

A Walk in the Dark

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Bible Verse: Psalm 88
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I know we have some visitors with us. We're glad to have you with us this evening. On Tuesdays, we are studying through the Psalms, Psalm by Psalm beginning in Psalm 1 and we are now to Psalm 88 and this is a magnificent Psalm, one that is a striking piece of Scripture, for sure, and I invite you to turn there with me as we study it. Here we find worship in a minor key. Here if you wanted to title the message on your notes, we have "A Walk in the Dark."

We'll begin in verse 1, passing over the inscription for the sake of time.

1 O LORD, the God of my salvation, I have cried out by day and in the night before You. 2 Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry! 3 For my soul has had enough troubles, And my life has drawn near to Sheol. 4 I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit; I have become like a man without strength, 5 Forsaken among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom You remember no more, And they are cut off from Your hand. 6 You have put me in the lowest pit, In dark places, in the depths. 7 Your wrath has rested upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah. 8 You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an object of loathing to them; I am shut up and cannot go out. 9 My eye has wasted away because of affliction; I have called upon You every day, O LORD; I have spread out my hands to You. 10 Will You perform wonders for the dead? Will the departed spirits rise and praise You? Selah. 11 Will Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave, Your faithfulness in Abaddon? 12 Will Your wonders be made known in the darkness? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? 13 But I, O LORD, have cried out to You for help, And in the morning my prayer comes before You. 14 O LORD, why do You reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? 15 I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on; I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome. 16 Your burning anger has passed over me; Your terrors have destroyed me. 17 They have surrounded me like water all day long; They have encompassed me altogether. 18 You have removed lover and friend far from me; My acquaintances are in darkness.

Last time, last Tuesday, we studied Psalm 87 and found that it was a glorious look into the future as it spoke of the glorious city Jerusalem and the wonders and the glories that would one day be brought to pass by the Lord in his great sovereignty over the nations, and the nations will gather together to worship Christ one day still future to us, and so it was a high note of majesty that we saw. Psalm 88 is a jarring contrast. If you read the two back-to-back with some measure of understanding, it is remarkable that they are placed side-by-side.

The theme of Psalm 88 is dark and foreboding. You find these words expressing the darkness that is in the Psalmist's heart as he writes: Sheol, pit, dead, grave, dark places, depths, departed spirits, Abaddon, darkness, rejection, afflicted, die, suffer, burning anger, terrors. Indeed, the last word in this Psalm in verse 18 is darkness. One commentator has said and I quote, "This is the darkest, saddest Psalm in all the Psalter. It is one wail of sorrow from beginning to end." This would be a difficult Psalm for a falsely upbeat church to preach because it has nothing of the tenor that they want to project and yet here it is in the Bible, here it is in the Psalter, and we ask this question then: what is happening in Psalm 88? I thought that the Psalms were the book of worship, the joyful shouts of the people of God? What is going on here, then, in Psalm 88 where there is no voice, there is no sliver of hope, there is no shade of light that shines through in what is being expressed? What we have here in Psalm 88 is we hear the voice of one of God's children who has suffered for a very long time. His affliction has led him to the brink of death and he has found nothing by way of encouragement, nothing by way of strength or earthly hope to cheer him along the way. It is a crushing weight that he is expressing and yet we find this, that without any external encouragement, he steadfastly prays.

So let's see what the Lord has for us as we unpack this Psalm in the hour ahead. First of all, let's take a look at the Psalmist's terrible affliction. His terrible affliction as we consider the first eight verses of this Psalm. He opens with a cry for the Lord to respond to him as so many of the Psalms do.

Look at verses 1 and 2 with me. He says,

1 O LORD, the God of my salvation, I have cried out by day and in the night before You. 2 Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry!

So we encounter him as we find others in the Scriptures, having prayed for a period of time, in this Psalmist's case as we'll see, a very long period of time, and he is praying after a long season of unanswered prayer. God has not responded. God has not helped him and so he's praying for God to receive his prayer, to incline his ear to him, which is another way of saying, "God, answer me and help me because you have not been doing that until now."

