

Walk in his way: The way of endurance

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit, our teacher, and your great glory, our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Last week we walked on the way of hope and I started speaking about that light at the end of the tunnel.

This week we're going to think together about walking on the way of endurance. And that happens when there isn't any light at the end of the tunnel at all.

For some of us, perhaps all of us, there are some days when that's what it seems like. There just isn't any light at all. Some of us, these days of darkness come and go. But for some of us, they're there all the time.

There are one or two Psalms where the final line or sometimes the whole final verse is quite shocking. Now this next paragraph I can't prove, but I just wonder if this is what's happened.

[1 : 27] One day at worship or perhaps in prayer, the Psalmist has heard themselves saying or thinking something shocking. Something which horrifies them.

My friends, darkness. Or perhaps darkness is my only friend. And what I wonder is, when the Psalmist gets to that point and has said that shocking thing, do they then begin a process in which they hear God speak to them and they create the rest of the Psalm before it?

Might it be that the Psalm grows out of this place of shock? Why have I said this? How did I end up here? Before getting into Psalm 88, just two things to comment on.

For the past hundred years or so, it's become common to classify the Psalms by type. What type of Psalm is it? Well, there's a praise Psalm. There's a thanksgiving Psalm.

There's a wisdom Psalm. There are lament Psalms. It turns out there are more lament Psalms than any other type of Psalm in the Bible.

[2 : 59] Our God knows our lives better than we know them. Our God knows our sorrows and our trials. And it turns out before we get to them, God has already prepared for us words that we can use when we are in distress.

Words that we can say when we can't find any words of our own. And not just any words. These are God's words breathed out by him, written down by his people in Scripture for us.

So that we can find them. And read them and make them our own. Then in the Bible, the book of Psalms is divided up into five sub-books.

Maybe notice this as you read through it. It's in book one, book two, book three. Book one is Psalms 1 to 41. And then 42 to 72. 73 to 89.

90 to 106. And 107 to the end. So obviously Psalm 83, Psalm 88, which we're in this morning, is in book three. Psalm 73 to 89.

[4 : 21] The only reason I'm telling you this is that this collection of Psalms, Psalm 73 to 89, faces up to the collapse of the monarchy in Jerusalem.

Psalm 74. The kings have failed to keep faithfulness with the Lord. The nation has failed to keep faithfulness with the Lord.

Therefore, the kings and the nation are now under the judgment of God. And they will soon face exile in Babylon. That's the context in which this psalm arises.

The struggle in these surrounding psalms is to put together the reality of what's happened with the background reality of God's promises.

His presence. That there would always be someone to sit on David's throne. That the nation would be preserved. That Jerusalem would be his city.

[5 : 32] That's the struggle which is at the heart of these psalms. Psalm 88 is the most extreme example of lamentation in the psalms.

Coming at the climax of national sorrow and despair. At the failure of their kings. But it is intended to teach us the way of endurance.

When you're in the darkness and there's no light at the end of the tunnel. And you don't even know that there is an end of a tunnel. When even God isn't answering.

There are only two things you can do. You can wait. You can endure in the darkness until God answers. And you can take up the psalm.

And repeat it over again. And over again. And over again. My friends. Darkness.

[6 : 38] But where in all this is God? The experience of darkness intensifies. The cry to God at the beginning of the psalm. Verses 1 and 2 are an urgent intimate cry.

A wailing cry to God. Particularly to the God of my salvation. The God who will turn his ear to my pain filled cry.

Even in the darkness. God remains my God. The passion and intimacy of this appeal.

Somehow make the darkness even more impenetrable. This first cry in verses 1 and 2. Is followed in verses 3 to 9. By an account.

Of the fading of the light. The psalmist writes of coming to the age of life. An outcast among the dead. In Psalm 69.

[7 : 37] Last week we read of unjust suffering. Of lying enemies. But here in Psalm 88. There is no speculation about why.

It has got dark. Only a report. Of what the psalmist is feeling. And experiencing. This is not about logic.

This is not about rationally describing. This is an emotional wheel. In verses 6 to 9.

It is you. The you I'm talking to. The you who is the God of my salvation. You are the one who has done this. This is not about not blaming lying enemies.

Or false tongues. Or deceptive opponents. But you. It seems important for each one of us to acknowledge.

[8 : 39] Even if only to ourselves. that we have said this to our God. I really do believe that only faithful disciples see such things to their God.

These verses are reporting for us what it is like to be a partner of the Lord. But then, halfway through verse 9, the opening appeal breaks out again.

I call to you, Lord, every day. I spread out my hands to you. I'm not giving up. I'm not going to shut up. Every day when I pray, I'm going to call out to you the same thing until you answer me.

