

Finding God in the Midst of Depression and Despair

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 March 2022

Preacher: John Elmer

[0:00] Okay. Oh, I am staying up. Well played, well played. Well, good evening, everyone. It's nice to be here. Can you hear me? Come back. Good. I am. It's fun to see all these old familiar faces.

And Pat just reminded me how actually the church started using space at the vineyard. So that's pretty cool. It's so good to see it grown and established and doing well. So that's very cool. So, you know, I'm, those who know me probably know I'm a foodie and I love going out and getting good meals and I love going to restaurants. Whenever there's a new restaurant open up, I try to get to it right away.

And I favor mom pop places. I hate going to chain places if I can avoid it. But my son was vegan for a while. And to get a place where we all could eat, we'd have to go to the Cheesecake Factory. And have you ever been there? Their menu is the biggest menu that I've ever seen. There's like 17 pages or something, right? I mean, you can get everything. Don't ever trust a place you can get everything at, right?

[1:29] Because, and it has so many things. It has some of everything, which is kind of like real life. And it's actually a lot like the book of Psalms, which is a book about real life.

That, you know, in real life, in the book of Psalms, you can see joy, you can see sadness, you can, you know, see stressful times, times of peace, times of fear, uncertainty, blessed people, bored people, angry people.

You see it all in life. You see it all in the book of Psalms. And out of those 150 different songs or prayers, they're all tied together with one theme.

And that theme is, great is the Lord and most worthy to be praised. Like in almost all the Psalms, it says that in one way or another.

Great is the Lord and worthy to be praised. I may be angry. I may be sad. I may be hurt. I may be excited. I may be going to worship God. I may be coming back. But there's, there's, it's in almost all of them, except for a couple.

[2:42] And today what I want to do is look at one of those Psalms that really doesn't have that, that punchline. And I'm calling this the dark night of the soul.

And by this, it's a, it's a Psalm about the dark night of the soul, which, which is just a dark time. It's a time when, when God feels very distant or gone, where we, we fight fear and, and depression.

We may be overwhelmed or undone in some way, burned out, spiritually dry. It could be a time of darkness where everything seems to be closing in on us.

And in this Psalm, I'm going to look at Psalm 88. That's how this author feels. And if you have your Bible, you can open up to it.

I'm going to actually just read the whole Psalm first. And then, and then we're going to talk about it. Psalm 88. Lord, you are the God who saves me day and night.

[3:47] I cry to you. May my prayer come before you. Turn your ear to my cry. I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death.

I'm counted among those who go down to the pits. I'm like one without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care.

You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily on me. You have overwhelmed me with your ways.

You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I'm confined and can't escape.

My eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day. I spread out my hands to you. Do you show your wonders to the dead?

[4:55] Do their spirits rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave? Your faithfulness and destruction? Are your wonders known in a place of darkness?

Or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? But I cry to you for help, Lord. In the morning my prayer comes before you.

Why, Lord, do you reject me? And hide your face from me? From my youth I have suffered and been close to death. I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

Your wrath has swept over me. Your terrors have destroyed me. All day long they surround me like a flood.

They have completely engulfed me. You have taken from me friend and neighbor. Darkness is my closest friend.

[6:04] You know, the Psalms have lots of prayers of people in hard spots. About a third of them are what's called lament Psalms. Psalms are somebody crying out.

But almost every one of those lament Psalms have a point of hope. That, you know, somewhere it says, But I trust you.

But your redemption will come. Your promises are sure. Something like that. All of them. But Psalm 88, which I just read. And Psalm 39.

This Psalm, isn't it? If you listen to it, You know, you'll notice that darkness is mentioned three times. Death, seven times. Despair, suffering, wrath.

The last word in the Psalm is literally darkness. Because if you literally translate it, it would say, My closest friend is darkness.

[7:04] Period. End of my prayer. What kind of prayer is this? Why is this in the Bible? I think it teaches us four things.

And I got this from a guy named Tim Keller. I heard him talk about this. It's really helpful. Here's the first thing it teaches us. Darkness can last a long time for a follower of Jesus.

Darkness can last a long time for a follower of Jesus. You know, he had a connection with Yahweh. If you look at verse 1, He starts by saying where He is, right?

He says, Lord, And that word Lord, Let me give you a little clue. If you ever read the NIV, When the Lord is all cap letters.

That means the original word is Yahweh. Yahweh. That's the Hebrew word, The name that God gave Himself. When Moses asked for His name, He says, I am who am.

[8:10] That's what that means. That's what Yahweh means. When Jesus one time was talking with the Pharisees, They were talking to Him, And He said, I am who am. And remember, They picked up stones to stone Him.