So he is writing this Psalm only after God had refused his prior prayers and had given him no relief and notice in verse 1, notice that he calls upon him in the name, "O LORD,"

all caps in most of your English Bibles, representing the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, the promise-keeping God, the God who is faithful to his people, in other words, and he addresses him by faith by this name as the God of his salvation. "Yahweh, You covenant-keeping God, Yahweh, the God of my salvation, it is to You that I direct my prayer," he says, "Hear me and answer me."

Now he addresses God by this name Yahweh on three other occasions in the Psalm. I want you to see this because it's very key in my perception to understand exactly what it is that he's saying and how to properly interpret it. In verse 9, he says, Psalm 88:9, he says, "I have called upon You every day, O LORD." In verse 13, he says, "But I, O LORD, have cried out to You for help." In verse 14, "O LORD, why do You reject my soul?" He is in the midst of a spiritual hurricane and he is clinging to the one tree that is not moving. While the wind blows about him and the storm is battering him on every side without even the relief of the eye of the hurricane passing over him for just a moment of respite, in the midst of the severity of the storm, he is cling to the one tree that is not yet uprooted. "God, You are Yahweh. God, You are the covenant-keeping God of Your people. God, I call out to You."

Now, what I want you to see and again for those of you that are visiting, what we do with the Psalms is we're treating each one of them in a single message. Psalm 119 will probably be the exception to that. We try to treat them all in a single message and just see the overall flow of the Psalm against what we're seeing rather than a detailed word-by-word exposition. What I want you to see here in light of the darkness that I pointed out to you earlier, all of the dark themes, the foreboding themes of the Psalm as a whole, what I want you to see is this and contemplate is this: the uses of the name Yahweh, indeed the very name Yahweh is in tension against the whole tenor of this Psalm. Yahweh means that God is the faithful covenant-keeping God and he is calling upon Yahweh expressing to him that he is not seeing any of this faithfulness manifested in his own experience. The God of deliverances, in other words, is not delivering him. Persistent prayer has produced no external results and even worse, there is no internal benefit that he is finding either. It is bleak inside and it is bleak outside. There is no relief from this storm.

His situation is bleak. He is troubled within. He is near death and all of those factors, all of that reality both inside and outside, cry out for God to hear and answer him and you see that expressed in verse 3. Remember he had said, "Let my prayer come before You. Incline Your ear to my cry." And he goes on in verse 3 and says,

3 For [for this reason, because] my soul has had enough troubles, And my life has drawn near to Sheol.

"I am dying here, O God, and my soul is troubled within. Doesn't it seem to You, Yahweh, that You should respond to me since You are the covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God and I am in this desperate strait with no hope of relief?"

You see the pulsating tension of what is in his heart and he describes the situation further as you go on to verse 4. Those who know him, consider him to be as good as dead. Verse 4 he said,

4 I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit [in other words, the people who know me, who see me, have cast me off as one who is as good as dead]; I have become like a man without strength, 5 Forsaken among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom You remember no more, And they are cut off from Your hand.

The picture that he's giving us here is that he is forgotten and forsaken as though he were one buried, nameless in a mass grave with others who are of no account. This situation has been so profoundly long and so profoundly deep and so profoundly dark that it seems as if God will never remember him again.

It's crushing, isn't it? I know that some of you have tasted some of this and the aftermath of death and sorrow and grief that has come upon you and you know that crushing weight of death and of affliction, and no human words comfort you or did comfort you in those times. Perhaps for some of you, I know that this has been my experience in the past, you cry out to God for help and you might as well be speaking into a trumpet that just returns your words in brass, having gone nowhere and not having been observed by the God who heard them. You might as well have been praying to a brick wall, it seemed in your experience in your mind, that's really important to keep in mind, it seems that way. Well, here in Psalm 88, we find something of that spiritual experience being expressed and what makes it all the more difficult for him, what makes it all the more troubling for him is that he understands that this affliction has come to him by the hand of God himself. That magnifies the alienation. It magnifies the separation. It magnifies the isolation that he feels. Where do you go if all of your human friends have abandoned and forsaken you and the one refuge that you turn to, you turn to the name of your God and you find no relief there either. This is isolation exponentially experienced.

