

PM Psalm 89:1-29 & Ephesians 1:1-14

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[0 : 00] Psalms, Psalm number 89 and verses 1 to 29. Psalm 89 verses 1 to 29.

And this is entitled, I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord. His covenant faithfulness to his people that is. So let's read here from the beginning.

I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever. With my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. For I said steadfast love will be built up forever.

In the heavens you will establish your faithfulness. You have said I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to David my servant. I will establish your offspring forever and build your throne for all generations.

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord. Your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord?

[1 : 05] A God greatly to be feared in the counsel of the holy ones. And awesome above all who are around him. O Lord God of hosts. Who is mighty as you are, O Lord.

With your faithfulness all around you. You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves rise, you still them. You crush them like a carcass.

You scatter your enemies with your mighty arm. The heavens are yours. The earth also is yours. The world and all that is in it. You have founded them.

The north and the south. You have created them. Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name. You have a mighty arm. Strong is your hand. High your right hand.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Steadfast love and faithfulness go before you. Blessed are the people who know the festal shout.

[2 : 02] Who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face. Who exult in your name all the day. And in your righteousness are exalted. For you are the glory of their strength.

By your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the Lord. Our King to the Holy One of Israel. 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. I have found David my servant. With my holy oil I have anointed him. So that my hand shall be established with him. My arm also shall strengthen him.

The enemy shall not outwit him. The wicked shall not humble him. I will crush his foes before him.

And strike down those who hate him. My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him.

And in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand on the sea. And his right hand on the rivers. He shall cry to me. You are my father.

[3 : 04] My God. And the rock of my salvation. And I will make him the firstborn. The highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever.

And my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever. And his throne as the days of the heavens.

We'll just read to there. May God bless to us this reading. Chapter 1. And we'll read verses 1 to 14. Ephesians chapter 1.

Verses 1 to 14. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 07] Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

That we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. According to the purpose of his will.

To the praise of his glorious grace. With which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption. Through his blood. Through his blood. Through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses.

According to the riches of his grace. Which he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight. Making known to us the mystery of his will. According to his purpose.

Which he set forth in Christ. As a plan for the fullness of time. To unite all things in him. Things in heaven. And things on earth.

[5 : 08] In him we have obtained an inheritance. Having been predestined according to the purpose of him. Who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

So that we who were the first to hope in Christ. Might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also. When you heard the word of truth. The gospel of your salvation.

And believed in him. Were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Who is the guarantee of our inheritance. Until we acquire possession of it. To the praise of his glory.

May God bless to us this reading too. Now we want to look at some words. From Ephesians chapter 1. And some words. As I say. Not the whole verse.

Some words from verse 4. And part of verse 5. He chose us in him. Before the foundation of the world.

[6 : 07] That we should be holy. And blameless before him. In love he predestined us. For adoption as sons. Through Jesus Christ. Christ.

Now I get a new service on my computer. And you get a whole series of headlines. That look great. And sometimes you click them. And see what's in the headlines.

And there was one headline. That struck me. And it said something like this. Lost chapter of the Bible. Discovered. And I thought. Well that's something I want to hear about.

So I clicked it. And I read the article. And they discovered. That it wasn't a chapter of the Bible. They were talking about. It was three words. And it hadn't been lost at all.

These three words had been found in certain old manuscripts. And this was another manuscript with that reading that they had. And that's of no significance to most Christians.

[7 : 09] And it's only of significance to a few very learned people. That bother about these details. And the point is. There was this big headline.

That sounded really important. And when you boiled it down. It wasn't very much at all. And you know.

That's the way that it is. With some of these headlines. Now I mention that because. Last time. I looked at verse 3. And I said. This is like the headlines.

Of this passage. Here are the chief ideas. Brought out to the front. And summarized. As in a headline. And we've got the originator.

Of this plan. It's God. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We've got the operation of this plan. It's all done in Christ. In union with him.

[8 : 02] And we've got the object of this plan. It is to enrich God's people. With all spiritual blessings. And if you think of that. As a headline. It's a startling one.

It really seems. To talk about something big. And the question is. Does what follows. Does the story that follows. Live up to that billing.

