

Marc Steele (4)

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[0:00] I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever. With my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. We buy into this myth that the walk of faith is simple.

It is not. We gain an awareness of the promises of God. But, especially when we are new to the walk of a Christian, we think that we have found the answers to every single thing we will face in our future.

That's just not the reality of what it means to be a Christian. Now we come to Psalm 89. Born in 1980 and raised in the evangelical church.

I see verse 1 and I hear this praise song that was very popular during the time I was raised within churches.

[1:27] Anybody familiar with it? Yeah. Yeah. It's very upbeat. Very joyful. To be honest with you, it might be a little too saccharine sweet for my taste.

And we kind of like it. It's to get our blood going and get jumping and say, you know, get excited as we join worship.

But the reality of this psalm is, while the first two thirds of it are very joyful, the last third, which we tend to ignore, is extremely dark.

As a matter of fact, some commentators have observed, this psalm was meant to be sung more like a funeral dirge than it was a praise psalm.

Now, that little phrase at the beginning of Psalm 89, that still inspired scripture. We often don't include it in our readings, but we find here the author.

[2:31] But a mascal, or a skilled psalm, this was meant to be a psalm of catechism or a psalm of teaching. Much like when we had the children up here during Advent, we had taught them a type of mascal, a psalm that was meant to instruct them and teach them some truth about God.

We find that this is a mascal of a man named Ethan the Ezraite. And we're not completely in the dark about who Ethan the Ezraite is. If you read through the Chronicles or the Books of the Kings, you'll find this huge cast of characters of people that it's really hard to track.

Often they don't make it into our Sunday schools, but maybe Ethan the Ezraite is one that should.

Because if we go to 1 Kings chapter 4 and we learn about the wisdom of Solomon, we find out that Ethan the Ezraite was actually the wisest person in the land before Solomon came into town.

So he was kind of like the heavyweight champion of the world, and then Solomon came in and kind of knocked him off his pedestal. We also find in other places in Scripture that this man was likely a member of David's court.

So he had a closeness to King David, and he had some sort of relationship to Solomon, enough that people would compare him to Solomon. Ethan comes to his psalm.

[4:01] This is not a sentimental chorus that make him feel good. But it is a bold proclamation of truth built on certain and historical promises.

When we leave here today, we go to our family dinner tables, our jobs tomorrow, maybe school, and someone asks you for what, as Peter would have said, the answer to the hope that is within you, what will you tell them?

You'd better have more than your feelings about your faith. Feelings are tricky business. I'll let you in on a secret.

Sometimes I don't feel the love of God in my life. Sometimes we walk through the dark valleys. But in those times, I still know the love of God, and I can still sing of it.

Whether it's a poppy, catchy praise course, or a funeral dirge. God has revealed his love to me in his word and through his spirit.

[5:15] And as Ethan looks back at the history of Israel, he finds the same encouragement and hope. He looks to the covenant that was made with David, and he picks up some of the exact same words that Nathan uses when he announces the covenant from God to David.

It's written in Chronicles 17, Moreover, I declare to you that the Lord will build you, David, a house, when your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers.

I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

I will not take my steadfast love, my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, Saul.

But I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever. This is great news for David, right?

[6:25] But we can already see in this psalm that the effects of Nathan's word to the king did not stop and die at David. Ethan hears him.

Ethan picks him up. Ethan repeats them almost exactly here in the psalm. It is good news, not just for David.

It is good news for Ethan, and it is good news for Israel. Sometimes we forget the importance of considering when a passage of scripture, especially a psalm, is written.

So I think it's important today that we notice that Ethan was alive and considered to be very wise before a psalm came into the picture. And because we know he was a psalmist, since we're reading one of his psalms, we read between the lines and we can assume a certain closeness to King David.

So I think somewhere in there, it's not too far of a jump to reason that as Nathan gives the words of promise to King David, Ethan is either in the room hearing them or one of the first people that this promise is shared with.

[7:36] And during this point in Ethan's spiritual walk, as he hears the good news of what God is going to do for the kingdom of Israel, he rejoices in the steadfast love of the Lord.

This is the announcement of a great future for the kingdom of Israel. While Ethan is astonished by the love of the Lord, he is not surprised because he knows the history of what God has done for the nation.

And he also knows that God has always ruled as King and worked to accomplish His will on the earth. Ethan here in our psalm today remembers, going down to verse 5, that God is the cosmic King.

Now, some of you of a certain age might snicker when you hear the word cosmic. You might think of Woodstock or hippies or transcendental meditation or a long list of things when you hear the word cosmic.

Others of a certain age probably think about the cosmic brownies that Little Debbie's makes and that you can pick up at any supermarket. Amen. Amen. Amen. But this is not what I mean by Ethan viewing Christ as the cosmic King.

[9:00] Just as Paul does in Colossians, Ethan looks at God and sees one who is King over all that is seen and all that is unseen.