Look at verse 6 with me and notice he's praying to God now and so when he uses the second person, "You," he is speaking to God when he says this, not to a human audience. In verse 6 he says,

6 You have put me in the lowest pit, In dark places, in the depths. 7 Your wrath has rested upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. 8 You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an object of loathing to them; I am shut up and cannot go out.

And when you read this Psalm sympathetically, you can almost taste the salt of his bitter tears, can't you, as you hear what he is saying, as you enter into the spirit of what he is expressing to God. His affliction has come upon him like repeated waves on the seashore and there is no relief in sight. He is shut up and he cannot go out and he attributes this to the hand of God.

Look at it again with me in verse 6, "You have put me in the lowest pit." Verse 7, "Your wrath has rested upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves." Like repeated waves on the seashore, this has come again and again in a relentless, monotonous cycle that gives him no relief. Wow. Wow. Pretty strong language. You can see how terrible his affliction is in these first eight verses. Vertically speaking, God is distant and seemingly nowhere to be found. Horizontally speaking, his friends have abandoned him. Internally speaking, he's devastated, without hope. He is utterly isolated and utterly alone.

That leads us to the second aspect of this prayer, of this Psalm I should say, and it's his touching prayer, his touching prayer here beginning in verse 9. Beginning in verse 9, you see him calling out to God and he says,

9 My eye has wasted away because of affliction; I have called upon You every day, O LORD; I have spread out my hands to You.

Don't miss that. Don't miss that. Do you see the relentless nature of his faith? Do you see the persistent nature in which he has sought the Lord? Day after day, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, all the way to Saturday, week after week, month after month, crying out to God and finding no answer, finding no relief. You can see why it would be easy to just pass over this Psalm if you were just picking and choosing the ones that you liked the best to speak on. This is a very difficult experience and as I may expand on a little bit later, the utter darkness of this Psalm is unique to the Psalter. There are 149 other Psalms and none of them read exactly like this one. It makes a unique contribution to the canon of Scripture, a unique contribution to the Psalter itself, and shows us that there is a time and there is a place and for some saints they go through seasons like this. Job certainly did, didn't he? Job knew something about this darkness and his fickle friends said, "You're the blame. You're the one to blame. You must have sin that you're hiding for God to deal with you in this manner."

So this Psalm represents what for occasional saints, not for all, for occasions in life, not necessarily for all of life, this can be the experience of a true saint of God and for those of you who perhaps are in this darkness, that may be the one glimmer of light that you need to know. When a man, when a woman, has had this dark bowl placed over their life, it is very rare, it is extraordinarily rare to find a human being who truly sympathizes and understands without a sense of distance or judgment or accusation or indifference, right? And that only isolates even more and makes it all the more difficult to bear and to endure and when you are in that situation and when it seems that there is not even spiritual relief found from the Scriptures and from your knowledge of God and everything has just been extinguished, sometimes the one glimmer of light that you need to take the next step is to find here in Scripture passages like Psalm 88, like the book of Job, that say that once in a while God will deal with his saints in this way and to find in that the encouragement that says, "There is a context here. I have not lost my mind. I am not abandoned utterly. There is a context here. There is one in the Scriptures with whom I can identify when I find this expressed this way in Psalm 88." We'll say more about that in connection to Christ toward the end of the message but if you're in that dark circumstance, let me just invite

you to Psalm 88 and to find that there is a voice given to you, there is a voice given for you in the Scriptures in that isolation and that is a great and profound encouragement for those that are walking in this dark shadow of life.

