

Psalm 88 • A cry of pain and sorrow

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Psalm chapter 88. While you're turning there, I wanted to share some quotes with you about the Psalms.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I'm sure, I imagine most of you may know who he is. He was a man who loved the Psalms.

He wrote and said, "The Psalms is the prayer book of Jesus Christ in the truest sense of the word." He prayed the Psalms and now it has become His prayer for all time. We understand how the Psalms can be prayer to God, and yet, God's own Word. Precisely because, here we encounter the praying Christ. Because those who pray the Psalms are joining in with the prayer of Jesus Christ. Their prayer reaches the ears of God. Christ has become their intercessor." Great quote.

He also said, "The more deeply we grow into the Psalms, and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich our prayer will become."

And then finally he wrote, "Whenever the Psalms is abandoned, an incomparable treasure is lost to the Christian Church. With its recovery will come unexpected power."

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "The delightful study of the Psalms has yielded me boundless profit and ever growing pleasure. Common gratitude constrains me to communicate to others a portion of the benefit with the prayer that it may induce them to search further for themselves."

Gordon Fee wrote concerning the Psalms. "The Psalms, like no other literature, lift us to a position where we can commune with God, capturing a sense of the greatness of His kingdom and a sense of what living with Him for eternity will be like."

And then finally, Ray Stedman wrote, "The Psalms are much more than poetry. Many of them bear the title, Maskil or teaching psalm. (Thus) They are thus intended to instruct the mind, as well as to encourage the heart. They are designed not only to reflect a mood, but to show us also how to handle that

mood, how to escape from depression, or how to balance exaltation with wisdom."

Just some great quotes. Let's pray, as we get into the Psalms,

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word tonight as we get into the Psalms. We pray LORD, that You would lead us in all that we see tonight in the Scripture. Lead us and guide us. Direct our hearts we ask. In Jesus precious name, amen.

Psalm 88. This is, I don't know how to put it any other way, but this is an incredibly sorrowful Psalm. This is not the Psalm that you're going to read as a pick me up. I'm just telling you. It is regarded by some as the saddest Psalm in the entire collection of 150 psalms. And that's saying something.

It is a lament, which is to say, it is a cry. And it records the cry of someone who is going through a very dark time, a very dark season. And the person is asking God, why? And I want to read it through.

It says in verse 1,

"O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

2 Let my prayer come before you; (and) incline your ear to my cry!

3 For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol." (ESV)

That's a very poetic way of saying that, I feel that I'm about to die. Because Sheol is a word for the grave. And so when he says, I find my life being drawn near to Sheol. He's saying, I'm feeling the very life ebb away. In fact, he goes on to say in verse 4,

"I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength,

5 like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

6 You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.

7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

8 You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape;

9 my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread my hands to you. (correction - I spread out my hands...)

10 Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you?

11 Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon?"

And Abaddon, by the way, is a word in the Hebrew that just literally means, destruction. It's, I mean, it can be translated destruction or even perishing. You can see where this Psalm writer is at.

Verse 12,

"Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"

13 But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

14 O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?

15 Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.

16 Your wrath is swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.

17 They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.

18 You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness." Or, in other words, darkness has become my companion, or companions.

You can see from this psalm that the writer considered himself pretty much like the walking dead. And as I said, it's a sorrowful psalm. It's dark in its message. It even borders on hopelessness.

This person feels rejected by God, feels also shunned by man and is in the depths of grief. I don't know if you've ever been in the depths of grief. But this is a Psalm of that very thing.

And missing from this psalm is what we've seen in many of the other Psalms that have come before it. And that are..., in amidst the expressions of grief and sorrow, are expressions of faith.

How many times did we see that in David's prayer? David would, he would pour out his heart just the way this psalmist does. But he would also intertwine comments or declarations of faith. He would say, and yet my soul will trust in the Lord..., or, and yet, my hope is in you God, all the day long, for you hear my cry, and you are there to respond to me..., and on and on.