And as we read verse 5, let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, and your faithfulness in the assembly, the holy ones. Not to disappoint any amateur astronomers in the congregation, but the heavens praise in this, this particular verse, this particular verse of Scripture is not speaking about the stars in the sky.

It instead speaks of that great court of spiritual beings that bow down before God. We read here of the assembly of holy ones and heavenly beings.

Verse 6, Who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord? And we see before us the realm of angels for a moment, the realm of cherubim, the realm of the seraphim.

And we remember back, or we remember forward rather, to Hebrews chapter 1, where the author of Hebrews tells us about how great and strong and mighty angels are.

[10:23] And we remember our psalmist tells us God is mightier than all of them together.

Remember what happens to Christ as he's in his final days, final day.

Who does he say he could call upon to rescue him from the cross? Twelve legions of angels. And I'm of the opinion those twelve legions of angels could have come down and wiped humanity off the face of the earth if he had called upon them to do so.

And we see here God is praised for being mightier than the entire assembly. Remember, in Job, even Satan himself is bound by the will of God.

This is why the Apostle Paul can safely say when he speaks about God's promises, almost exactly the way that Ethan does, when he writes in Romans, I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, that's spiritual powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love, the steadfast love of the Lord.

Steadfast love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Why can Paul be so confident about this? Because none of these created things can overpower God.

[12:14] All these created things combined and put together cannot overpower Him. God is mightier than them all. Verse 8, O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?

The faithfulness of God surrounds him like a cloak. It is one of his defining characteristics. We can look at God and see him as faithful.

Part of the reason for this is that we can look at him and view him as faithful is the fact that he has the strength to back up his promises. good intentions are nice, right?

I can promise you a lot of things, but if I don't have the ability to fulfill on my promise, my promise is no good. I can promise one of my sons a Lamborghini and he would rejoice in that promise, but I hope that he's not counting on it.

Unless, Jack, do you want to make me alone? No. Oh, okay, okay. Plans and promises are great, but they only count if you can execute on them.

[13:36] What we see here in the Psalms is that the strength of God always backs his steadfast love, who is mighty as you are, oh Lord, God has always, and I mean always, defended his people.

So Ethan considers the promises that were given to his King David. He considers the fact that God rules over the seen and unseen realm.

And then he does what I consider to be a very valuable exercise. He looks back at the faithfulness of God to the nation of Israel. In other words, he looks back to the good things God has done in the past.

You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves rise, you still them. You crushed Rahab like a carcass. You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

Now I know this is going to be confusing for the youngest Sunday school crowd because this looks like Rahab. It's not Rahab that's being spoken of. They learned about Rahab today, the lady at Jericho that put the scarlet window in the wall.

[14:51] That's not what's being talked about here. This is a, it's unfortunately translated into English the same way as the other word. This is maybe we'll say Rahab to avoid confusion.

We find the same phrase used in Isaiah 51. Awake, awake, put on strength the arm of the Lord. Awake as in days of old, the generations of long ago.

Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?

What's being spoken about here is actually Egypt. he's speaking about God's deliverance at the Red Sea. Where Rahab may speak to the Pharaoh, I also wonder, this may speak to the spiritual powers of evil behind the great Pharaoh.

Ethan remembers, in the face of dark situations, God's deliverance in the past. Now, this is a very, very long psalm.

[16:02] We probably could do a whole sermon or teaching series off of it. So we're not going to look at every instance of deliverance here, because Ethan starts what's considered to be a litany.

This is what the discipline is about. This is one reason why we sing songs and spiritual songs.

That's why Pat's job is so important. She picks songs that recount the faithfulness of God in our past as a church, and considers the promises of God for our future.

Why? Because our present is often so dark. This is why the psalmist sings of the steadfast love of the Lord. It's a continuous discipline for us to remember the past and look forward to the future.

Ethan writes in verse 11, which I believe serves as a great summary for this whole psalm, the heavens are yours, the earth also is yours, the world and all that is in it, you have founded or created them.

It's another discipline of song. He says, God has complete control over the spiritual world, he has complete control over the material world, and that we know this is true because he made them both, and everything within them.

[17:24] because of his steadfast love towards those he has called into a covenant relationship with him, just as the covenant written in the blood of Jesus in which we'll share in shortly, he leverages all these things from both realms of creation to work together for our good according to his promises for those who are called according to his purpose.

And by the way, that last phrase was almost also an exact quote from Romans 8. So it is no surprise that Ethan writes, blessed are the people who know the festal shout, or the sound of rejoicing, like the kid coming down at 5.30 on Christmas morning, that kind of shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face, who exult in your name all the day, and in your righteousness are exalted.

Yeah, it's no kidding these guys are blessed. This is kind of what we expect when we come into Christianity. This is the kind of experience we want in, day in, day out, right? We want to have the joyful, cheerful smile on our face, yelling in excitement, exalting the name of Jesus.

But here's what does surprise us, especially in the American church today. I want to be very clear, I'm talking about the church across America, not just this church.