Now, he has said in verse 9, "I have called upon You every day; I have spread out my hands to You," expressing the reality of unanswered prayer. "God, it's not, God it's not for any lack of my seeking You that I'm in this position. It's not that I've walked away. I have been at Your throne day after day after day and there has been no relief. I've called upon You every day, Yahweh, You covenant-keeping God. I have spread out my hands to You, Yahweh, You covenant-keeping God, and here I am. I'm on the brink of death with no relief." It's powerful. Don't you love the fact that Scripture will speak so honestly to human experience? Don't you love the fact that Scripture does not paint a false and rosy picture of all of life? Don't you love the fact that Scripture deals with reality in this kind of way? I do.

Now he goes on in verse 10, remember he's feeling as though he's on the brink of death, and he says here in verses 10 through 12, he makes a very poignant painful argument to God to try to prompt God to answer him. Look at these next three verses in verse 10. He says,

10 Will You perform wonders for the dead? Will the departed spirits rise and praise You? 11 Will Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave, Your faithfulness in Abaddon? 12 Will Your wonders be made known in the darkness? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

What's he saying here and why is he saying it? At a human level, what he is saying is this, he says, "God, if I die here, there is going to be no purpose in my suffering whatsoever. If You do not deliver me, how am I possibly going to be able to praise You after I am gone? Once I'm dead, Father, there's no more for You to do for me and the spirits who have departed do not rise and praise You before men. You receive no glory from the dead." He's speaking on a human level, a human perspective here. He says, "From the grave who's going to declare Your lovingkindness? Who will talk about Your faithfulness in Abaddon," and word that means "destruction." It's parallel to "grave." "When souls depart and go to this netherworld, this place of death and separation, God, every opportunity that they have to praise Your name has been extinguished and so, God, what purpose is it for You from Your perspective, for Your glory not to deliver me if I'm just going to die and my voice and tongue are silenced forever? There's no point in this from Your perspective. This does You no good."

Now, let me just quickly say here that the Psalmist here is not denying the conscious existence after death that Scripture elsewhere teaches about souls that depart. He's not addressing it from that perspective and it would be silly for him to do so because he is in the middle of an earthly dilemma that has no solution. He is arguing and speaking from within a human earthly perspective. If he dies, he cannot speak for God to other men on earth, is his point. When his tongue lies cold and silent in the grave, and as the hymnwriter said, "When the death dew lies cold on his brow," there's nothing left to be

said, and from an earthly perspective all of this suffering would have been an utter spiritual waste. "From an earthly perspective," he says, "death is a realm of inactivity, silence, separation, gloom and oblivion so why, God, send me there without granting me relief first? And yet as I've cried to You day after day after day, all You have done has left me in this dark silence of oppressive spiritual experience."

So you see his touching prayer. He's arguing with God to hear him and to respond and yet he's calling out to Yahweh. He's calling out the very name that represents faithfulness. So there is this explosive tension in his heart, this explosive tension in his mind. "God, I know by Your revelation who You have said that You are. I know by common experience with the people of Israel that You are the God who has delivered Your people even from slavery in Egypt in the past. I know these things but, God, that is so far removed from my own experience that it seems like a rank and utter contradiction. God, the way that You are dealing with me contradicts Your own very name, so it seems." And that becomes his argument, then, for God to answer his prayer favorably. "God, this is Your name. Your name means Your faithfulness. My experience has been consistently dark day after day after day. If I die like this, I'm not going to have any opportunity to praise You before men for it and so, God, everything about my situation and everything about Your name cries out for You to intervene and help me to show me mercy that You thus far have withheld from me." This is the raw voice of desperation, clinging, as I said, to the one tree in the hurricane, the name of God that has not moved.

Now, we've seen his terrible affliction, we see his tender prayer, his touching prayer, and now we look, finally, thirdly, at his tested faith. His tested faith. Though he is discouraged in his dark circumstances, he still has faith even though God's not doing much to help him out here.