Why? Because He was blaspheming. He was claiming to be God. When this, I believe, When the Old Testament uses Yahweh, It is looking and reminding us of the triune God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

This is Jesus. You know, He had this relationship. Lord, You are the God who saves me. He had a saving, You know, In New Testament terms, We talk about a saving relationship.

Day and night, I cry to you. He's still crying out. He's still praying. He has this connection. You know, Verse 13 says, But I cry to you for help, Lord.

In the morning, My prayers come before you. He's regularly praying. He, Even though He's still in darkness. You know, We don't know exactly what causes darkness.

[9:14] It, It seems outwardly, He's losing friends. We know that. He, He seems to be somewhere, Some kind of physical thing. He says He's near death. You know, Did the dead praise you?

There's something going on, Inwardly, For him. And maybe you all can relate, To any of these things. You know, Physical health, Or, Or, Losing friends. Or, You know, Inwardly, He feels abandoned.

He's, He's, Claiming that he's alone. He thinks God's left him. I mean, I'm guessing, Every one of us has felt that, At some point, In the last month.

Maybe through today. It's, A human experience. So, You can be a Christ follower, And still, Be in this place, Where it feels like you're in utter darkness.

Now, Think of the mercy of that. You know, The, The Bible is honest. It, It, It tells the truth. You know, There's this, A great theological work.

[10:21] You may be familiar with it. It's called, Prince's Bride. And, And, And, And, And the hero of the movie, Uh, Wesley, Right? At one time, He says to the prince, He says, Life is pain, Your highness.

And, And anyone who tells you differently, Is selling you something. The Bible's not selling you anything. It's realistic.

You can do everything right, And still have this, Be in this place of darkness. Because God loves you, He wants to give you, Honest, Real, Expectations.

You know, At the, At the vineyard, We've seen lots of people connect with Jesus for the first time. And they, They, They get all excited. It's great. It's wonderful, Right? And, And they come to this place, And sometimes they'll say, You know, Now that I'm, I'm following Jesus, Nothing bad can happen to me.

And, And, You know, I thought I'd say, Well, Not really true. Uh, Bad things, Can and will happen.

[11:33] In fact, There's this guy I know named Jesus, Who is way better than you. And, And he had some pretty bad things happen to him. Um, And we're not above our master.

In fact, Jesus said, In this world, You'll have trouble. But he doesn't leave us. So, There's this, Expectation to understand life is hard.

So, It kind of, There's mercy in that. Don't, Don't agonize over the why. Second truth we learn in this psalm is, In darkness, We can learn a lot about the grace of God.

You know, Let's be real. This guy's prayer, Isn't like the best prayer you ever heard, Is it? I mean, He is like, Interrogating God.

He's like, You know, Asking God, Sarcastic questions. Do you show your wonders to the dead?

You know, Do the dead praise you?

[12:43] He's not humble. He's like, Kind of rattling God. Hey, Like, Answer me, God. He's blaming God for all his problems. Honestly, He's being very disrespectful.

Does it seem, I mean, You wouldn't hear that before some, Church services prayer. So, You know, His last statement, Think about disrespectful.

His last statement is, You know what, God? Darkness. That's my best friend. You ain't my best friend. That is, At least that's around.

At least I can feel that now. I mean, Think of the, The anger, The, The disrespect here that He's, He's showing. So, Why is this in the Bible?

Like, This is, You know, The Bible is the word God. It is, It is, God chose what was in here. He put this together. And, And, He put this, This prayer in there, On purpose.

[13:48] It wasn't an editorial mistake. He didn't say, Man, That prayer, I don't want that. He didn't say, Not in my book.

Uh-uh. I don't want anybody to think, You know what he didn't say? He didn't say, I don't want anybody to think that's okay. Let that sink in for a minute. So, Why is it in there?

Derek Kidner, He is an Old Testament scholar. He writes this. He says, The very presence Of this prayer in Scripture Is a witness To God's understanding.

God knows how people speak When they're desperate. There's grace in that. It's God's grace.

That we can speak Our heart When we're desperate. When we're hurting. When we're in pain. He will identify with us When we're in that place.

[14:57] He doesn't leave us In the dark place. He doesn't say, You know, I don't want anything to do with you When you have that attitude. He's with us Because of grace Not performance.

You know, When I When I Graduated from college. I moved to New York City And Worked in the storefront church And I started A community center.

And The community center Actually grew. And we were Seeing Kids You know, Coming in And they were Getting saved.

We were doing tutoring. We were engaging them In cultural change. You know, Helping them have a voice In In In their environment.

It was It was powerful. It was good. It was growing. It was It was something that was You know, Awesome. And we grew so much That the owners of the building Even though this was in the South Bronx Where it was just such a mess.