Verses 10, 11, and 12 are a series of six questions. The answer to each one of which is no. As the Lord Jesus said, He is the God of the living and not the dead.

He will not do wonders for the dead. The dead will not praise Him. The dead will not speak of His faithfulness or share the good news of His love. In the darkness, nothing is known.

[10 : 02] Not the Lord's extraordinary deeds. Not His righteousness. Nothing. Death is an enemy to God.

Death is always an enemy. Darkness is the ultimate symbol of the absence of God. Martin Luther wrote of the strange experience of the absence of God.

Deus absconditus, he called it in Latin. St. John of the Cross wrote of the dark night of the soul.

They were both following the path of the psalmist who knew this before them.

But again, the appeal to God is voiced in verse 13. I, to you, Lord, I cry for help.

In the morning, my prayer rises to greet you. I will not give up. I'm still here. I'm still crying out to you. Every morning, you're going to hear the dawn chorus of my cry.

[11 : 09] Rising to meet you. Shockingly, the psalm ends with a direct accusation. Why are you rejecting me?

Why are you hiding from me? Why is your anger engulfing me? Why have you even taken my friends from me? Why have you left me with nothing but darkness?

Why have you left me with nothing but darkness? On a day when you don't know what to say to God, somewhere in the psalms, you'll find words to help.

And maybe one day, it'll be these words. for the disciple of Jesus there are only two options you can wait for God to shine the light of his presence into your darkness or you can repeat the psalm over again first time I typed that line I typed read the psalm over again but reading seems somewhat detached I can read things and forget about them you can repeat the psalm you can internalize it and it can become your cry we imagine the life of faith to be one of answered prayer believe in

Jesus and all will be well an awareness of the presence of God always ask Isaac Watts who wrote that last hymn about about that a man who's suffered with darkness his whole life we imagine that faith is when we speak of Jesus and others will come to faith in him when we serve the needy in our community and we make a difference in their lives but faith is also holding on faith is enduring faith is wailing into the darkness wheeling into the darkness in the direction of God every word every thought you direct towards your father God is filled with faith and achieves your enduring wonder if you remember when you were wee and out with mum and you came to the curb and mum would turn to you and say hold my hand is there any possibility that she meant that you could reach up and you could hold her hand and that would be enough did we not finally realize that what she meant was I'm going to clamp my hand onto yours and if it turns blue because I'm cutting off the blood I'm not letting go till we cross the road she held your hand way more tightly than you could ever hold on to her endurance is not about us and our poor strength reaching out and trying to hold on to our father God endurance is not about us and our poor strength reaching out and trying to hold on to our God and we are in his hand and nothing can shake us from it endurance is when we cannot feel his hand but we keep on trusting him that it's there endurance is following our savior Jesus into the garden and kneeling down beside him to pray and in that moment in the darkness as we hear him pray father take this cup from me we know that he understands where we are in the darkness all there is to do is to cry out to the father by night or by day day after day keep calling out to him endurance is when the Lord Jesus declares the gospel and all around him people start going away they start leaving him this is too hard we don't like it we don't want it to be that way we want it to be a different way so we are off and I suppose that's a third option

in the darkness you could decide you've had enough of this and you're off but that's not a faith option seeing them leave with his hard words in our ears by faith do we not see the Lord Jesus turn to us and ask us do you also want to leave but to whom shall we go you alone have the words of eternal life there's nowhere else to go last week we walked in the way of hope hope comes before endurance hope gives birth to endurance we can walk on the way of endurance because we have hope darkness is not the end our father God from nothing spoke light into the darkness the living word of our God is light a light which is life for all people a light which shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot master or overcome it when the waters surround us and would seem to overwhelm us for that moment we already have an anchor when we fear the darkness is all that we have and all that we will ever have for that moment we already have an anchor when it is as though we have been brought to the brink of death through the absence of God for that moment we have an anchor we endure not because we hold on to the anchor but because Christ who is the anchor has embedded himself in the shore because Christ who is the anchor casts out the rope of the Holy Spirit and that rope takes hold of us

[17 : 51] Jesus who alone is our anchor has gone before us Jesus has already descended into the darkness of death and rose again victorious for us Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth under the world encompassing darkness of God's absence for us yes for us in our salvation Jesus has gone before us and in him united to him hidden in him we endure we do nothing more remarkable than stand and continue to stand we do nothing but cry out words of faith trusting that God hears them in the darkness when we cannot help ourselves we cling to him who died for us and now lives for us and for our salvation let's pray together

Father for all those in the darkness today we pray that you would keep hold of them for each one of us when those days of darkness come keep hold of us and yet we pray we pray for that closer walk with you that blessed sense of your presence we pray that for each one of us the bright beam of your face would break through the darkness that we would know you and your smile upon us be with us we pray in Jesus name Amen holy