Look at verse 13 with me. He says,

13 But I, O LORD, have cried out to You for help, And in the morning my prayer comes before You.

"I start my day on this theme, O God, of again coming before You and asking for Your help." So now here in this Psalm for the third time he is calling out to God by his covenant-keeping name and saying, "God, help me."

One commentator says this at this juncture in the Psalm, and this is very very critical to understand. Let me back up before I read that quote and just say that I recognize that this sounds foreign to, this language, this experience, this argument of the Psalmist sounds somewhat foreign to almost everything else that we've seen in the Psalms in the times gone by. Normally when the Psalmist cries out to God, normally you'll see him turning from trials to triumph; normally you'll see a turn from despair to joy. Here in this Psalm, though, you don't find that turn taking place. You keep waiting for the road to turn away from its destination and it just keeps going further and further down toward this dark end, and the temptation is to view an expression like this, the collective expression of Psalm 88, the temptation is to view it in a critical and judgmental light and say, "There must be

something wrong with him that his experience is like this; that he would speak to God like this."

I agree with the commentator who said this and I quote, and listen to it carefully. If you can get this, you can master something really important. I quote, "The very frequency and insistency of prayer marks the Psalmist as a godly man who believes in the Lord's righteousness and fidelity toward His own." Let me read that again. "The very frequency and insistency of prayer marks the Psalmist as a godly man who believes in the Lord's righteousness and fidelity toward His own." In other words, beloved, don't judge him harshly by the words that he speaks. Job said that the words of one who is in despair, those words belong to the wind. Rather, judge him by the manner in which he persistently and consistently calls on God for help when he has no external inducement or encouragement along the way. I would suggest to you that actually rather than seeing a man of little or no faith here in Psalm 88, you are seeing one of the most exemplary manifestations of faith possible because he continues to call out to God, he continues to believe in his name when absolutely nothing encourages him to do so.

Faith, beloved, sometimes is reduced to an exercise of your will when there is no support of it from the feelings of your heart and the tension in his soul is palpable. His cries are unanswered.

Look at verse 14. He says,

14 O LORD, why do You reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?

You know, Habakkuk, we studied Habakkuk a couple of times in the course of the life of our church over the past seven years, the prophet Habakkuk voiced similar dismay in his opening prayer of his prophecy when he said, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help and You will not hear? I cry out to You violence and yet You do not save." He knows that God is supposed to be the God who answers prayer. His experience is diametrically opposed to that. The persistence of prayer, the asking, knocking and seeking of which Christ spoke in Matthew 7 has done him no good and yet here he is again the next day, the next morning calling on him again.

His affliction has been long and, oh beloved, beloved, enter into his experience with sympathy. Have mercy in your heart upon this afflicted saint as you read what he says in verse 15. He says,

15 I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on; I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome.

Do you know what he's saying here? Sometimes and we've talked about this in the past, in other Psalms you'll find the Psalmist drawing upon prior experience as a means of encouraging his faith. "I remember the days gone by when You blessed me and that fuels my hope and gives me the courage and the motivation I need to ask You to help me again

in the future." What this Psalmist is saying here, he doesn't have anything like that to draw upon. He says, "From my youth on, I have been afflicted and Your terrors have overwhelmed me. I don't have any better days to remember. It's always been like this for me." In his experience, God has been the source of terrifying affliction.

Look at verse 15 again, "I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on; I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome." Notice the second person, "You, Your."

16 Your burning anger has passed over me; Your terrors have destroyed me. 17 They have surrounded me like water all day long; They have encompassed me altogether.

And the result is that's what he's received from God and in verse 18, in his human experience, he's left alone. Look at verse 18,

18 You have removed lover and friend far from me; My acquaintances are in darkness.

"I can't see my friends because they're not here. There is no one here to give me earthly comfort. You have been the source of frightening adversity to me, O God." And it closes on that note. As much as we may want it, as much as our prior experience in the Psalms conditions us to expect it, there is no closing note of hope. This Psalm literally ends in darkness. He has finished praying in the same state in which he began. No answers. No relief. And every expectation that tomorrow will be another experience just like today, which was just like yesterday, and the day before that, stretching all the way back into his youth.