[16:01] And, you know, It was when Fort Apache, The Bronx, That movie, That was that neighborhood I was in. And it was It was where Where Ronald Reagan Walked through one year No, First it was Jimmy Carter Walked through one year And said, You know, No place like this Should be in America.

And then four years later Ronald Reagan walked through And said, No place like this Should be in America. And, you know, Probably presidents Are still walking through Saying, No place like this Should be in America. It was just like A rough neighborhood. And they We were having this impact And kids' lives Were getting changed.

And the It became so big And such a Nuisance for others That there's so many kids around. The landlord Told the church You shut this down And we're kicking you out.

And They shut us down. And I Was devastated. I love those kids. Two years I poured my life Into having something Happen in that neighborhood.

And I was so Mad at God. I You know, I I Couldn't I I just kind of Faded out of church. I started driving a Yellow cab In New York City.

[17:14] Which is The worst job For your soul That they ever In frontage, right? And I was angry. And when I prayed I prayed angry. I was just like God, how could you do that?

And And these Supposed Leaders of God That didn't back us And wouldn't give us Another place And You know, And the denomination I was a part of I was I was furious. I was angry.

I I kept, you know If I talked to God I was yelling at Him. And it was in those Dark spots And I look back And I see That was the grace Of God That He didn't Beat me up for that He didn't Exclude me for that He realized That was That was just my pain Working through There is This grace Of God That we learn That He He isn't so easily Offended from our Brokenness Here's a third thing We learn in this We learn that we can Become a person Of greatness And darkness Dark times Are the best Place To become a person Of greatness You know A person of depth A person of faith A person who

Understands grace That's in dark times We learn endurance We build deep Strong Muscles up These are the things That make people great Right?

Great is way different Than popular Dark times Don't necessarily Make you popular But they make you Great and strong Inside It's true He's saying A bunch of things Wrong But he's saying Them to God He never quit Speaking to God I mean Think of Job Right?

[19:16] Everything comes And hits Job Job gets knocked down Physically His family gets hurt His body gets hurt His everything Crumbles And Job If you read The whole book Says a bunch Of dumb things And you know Says a lot Of wrong things And yet At the end God looks back And says Quote Job Honored me How?

Because he kept Praying Because he kept Seeking God No matter No matter What crashed Down No matter That he didn't Understand it No matter It seemed All unfair He kept Crying to God He kept Looking to God You know Though you slay me Still I will follow That kind of heart Makes us Great Deep People It's in darkness We move out Of transactional Relationships To submitted ones Because a lot Of our relationships Are transactional I do this I expect that From you If I get that I'll do this For you You know There's a transaction But when we're In this spot Of such utter Darkness We're in a place Of such complete Pain We have nothing To give It's at that point That we learn True submission Where we say God No matter What you do I will follow You No matter What pain I understand There's nothing Better still Than you

That is Real deep Faith That is Mountain moving Faith And only Darkness Can get us To that place Now we look To him Because we know He's great And most worthy To be praised We move From self-centered To God Focused You know This writer Became a deep Person Who God Used Let me read You something You know Psalms Maybe about Half of them Maybe not quite The Psalms They Some of them Have titles And there's A little debate Among theologians Because they have Nothing better To do They They like Is the title The inspired word Of God Or is it not Or is it just There You know As far as I Understand Those titles Have been there Since the beginning With these You know

In the oldest Manuscripts We have So I think they're Pretty legit That's just My theological Stand on it But even if they Weren't God put them In his book For some reason And listen to the title Of this Psalm It says A Psalm A Psalm Of the Sons Of Korah This is a group Of priests Who wrote A bunch of Psalms Who were Very influential In In In Israel For the director Of music According to Mahalath Lenath A miscal Of Haman Dezerite This guy Who wrote This Psalm This Psalm Became The

director Of music Over all Of Israel That this guy When you read Scriptures You'll see His name He We're Closely With King

David That he was A prophet For David That in Kings First Kings Four It actually Says That he Was very Wise That this Guy In the Furnace Of darkness And pain Grew to Be a Great Person God Used this Dark night Of soul To transform Herman's Life He wrote Songs and Prayers 2800 years Ago That people Are still Reading and Inspiring Be inspired By I don't Know who Your favorite Musician Is but I don't Think Anybody's Going to Do you Know Elvis Presley Or Britney Spears Song You know 100 years From now And this Guy Did a Song That still Impacts Us He gave Leadership To God's People Out of The hottest Fires Comes the Strongest

[23 : 45] Medals Out of The pressure Of Of Of Of Of I don't Know What's the Pressure What pressure Is it to Make diamonds The earth Volcanic Pressure Something Makes Diamonds Right It's Basically Garbage That's Been Squeezed Together For A Long Time You Know I'm Not A Scientist Let me Read you Something I am A Bible Guy This Is What Paul Says We Also Glory In Our Suffering Physical Suffering Mental Suffering Relational Suffering The Dark Night Of The Soul He Says We Glory In It Because We Know That Suffering Produces

Perseverance We're Suffering We Gotta Press Ahead We're Suffering We Learn To Pray In A New Depth A New We Build Endurance We Build This Ability To Keep Fighting Perseverance Produces Character!