We think somehow our mission is to have the perfect life, to have it all together, and if it falls apart, we're called to just fake it until we make it.

[19:07] When questions about the dark places of life come, they remain unasked for fear of what questioning might say about our spiritual condition. when we come in and examine the promises of God in that attitude, we say somehow we have the strength and we have the answers.

We've honesty in the face of trial points to our own inadequacy and our need to completely rely on God. here in this psalm that we have reduced to a catchy praise course, we see Ethan close his psalm with a deeply troubled call for answers.

We're very quick to write songs about Psalm 89.1, but how many songs have you heard lately about verse 38? But now, David, you have cast off and rejected.

You are full of wrath and anger against your anointed one. We're not sure exactly when this psalm was written. I would suggest that it might have happened during the time that Absalom turned against David.

It may have been at another time. I certainly believe this serves as a prophetic word about the future of Israel in the next centuries. But if God has promised the eternal reign of David and his house over Israel, how can Ethan explain this in light of the current reality he's living?

[20:44] When David's enemies triumph over him, and the house of David seems to be cast aside. Lord, verse 49, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked, and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations, with which your enemies mock, O Lord, with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

This kind of brings to mind, this just jumped into my mind, but the suffering of Bishop Bill Love in the Diocese of Albany. He took a stand in faithfulness based on the promises given to him in scripture. He certainly has not won for himself praise, acclaim, wealth, and glory. He's instead mocked by his enemies and mocked by the enemies of God.

How do we make sense of the suffering we endure as believers when we also know the promises given to us? When we hear the words of Christ in John's gospel that he came to give us life more abundant, and instead we face days of devastation?

[22:07] Well, Ethan here has done something clever. He's used the device. He's treated this like a game of Jeopardy. How does Jeopardy work? Do they give the question first? No.

They give the answer, right? They give the answer first and then you ask the question. That's exactly what Ethan has done here. He says, Alex, I'll take the promises of God for 200.

Trebek says, the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. And Ethan gives his answer in the form of question, how does one explain that the promises of God appear to have failed?

If the steadfast love endures forever, and if this love is directed towards all those found in Christ, and you have placed your faith in him, and God is eternal, and all things that exist both in heaven and earth bow down before him, well then, by necessity, logically, his love for you began before you even came into being.

And because his love is so great and so enduring, it cannot be contained within your short lifetime. It will spill out and pour into the life to come.

[23 : 29] And sometimes we lose sight of that fact because of our short-sighted perspective. Ethan here has given us a great spiritual discipline. In the face of trial, when he can no longer see the hand of God in the circumstances of his life, he begins to recount the acts of faithfulness in his past and the past of Israel.

Would God bring his people this far to abandon them? The answer is a resounding no. The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Here's the reality of this all.

If you think the promises of God towards you have failed, then your view of his promises are too small and you didn't understand them to begin with. And I don't say this in some sort of judgy, hyper-spiritual way that says, when you face the trials of life and you don't understand them, then it must be your fault.

That's not at all what I'm trying to say. Some of the greatest spiritual men that have ever lived have faced these intense periods of doubt where everything that the Lord had promised them seems to be gone.

God works this way in the life of his called out people to reorient their perspective, to reset their way of thinking, to get them to begin to see that the promises he has made to them are too great to be contained in their lifetime.

[25 : 04] That if God's goodness is limited to my short years, it is not great and it does not endure forever. But if the promises made to David and by extension also made to Ethan and Israel, that the throne of David would be established forever, where would those be fulfilled?

fulfilled. They're not fulfilled in Ethan's lifetime, right? They're not fulfilled in David's lifetime. They're not fulfilled in Solomon's lifetime. Man, I should try to do this.

This is a discipline they give you in seminary where you try to remember the long course of the kings of Israel. They don't happen anywhere in the Old Testament. Right?

The kingship of David, not only the kingship of David, but the entire nation is wiped off the face of Israel. I mean, if Ethan's despairing now, how much more are those Old Testament saints that are singing from the banks of Babylon and on the Nile in Egypt?

The promises are not fulfilled in the years of Ethan. They're not fulfilled in years. They're fulfilled in a person. Since the promises God has given is greater than human or angelic understanding and human and angelic strength, they cannot be fulfilled by a mere man or an angel.

[26 : 32] It is only God who can fulfill the promises of God. While Ethan can't make sense of how the throne of David is to remain in the land of forever, he places his faith in the steadfast love of the Lord.

And the eyes of faith give him a spiritual vision that looked beyond his lifetime forward to a millennium later when John the baptizer pours water upon the promise of Christ and the spirit falls and a voice calls out, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

Here we find the beloved son, here we find the promised throne of David. For this reason, Paul writes as he considers the promises of God and the difficulty of the life of the saints.

In 2nd Corinthians, for the son of God, Christ Jesus, whom we the apostles proclaimed among you, was not yes and no, but in him it is always yes.

For all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus. As white as through him, we utter our amen to God for his glory. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 08] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.