Is it all. That that headline. Makes it out to be. So that we can indeed say. Praise God for this. So that we can say in effect. There's no God like our God.

Who does a thing like that. Well I'm not going to develop this. Too much this evening. I did want to go through this passage quickly. But I can't go through a passage like this quickly.

So we're just going to take a little of it. And hopefully next time. We'll take a little more. And we'll see how we go from there. But it's just a few ideas. That I want to take out of this.

[9 : 00] But in verse 4. You've got the same basic ideas there. God is at work. He chose us. He predestined us. Everything is in Christ Jesus.

He was blessed us in Christ Jesus. In verse 3. And he chose us in him. There is the same idea of union with Christ. And as for rich blessings.

Surely these are implied in what he says here. That we be holy and blameless. That we be adopted as the children of God. So we've got the same basic ideas. And we've got something more specific

now.

So let's look at these. And measure them against the headlines that we've been looking at. And see is this plan that he's begun to outline as great as it sounds.

According to the headlines. And we're going to speak about two things. Two main things anyway. And we're going to deal with the starting point of this great plan. And the central activities of this great plan.

[10:04] The starting point of this great plan. What were the circumstances which called forth this great plan that is described in these verses?

When did this happen? What was the background? That's what we're going to consider here. The starting point from which this plan took rise.

Well the obvious thing to say here is to talk about the time scale of this. And it's said quite plainly here. Before the foundation of the world.

Before anything actually happened. This plan was in place. It wasn't something that was suddenly thought up as an emergency measure.

When things went wrong. And something had to be done about it. Without due foresight. This was there from the beginning. In the original blueprint of things.

[11:03] This plan had its place. Indeed. This plan was the main feature of the blueprint. That God as it were drew up. And upon which the world was founded.

And the world runs. It's part of the original foundation of everything. It goes back away before time began. And that's good news.

Because that it seems to me makes it more solid. And that's the point of this. I'm mentioning this in fact. But we'll come to that in a moment. This is something that is part and parcel of the way that God treats the world.

Because it's there from the beginning. Part of his original blueprint. I don't know if you know. That last time I was here. I had trouble with my car. And when I came down.

There was a terrible noise. A little squeak. Squeak. Squeak. And then it became much worse than that. And I was really getting anxious about it. But on the way back.

[12:09] It didn't make a noise at all. But I did take it to the mechanic. And he put it up on his ramp. And he put the ramp up. And he went under the car to look at it. And I'm always a wee bit wary about going under a ramp like that.

You know. Here's this car suspended above your head. And you're looking up at it. And I must say. It doesn't feel very safe. But then I know this. That even if the electric supply suddenly failed.

There would be some built in safety mechanism. To make this feel safe. And there would be no way. That that car could come down on top of you.

They've got inbuilt into it. A plan that stops disaster happening. And that's the way that it is with this plan of God. It's inbuilt into the system that operates in this world.

It's there from the beginning. Ready for this situation. That would prevent disaster happening. And that to me as I say. Gives it real security.

[13:14] We speak. Some people speak. Maybe poetically we have to say. About the eternal hills. The hills are there. In the same form as they were for our parents and our grandparents.

Generations before. And okay. They may move slightly in earthquakes. Maybe half an inch in a big earthquake. Or something like that. But basically the hills are there.

And they've always been there. And from the human perspective. They always will be there. This is like that. Only it goes further back. Before the hills even were.

This plan was formulated. While the world exists. This plan is there. And when the world ends. This plan will still be there.

Before the foundation of the world. This plan was made. And that's what's working out now. And this I think is meant to give us a sense of security.

[14:16] People speak about these doctrines as giving us security. And they say one saved. All was saved. And that's meant to give you security. Well there's something to say about that next time perhaps. But this to my mind is the thing that gives it security.

It wasn't a temporary measure. That was suddenly dreamed up in an emergency. It was there from before the world began. And it will be there when the world ends.

That's what makes this live up to the headlines. This is a secure plan. Fail safe. Ready for use. To prevent disaster.

And we can trust in it. It's thoroughly reliable. Because it was there. Before the foundation of the world. That's the starting point. In regard to time. Before the foundation of the world. But I'm wanting to suggest that there's a moral dimension in this. In what situation were people envisaged to be?