And this is missing in this Psalm. Which is one of the reasons we consider it, frankly, one of the saddest Psalms. And this is that place of darkness and despondency that people fall into from time to time. I mean I suppose you could, say this person might be even been clinically depressed. Who knows? And yet the psalmist is crying out to God. That's the good thing.

And instead of just dealing with the sorrow in their own self-pity, they are crying out to God. But, here's my question: If you were to encounter someone like this, what would you say? That's a toughie, isn't it?

Every so often I'll get a note, or an email just like this. Not as poetic, mind you. It doesn't have all of the parallelism that is part of Hebrew poetry or anything. And they probably aren't going to use Hebrew words like Abaddon and Sheol and stuff like that.

But the message is the same. I don't know what I'm going to do because I'm at the end of it. I'm literally at the bottom of the barrel. I'm in the depths of despair and pain has overwhelmed me.

And this is the place where a lot of people would just say. What's the use of going on? And to a degree, we can understand the kind of pain that washes over someone to that level that they truly begin to feel hopeless.

But this is the time when you have to go back and you have to look at the Word of God. And you have to decide for yourself, am I going to believe it or not? And we do come to those places, don't we, in our lives. And in fact, I think that's where we begin to mature as Christians when we come to those places.

In fact, I doubt somebody is going to mature perhaps like they should, if they don't come to those places. Where I have to look at the promises of God's Word and I have to ask myself, am I going to believe it or not?

And honestly, when you're talking to someone who is at this level of despair and dealing with this level of pain, the, one of the best things you can do is to gently and politely lay out the truth of God's Word. And simply ask the question, you know what? It's your choice. You can believe it, or you can say, I don't believe it. I choose not to believe it. But of course, that's going to be to your eternal loss.

And the fact of the matter is, there are things to say to people who are going through that sort of stuff. There are things to say to those sorts of folks right from the Psalms. Let me show you on the screen one of the things that I would share with somebody right from Psalm chapter 34. And that is this,

Psalm 34:18 (ESV)

The LORD is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

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That's a promise. Okay? That's a promise. That's not just a nice sentiment. That's not just a nice quote in Reader's Digest that you can kind of go, ah, yeah, well, gee, that made me feel a little better. That is the truth of God's Word. "*The Lord is near to the broken hearted and (He) saves those who are crushed in spirit.*" It's a non-negotiable truth. Right? It's just simply true.

Or it's not if somebody chooses to say, well, I just don't, I don't believe that. But there's no way out. There's no way out of getting out of that hole. Once you begin to lose hope in the promises of God, you've dug yourself a very deep hole.

When I have found in my own life, when I begin to sense a little bit of the direction of my heart going this way, I have to go back to the promises of God. I have to go back and open my Bible and begin to read those promises and say, okay, this is what God said. Now, am I going to accept it? Am I going to believe it? Am I going to stand on it as truth?

And that's what we need to do when we're dealing with someone who's going through a situation like this. Put together promises from God's Word and go to them and say, hey, let's just, let me bolster your heart for a minute in the Word of God. Let me just read some promises, some wonderful promises from God's

Word. And allow the Word to do what it does the best. Do you guys understand?

I've heard people say, before, when somebody's going through a really hard time, the worst thing you can do is quote Scripture. I disagree. I disagree wholeheartedly.

My Bible says that the Word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any double edged sword. (Hebrews 4:12) And it has power connected to it that your words and my words simply don't have. And I can say all kinds of nice sentiment and platitudes and encouragements to try to lift somebody's spirits. But my words don't have power unless I am speaking the Word of God.

I think one of the best things you can do is gently and lovingly share the Word. Let me remind you of what God's Word has to say. God is near the broken hearted and He saves the crushed in spirit.

That is a promise. And you can hang on to that promise. Because, I understand how things can look very dark. But it is the Word of God and it is clinging to the promises of God, that brings light back into our lives.