So he finished praying in the same state that he had begun. He finished praying without understanding why, just as Job also never understood the reason for his affliction either, and this Psalm closes and is intended to be a unit of thought for the people of God.

It's so dark. How are we to understand this? How are we to make some kind of sense of this? Well, one writer suggests this, he says and I quote, he says, "The Lord knows that the sentiment of this whole Psalm sometimes best describes His wayward, shortsighted, impenitent, insensitive and faithless children." Is that our take-away from Psalm 88? Is that why Psalm 88 is in the canon? Is the inspired writer of Scripture wayward and unrepentant? Is that the lesson to grab from this Psalm? I think that question's kind of important.

Well, Charles Spurgeon didn't think so. Charles Spurgeon did not view the Psalmist as a faithless one. In fact, Charles Spurgeon in the transparency of his godly soul said this in his exposition of Psalm 88 in "The Treasury of David." He said and I quote the great Baptist preacher. Spurgeon speaking of himself in the third person says this, "He who now feebly expounds these words knows within himself more than he would care or dare to tell of the abysses of inward anguish. It is an unspeakable consolation that our Lord Jesus knows this experience, having except the sin of it, felt it all in Gethsemane when he

was exceeding sorrowful even unto death." I shortened his quote. If you want to look it up in "The Treasury of David," it's a much more expansive statement than that, but Spurgeon is saying, "My soul has been there. I know by direct personal experience that is so depressing and so dark and was so difficult that I don't care to tell you about it, and I wouldn't dare to tell you about it because," he says, "it is certain that it would be misunderstood."

I would never class myself with Spurgeon but I could say the exact same thing that he said about his own experience. I've been in that dark place of inward anguish where there was no relief, where the heavens were brass, where every cry for help was ignored, it seemed, and the men to whom I reached out for help were less than useless. Look, as I said earlier, we have 149 Psalms that show hope to one degree or another and it is important for us to understand that that is the usual pattern for God's children. It is not common, it is not usual for God to bring a saint through this dark dark place, and it is a blessing and a grace from God that he is like that, but Psalm 88 teaches us that once in a while there can be exceptions for that. Psalm 88 teaches us and some of you have been there, some of you are there, Psalm 88 shows us that unrelieved suffering may legitimately be the believer's lot in life. Sometimes God allows some of his children to sample the sorrow of abandonment. Sometimes he leaves them to feel the isolation and when he does, whether we know this simply through the teaching of Scripture or whether we have somehow tasted it a bit in our own personal experience, it's a past tense event for me, just so you know, for which I can only give endless praise to God, but here is the way that we need to think and understand about it now 3,000 years after this Psalm was written, give or take 500 years. Now we can look back to Gethsemane. Now we can look back to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, now, now, beloved, now maybe we have tasted a small little sample of what the darkness and the isolation was for Christ when he was separated from his Father when he bore sin on our behalf and bore the wrath of God on our behalf and he cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Maybe something of this kind of isolation in our own human experience gives us an idea of what multiplied exponentially it was like for our Lord to bear sin and wrath and separation on our behalf. His suffering was real. His anguish was genuine. His anguish was felt for us and in Psalm 88, we get a distant glimpse, we get kind of a reverse meteor, a dark light across the sky that gives us a brief witness of how much our Lord has done for us, how much he suffered for us. There is a reason why Scripture refers to him as a man of sorrows. There's a reason why we sing, "Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah, what a Savior."