[15:20] So that this plan was necessary. And I have to say that anybody that's well versed in theology. Which I'm not. Knows that there is a very debated matter.

And people. Theologians at least. Have been in this throughout the ages. Probably still do. For all I know. It is a difficult matter. And I know that anybody that's thought about it. Will think that what I'm saying is kind of simplistic. But it's the way I see things. And I'm just putting it forward for you to reflect on. What was the moral situation? The moral starting point. Of the people involved in this. Well you see it doesn't say that here. Well I'm going to suggest that it does. What's he going to do for us? He's chosen us in him. That we should be holy. And blameless before him. And that means that we weren't that. Before he chose us. What position were we in when he chose us?

[16:22] Whatever position we were in. We weren't holy and blameless. Else there was no need. To choose us for that. And there's no doubt at all.

The position that the writer of this letter. Has on that matter. What position are people in? The very opposite of this.

There is none righteous. No not one. We're dead in our trespasses and sins. Not only immersed in our sinfulness. But incapable of getting ourselves out of it.

Because we're dead. That was the moral starting point. For this plan of God. Using people to be holy and without blame.

They were the opposite of that. Now some people say they were morally neutral. That idea comes up. But I can't think of somebody that's morally neutral. You're either good or you're bad.

[17:22] And there's no middle way I can think of at all. And certainly the writer of these epistles doesn't think so. To him there's only one way.

There's only two ways. You're either right or you're wrong. You're either following the path of holiness. Or you're a sinner under God's anger. There's no middle path.

And that's what we've got to take into account. This decree of election took its rise from the fact that God foresaw the absolute sinfulness and inability of people to do anything for themselves in regard to salvation.

And therefore he said, I'm going to take these people and I'm going to make them holy. And the same idea you get from the other way that this is expressed here.

He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. He predestined us for adoption as sons. What were we before we became the sons of God by adoption?

[18:32] And there's no doubt at all of what Paul would say about that. You were children of wrath even as others are. Children of wrath. That is people that are under the anger of God.

People that are to be punished for their sins. People over whom the sword of God's judgment hangs. And upon whom his judgment is liable to come.

There's no middle way here. You're either a son of the devil or you're a son of God. You're either a son of wrath or you're in a happy position as a member of God's family.

That's the clear teaching of the Apostle Paul. No doubt at all about it. And that I think we can legitimately say is the moral condition from which this decree of election took a rise.

If God said I'm going to make them my sons it means they weren't his sons. They were out of touch with him. They didn't belong to his family. And that's what I see is the moral situation that this decree of election takes its rise from.

[19:39] The startling point of this is the lostness of humanity. The inability of human beings to get right with God because they're immersed in their sins and they cannot deliver themselves by their own efforts or any other human means.

And it was in that position that God looked upon us and he said I'm going to take these people and I'm going to make them holy. I'm going to take these people that are children of wrath and I'm going to make them the sons and daughters of God.

And that's the starting point for this great plan of salvation. Now I said last time, I mentioned last time Robert Burns and I've forgotten of course the verse.

I thought I had off my heart but that's old age for you. And he said something like this. Thou who in the heavens dost dwell, who as it pleases best thyself, sends in to heaven and tend to hell, offer thy glory.

And no for any good or ill, they've done a for thee. And it's that last bit that really gets me. No for any good or ill, they've done a for thee.

[20 : 58] Because what he's really implying there is there were no moral considerations in regard to God's election. There was no question of morality entering into it.

Whether you were good or whether you were bad, it made no difference. It made no difference at all. There's a certain truth in that. But the point is that he seems to imply that the general teaching of the day was this.

That it didn't matter how you lived. If you were elect, you were elect and you were okay. And if you weren't elect, no matter what good you did, you were damned. And that's the way that many people still look at this doctrine of election.

They don't like it. And they say, well, here's a person. They can be good. They can be churchy.

They can do this or can do that. But if they're not elect, they're not going to go to heaven.

And you get a person who's immoral and arrogant and all sorts of other things. And if they're elect, they're not going to go to hell.

[22 : 13] That's the way it's understood. That's the way that Burns represented it and the way it's understood by many. There's no moral consideration in this. But that's the opposite of what this has been saying.