That we Get Rooted! That all The Froth All The Silliness All The Self Centeredness Can Be Sucked Out Of Our Life As We Endure Suffering We Begin To Understand What's Real And What's Important That's Character And Character Produces Hope Because Now All The Junk Has Been Stripped Down And You See Things For The Way They Are And You Understand That God Is Bigger Than It All And That God Is Faithful You Get Through Dark Times And You Go Into Another Dark Time It Doesn't Seem As Dark Your Spiritual Eyes Have Adjusted And So Now There's Hope And Hope Doesn't Put Us To Shame Because God's Love Has Been Poured Out Into Our Hearts Through The Holy Spirit Who Has Been Given To Us You Connected With Jesus You Have The Holy Spirit And

That Just Fills Those Those Hard Times With Value Darkness The Darkness You're In Can Help You Become A Great Person Deep Roots With Compassion With Wisdom So Keep Praying If You're In A Dark Time The Last Thing I Think We Learn In A Psalm Is Darkness Is Not Forever When We're In The We're In The Midst Of Darkness It Can Overwhelm Us Can It Like When You're In Darkness Right It Seems Like This Is Never Going To End This Is Where I'm Stuck This Is This We Begin To Get You Know This Is Reality Only This We Forget About The Good In The Past Or Our Future Seems Awful And There Seems No Way Out It's Easy When We're In Darkness The Shift From Reality!

To Feelings In The Darkness Our Feelings Are Bad And So We Think Everything Is Bad For Those Who Are In Dark Space You Know It's It's Just Easy To Shift Herman Did If We Look At Verse 18 In The Psalm You Have Taken From Me Friend And Neighbor Darkness Is My Closest Friend Is How He Ends He Ends It In This Very Dark Place He Leaves You With The Sense That Nothing Will Ever Get Better But It Did It Got Way Better For Him He Was A Friend Of The King He Was Blessed By God With Prophetic Gifting He He Had You Know Worship Released In Him He Got To Lead The Nation Of Israel In This Honoring And Glorifying Of

[28 : 10] Yahweh He Didn't Lay Live In The Shadows The Rest Of His Life Where God Was With Him You Know Jesus Went Through Utter Darkness Coming Back To Lent And To Kind Of Land It Here And He Went Through Other Darkness Alone So That We Didn't Have To At The Cross You Know He Was Betrayed By A Close Friend Abandoned By His Click Arrested Illegally Went Through A Sham Of A Trial Beaten While In Captivity Tortured With Thorns Whipped Drags A Log

Through The City Stripped Naked And Now To This Cross And Then Picks It Up From Noon Until Three In The Afternoon Darkness Came Over All The Land Utter Darkness The Sense Of Being Totally Alone In This Pain In This In This Confusion And Mid Day It's Dark And About Three In The Afternoon Jesus Cried Out In A Loud Voice Which Means My God My God Why Have You Forsaken Me At That Moment He Was Totally Alone It Was At That Moment I Believe That All The Sins Of The World Were Placed On Jesus All The Wrath Of God Was Laid There All The Cost For All The Petty

Broken! At That Moment For The One And Only Time A Holy God Had Turn His Eyes From Jesus At That Time He Was The Only One To Feel Utter Separation From God And There He Was And

He Cried Out In That Place Of Aloneness And He Did That So That God's Grace Could Be Released He Did That So We Would Never Have To Experience That Death You May Feel In Darkness But Jesus Defeated The Darkness And He Will Never Leave You Or Forsake You And In That Place His Grace Can Flow So Keep Crying Out To Jesus No Matter How Dark It Feels For You Today Or Tomorrow Or Next Week What I Want To Do Is Take A Moment To Pray For Y'all So Can I Do That Is That Is That Allowed In This Church I'm A Bishop You Know Let Let Jesus Man You Understand What We Go Through You Have Experienced That Kind Of Pain And In Justice And Sense Of Being Abandoned But You Overcame It All and you promised that you'd never leave us or forsake us.

I would just invite your Holy Spirit, Lord, for any one of us in this room that's feeling this sense of darkness, I pray that you would bring your Holy Spirit to release light.

[32 : 24] I pray for your grace. I ask you to bring your hope where there's hopelessness. Lord, thank you for never leaving us.

Amen.