

# A Soul Full of Trouble — Yet Still Praying

## Psalm 88

This is the only lament psalm that does not end in praise. Most of these psalms go from sorrow — to trust — to praise. This one, however, begins with sorrow, continues in sorrow, and ends in sorrow. In fact, the last word is “darkness.”

There are times in the life of the believer where this psalm feels more familiar than any other. Times when prayer seems unanswered; darkness lingers; and relief does not come quickly.

### Romans 8:26

<sup>26</sup> 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.

This psalm has one of the most detailed headings in the book of Psalms.

- Authorship — “A Psalm... for the sons of Korah... Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite”
  - “Sons of Korah” — temple singers associated with worship (1 Chron. 6:31-33). This is a public worship psalm of deep darkness.
  - “Heman the Ezrahite” — identified in 1 Kings 4:31 as a man of great wisdom. This is likely the same Heman connected with temple music.
- The term “Maschil”
  - This word indicates instruction, which makes it a teaching psalm; something meant to be learned from.

- This psalm is not just expressing pain — it is teaching us how to pray in pain.
- “A Song... to the chief musician”
  - This means it was intended for corporate use. In other words, God intended even this kind of sorrow to be part of the worship life of His people.
  - The church needs not only to sing songs of victory, but also songs for the valley.
- “Upon Mahalath Leannoth”
  - “Mahalath” (only used here and in the heading of Psalm 53) — although a debated term, in the context here, it most likely deals with sickness or affliction, or a musical mode associated with sorrow.
  - “Leannoth” — means to afflict, to humble, or for affliction.
  - Combined idea is this is a song of affliction or a song to be sung in suffering.

The psalm opens with the only positive statement in the psalm — “O LORD God of my salvation.” This is a confession of faith, a statement of theology, and a declaration of who God is. And yet, everything that follows seems to contradict that opening statement.

Psalm 88 does not teach us how to escape trouble — it teaches us how to endure it. It shows us what faith looks like when relief does not come quickly. And it is the testimony of a man whose soul is “full of trouble” — yet who refuses to stop praying.

## I. A SOUL OVERWHELMED — vv. 1-7

### A. The declaration of faith (v. 1a)

1. Even in darkness, the psalmist names God rightly. This is faith.
2. Jeremiah shows this faith in Lamentations 3:18-24.

Job 13:15

<sup>15</sup> Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

3. Very important note: everything that follows is spoken from this foundation.

## B. The depth of trouble (vv. 1b-5)

1. "I have cried day and night before thee" v. 1b) — there was no seeming relief in his mind.
2. "Full of troubles" – v. 3 (שָׂכַחַה רָעוֹת) — saturated; filled to capacity
3. "My life draweth nigh unto the grave" — the word for "grave" here is "Sheol." In other words, the psalmist thought he was about to die from the stress of his grief.
4. "Free among the dead" — cut off; abandoned.

2 Corinthians 1:8

<sup>8</sup> For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

## C. The disturbing reality (vv. 6-7)

1. "Thou hast laid me... Thy wrath lieth hard aupon me — he attributes his suffering directly to God.

2. He may not understand it, but he is still bringing it to God, not running away from Him.

## II. A SOUL ISOLATED — VV. 8-12

### A. Separation from others (vv. 8-9a)

His suffering is intensified by his isolation from those closest to him (“mine acquaintance”).

2 Timothy 4:16

<sup>16</sup> At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge.

### B. Supplication without relief (v. 9b)

“I have called daily... I have stretched out my hands...”

This is ongoing, disciplined prayer — or, daily persistence.

### C. The argument from death (vv. 10-12)

1. His argument is simple — “If I die, I cannot testify of Your goodness among the living.”
2. This is faith reasoning with God.
3. Hezekiah makes a similar argument.

Isaiah 38:18–19

<sup>18</sup> For the grave cannot praise thee, death can *not* celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. <sup>19</sup> The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I *do* this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.

## III. A SOUL UNRELIEVED — VV. 13-18

Still praying... but still in darkness.

### **A. The continuation of prayer (v. 13)**

1. "But unto thee have I cried" — repeated from verse 1 and 2.
2. "In the morning shall my prayer prevent thee" — the word "prevent" (ⲉⲩⲧⲣ) doesn't mean to hinder as it does today, but it carries the idea of going before. The psalmist is saying that his prayer began in the morning.
3. Still no answer — but he kept praying.

### **B. The cry of confusion (v. 14)**

"LORD, why casteth thou off my soul" — faith is now asking "why," not just "help."

Psalm 13:1

<sup>1</sup> How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

### **C. The constancy of suffering (vv. 15-17)**

"From my youth up... while I suffer thy terrors..." — this speaks of prolonged affliction.

### **D. The climax of darkness (v. 18)**

1. "Thou put... mine acquaintance into darkness" — darkness was his closest companion.
2. There's no resolution — no praise — and yet the psalm ends still speaking to God.

Conclusion:

The psalmist never gets the answer he is asking for — at least it's not recorded for us. And yet, as we've stated already, he never stops praying.

That's the ultimate victory here — faith that continues when we don't feel like praying.

Luke 18:1

<sup>1</sup> And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

The question asked in this psalm is important: "What do we do when the darkness does not lift?" The answer is found in the One to whom the psalm ultimately points: Christ Himself.

- Christ entered this darkness fully

Matthew 27:46

<sup>46</sup> And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

- Like the psalmist, Christ cried out to God; He experienced abandonment; He entered into deep darkness.
- Psalm 88 describes a man who *feels* forsaken. At the cross, Christ was truly bearing that forsakenness.
- Christ experienced what the psalmist feared

- He was truly cut off (v. 16)

Isaiah 53:8

<sup>8</sup> He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

- He entered death itself (vv. 2-4, 6)

- He bore the wrath of God (v. 7)
- Christ did not remain in darkness
  - Psalm 88 ends in darkness — the gospel does not.

Acts 2:24

<sup>24</sup> Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

- This psalm stops at the grace — Christ came out of the grave.
- The believer's hope

Because Christ entered the darkness — and overcame it — we know that our darkness is not final; our prayers are not unheard; and our suffering is not meaningless.

2 Corinthians 4:8–9

<sup>8</sup> *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

Hebrews 4:15

<sup>15</sup> 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.

Because He lives, no child of God will remain in the dark forever.