There's every moral consideration in this, the way it's presented here. What did God see? He saw the moral condition of humanity. And he acted accordingly.

And that was the basis on which it was for that reason, it was that situation that called forth his grace. He took into consideration the sinfulness of human people. And what was the end result to be?

Something very moral indeed. That they should be holy and without blame. That's the goal of election. And we'll see more about that next time probably. But the point is this.

Moral considerations came into play here. And that's the thing that undermines this silly view that Burns propagated and many people have.

[23 : 13] That you can live the way you like. And if you're elected, you're okay. And if you're not, too bad for you. That's the view. And it's the opposite of what the scriptures are teaching.

God is a God of morality. In instituting this plan, he saw us in all our sinfulness and acted accordingly.

And the purpose of it was to make us holy. Moral considerations are in play in the purpose of election. Moral. Well, let's leave it there.

Now, that it seems to me implies something pretty big. Here is a God that looks upon people that are estranged. That are hopeless. That are out of touch with them.

That have no desire for the things of God. And he says to them, I'm going to make you mine. I'm going to change your life and make you holy. I'm going to take you out from that position of being children of wrath.

[24 : 14] And I'm going to make you sons and daughters in my kingdom. I'm going to give you that honour and status and glory that belong to the children of God. Isn't that wonderful?

Isn't that enough to say, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has formulated such a wonderful plan of salvation? And that, I think, is what this description of the starting point of this plan leads us to reflect on.

It's a great thing that he has decided to do in taking us from what we were and making us what he wanted us to be.

Now, we're going to look at, very briefly actually, the actions, the central actions in this plan of salvation. And we've mentioned the words already and we'll just briefly mention them again and wrap it up.

Now, he chose us in him. He predestined us for adoption. He chose us. He predestined us.

[25 : 23] Now, he chose us is election, of course. And that undoubtedly refers to a process of selection. He chose us out from amongst others who were not chosen.

We do not know the proportion that he chose in comparison with those he didn't choose. Byrne's description of 1 in 11 has no biblical authority for it.

It is true that there are some passages that suggest that not many will be saved. But it is equally true that there are passages that suggest there's a great multitude to be saved that nobody could possibly count.

So, we're not in a position to agree with Burns that one will go to heaven for every ten that go to hell. We don't have any ground for thinking that it will be a small minority who are going to be saved.

We don't know the extent of God's election exactly. But we do know that he saves enough to make people honour him and worship him.

[26 : 31] So, he elects. That is, he selects people. To predestine does not refer to a different process. It's not that he does two things here.

But this is one action viewed from distinct points of view. The election is the choosing process. The predestination is the end result that's in mind.

So, it's one process under two names. Election and predestination. Now, people ask the basis of God's choice.

And we cannot say why one person is chosen and another is not chosen. We can't say specifically about that sort of thing.

But we can say that it is not because of our natural goodness or our natural ability. Nor is it because some people would have chosen Christ anyway.

[27 : 30] And so, he elected them to himself. And other people wouldn't have chosen Christ naturally. And so, he predestined them to hell. We can't say that at all.

Because what God knew was that nobody would choose him left to themselves. And that's why he had to choose them. We can say that while we were yet sinners, God loved us.

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. And in that respect, what Byrne says is true. No for onigiderell done for thee. That's true in this sense that the good or the evil that we had done was not the basis of God's choice.

He knew that we were all evil. And yet, he chose us. He chose us for our merits. He chose us despite our demerits. But we do have, in 1 Corinthians, for example, some indication of the way that we should look at things.

It is not because of human abilities or status that he chose us. For consider your calling, brothers, Paul says. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

[28 : 43] Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. There are some noble, rich, influential people chosen.

But it was not because they were rich, influential or noble that they were chosen. He chose us, a cross-section of the community, for his own reasons.

And one of the reasons was that he might be, that these whom he had chosen, wouldn't be the folks that the world would have chosen. And therefore, his grace is made the more outstanding.

Someone once said to me, God is sovereign, but he is not capricious. God chooses, we don't know why he chooses, but he's got a reason for choosing.

[29 : 44] But it's not in accordance with our merit, or our potential merit. God is sovereign, but he's not capricious. Now, of course, this is the problem with people.