You know, our gloom and isolation would be a rightful result of our corruption, of our guilt. It would be right for us to only know that as our experience. Not Christ, that sinless, glorious Son of God who knew nothing but perfect communion with his Father from before the beginning of time, and now he voluntarily entered into this kind of Psalm 88 experience on our behalf? Voluntarily? Do you glimpse something now by contrast of the great love of Christ for the souls of his people? The great love of Christ? This was no syrupy sentiment of love through which Christ went to the cross. This was the darkness of isolation, the despair of separation. No wonder he cried out, "Lord, if it's possible," three times, "let this cup pass from Me." But you see the beauty, the greatness of his soul

in knowing what lay ahead for him, nevertheless he prayed, "But Father, not My will but thine be done. Bring this gloom to Me, bring the judgment on Me, bring the darkness on Me, Father, if that be Your will, if that would deliver My bride from her sin, if that would deliver Your elect. If it falls on Me for their benefit, Father, I submit. I accept it."

When you see the glory of Christ like that, beloved, it makes you want to turn your eyes away. It makes you want to put your face on the ground and say, "O Lord, the price that You paid in Your one person, two natures," in his, in the infinity of his divine nature, he felt this infinitely and, beloved, he felt it for you and he did it because he wanted to, he did it in obedience to his Father and, beloved, get a whole new perspective on this perfection of Christ, he did it in love. He did this because he loved your soul enough that he could endure that, that he would walk into that so that you might go free, so that you might be forgiven, so that you might be reconciled to God, so that you might be with him in eternity forever and ever. He bore the grief so that you would know the joy.

So we find in Psalm 88 at a human level, a mark of realism. Sometimes there is no resolution for our difficulty. Sometimes there is no relief, no relief, no resolution. Does that mean that our sufferings are without meaning? Oh, perish the thought. Don't think that way. Look at what the God of Psalm 88 has done. Even for this Psalmist, even for the writer of Psalm 88, God granted such enduring meaning even in the context of time to his suffering that we are considering his word millennia later, thousands of years later. Of course there's meaning to his suffering.

In our day now, we look at this God to whom he cried out, the covenant-keeping, "O Lord God, the covenant-keeping God," and what do we see about this God? It was that God to whom he prayed that came to earth to save his people from their sins. It's that God who will return in glory. You see, beloved, we just have to have a completely different perspective on life, don't we? It's not about immediate resolution. It's not about immediate deliverance. One of the damnable aspects of superficial theology and seeker-sensitive ministry and health-and-wealth prosperity gospel, you realize that's an oxymoron, right? That's a contradiction in terms, there is no Gospel in that at all, is that it tells people to expect and even demand by faith immediate resolution of their problems. That's not biblical and it conditions us to live by sight not by faith, and it conditions us to live according to what we see and feel in utter contradiction of the suffering of Christ and the testimony of Job, the testimony of Habakkuk, and the testimony of the writer of Psalm 88. It appalls me and it should appall you too.

Yes, this God may allow us to suffer like that for a time but do you know what? One day he's going to return in glory. Beloved, I plead with you to see, to understand and to embrace that our ultimate hope is not the resolution of problems in this life. That's not why we seek God. That's not the point. We need to abandon this self-centered perspective that responds to God as long as he's responding to us and things are going our way. Who's God here? Who's the one in control? Who's the Sovereign and who's the subject here?

No, beloved, we seek God based on his character and his revelation, not because we necessarily get relief from our profound sorrow, we seek God because we see the preeminent worth and value and glory of Jesus Christ who suffered like this on our behalf, and we seek him for his own name's sake. We seek him for who he is. A big part of the time, we get the earthly blessings beside. Sometimes we don't and that doesn't change our determination to seek him, rather we seek him all the more because we have an assurance of final victory in our blessed Lord Jesus.

Let's pray together.

Father, though You slay us, yet we will trust in You. Be glorified in our lives. Help those suffering in this manner, those who walk in darkness and have no light. O God, would you give grace to their souls to persevere and to find in Psalm 88 reason to continue, but even more, Father, to see in our Lord Jesus the Shepherd who is worth seeking, the Shepherd who protects us, who provides for us, and who guides us, Father, to find in Christ and in Christ alone even if there is never an external inducement to help us, to find in the revealed Christ, the word written, revealing the Word Incarnate, to persevere with hope that our faith is not in vain? And thus we trust You, O God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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