous,

[⊗]and he shall bear their iniquities.

It was Christ's suffering and being deserted by his Father because of our sins that we will never be deserted...

Psa. 89:50-51 - Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked,
and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,
⁵¹ with which your enemies mock, O Lord,
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

The anointed one is the Messiah in Hebrew, Christos in Greek and Christ in English.
Christ = 534 in NT.

As Ligon Duncan says, ,

This psalm is reminding us that we are not exempt from that kind of suffering and perplexity. But the question is, "Will you have hope when the adversity and the perplexity and the adversity comes?" The psalmist is showing you how. You go back to God's Word and you believe it, even when you don't understand it, even when your situation around you looks like it couldn't be true. And you just sing that Word back to God and believe that Word back to God until He opens the way. We're not exempt from suffering and perplexity, but we are equipped to suffer with hope.

Whatever our state, whatever our circumstance, whatever our situation, whatever public life is like, whatever our private circumstances are, it's always time to praise God. It reminds you a little bit of Job, doesn't it? "The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

It's always time to praise our God. No darkness, no darkness in this world exempts us from needing to express praise to Him for His perfections.

⁵² Blessed be the LORD forever!

Amen and Amen.

-by Pastor Jeff Gregory
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