Why does he choose one and not another? Is it fair that he choose one and not another? And I can't honestly answer that question. And I believe that ultimately we've got to say, God is God, and we are his creatures.

God is the potter, and we are the clay. But I do want to put one idea before you to see, to maybe make the difficulty less difficult. I hope you think this fits.

Suppose I give money regularly. Every month I give, say, money to half a dozen charities. They're all charities.

That is, they're all sponsored by individuals, generous individuals. Help them out. Without the generous donations of people, they wouldn't be able to exist.

[30 : 47] And say, I give something every month to half a dozen different charities. Then in December, I'm pretty certain I'm going to get six letters saying, we've got our Christmas appeal.

Well, would you please give to our Christmas appeal? And I say to myself, well, I'm giving regularly every month. I'll give to these two charities and not give to the others.

So I'll give extra money at that time of the year to two of the charities and not the others. Now, am I to be blamed for not giving to all?

Or am I to be thanked for giving to some? And I think there are differences of opinion. Some people would say, you should give to everybody or nobody.

It's not fair to give to some and not to others. And some people would say, it's better to give to some than to none. And some would say, you're to be blamed for that.

[31 : 49] And some say, you have to be thanked for that. And that, to my mind, is a way that we should look at the things of God. Is God to be blamed because he didn't save everyone?

Or is he to be thanked because he did save some? And again, opinions were differed. But Christians are, of course, going to say, he's going to be thanked because he did save some. Now, in that illustration, I could always say, look, I give already to them all. I already give graciously to them all.

If I choose to give extra to some, that's my choice. And some of you would say, that's fair enough. You give to everybody, that's fair enough.

And that's the way I see it in regard to God. It isn't that he gives nothing to some people and everything to others. It's that he gives something to everybody.

[32 : 50] Something gracious to everybody. He treats all creatures with grace. Although he doesn't give saving grace to all. And this, to my mind, is important.

He gives to unbelievers, day by day, the blessings of his providence. Summer and winter, seed time and harvest and so on, will never cease.

He gave the promise to Noah. And he gave that promise to all mankind and to the animals as well. Well, this was God's grace. He did this despite the thoughts of man's heart were only evil continually.

He said, I'm going to treat them not according to their desserts. I'm going to treat them in mercy. And so he gives them the gifts of their providence. And then he makes his sun to shine upon the bad equally.

He causes his rain to fall on the fields of the righteous and of the unrighteous equally. God is gracious to all his creatures.

[33 : 57] He gives to them grace from day to day. He does not treat them as their sins deserved. He gives his word. It's available to everybody. He gives the preaching of the word.

Which isn't available to everybody, but it's available to an awful lot of people. And he's gracious in doing that. He gives the promises of his word. To the elect and to the non-elect.

These promises are available. He blesses all people with good things. Is he then to be blamed? If people despise that grace and then turn against them because he didn't give more grace?

And that's the situation we've got. People that say, he didn't save me. He didn't elect me. Are also the people that probably don't recognize his hand in the good things that they do enjoy.

And that it seems to me is something to be borne in mind. Do you presume, says Paul to the Romans, on the richness of his kindness and forbearance and patience?

[35 : 08] Not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. It's not that God doesn't give his grace to all. It's that he gives his grace, saving grace to some.

And his common grace to all. And all those that do not accept his common grace also despise his saving grace.

And that to my mind means this. That nobody can say that God puts them into hell. As if it were entirely his responsibility.

They've rejected his grace. They haven't trusted in him. They have sinned. They're in hell because of their sin. Not because God... That was the thing that caused them to get to hell.

The effective cause of them going to hell is their own sinfulness. And therefore there's no ground of complaint saying, He didn't elect me. If you go to hell, it's your own fault.

[36 : 15] If you go to heaven, it's to the praise of his glory. Because you couldn't have got there otherwise. Now that line of argument may not appeal to you. It appeals to me, I have to say.

But I do know that it's not a complete answer to the problem. But I do hope that it will help you to understand the purpose of God. It's not that he's not gracious to all.

And it is not that he designs people to go to hell. Without bearing in mind their own moral standing. And their own rejection of the grace that was available to them.

