

A Psalm for any Season

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[0 : 00] With my mouth, I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.! I will declare that your love stands firm forever,! That you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

! You said, I have made a covenant with my chosen ones. Let me add my welcome to Rhianna's and Happy New Year. It's great to see you here, particularly if you're new or visiting.

There's an outline that you received on the way in. I'm going to refer to that. And you might like to turn back to the Psalm 89 passage.

That's going to be the main passage for tonight. How about I pray?

Our Father, we thank you for your word and we thank you that we can gather together as brothers and sisters and friends to sit under it and hear you speak.

[1 : 09] May your spirit work in our hearts and in our lives so that we might understand the truth it contains about you so we know how to respond.

Amen. At the end of the year, it can be very easy to feel that next year things will be better.

Am I right? Do you ever feel that? And it might happen especially when the year ahead is bringing some kind of change.

Maybe like a new job or a new uni course or the end of school or retirement perhaps or a child or new family member.

And God willing, it will be better or at least different and maybe new and fun and those sorts of things.

[2 : 07] There are some minor changes for me this year and I'm excited about what they might bring. I had a bit of a rough start to last year and so I'm allowing myself to set bigger goals and imagine what might come.

Now these kinds of expectations, they aren't necessarily wrong, nor do they never turn out how we expect. But as we'll see in today's psalm, even when we have lots of reason to praise and glorify God as we have today already, there is often so many reasons also to lament.

Let's take a look together. Psalm 89 can be broken into three sections, praise, promise and lament. And what's so fascinating about this psalm is that despite the positive tone of the first three quarters, like 88, which we looked at last week, it's still a lament.

And while it has lots of good to say about God's character and his actions, there's also lots of confusion about what it seems like their faithful God is allowing or doing.

In the opening section, in 1 to 18, God's faithfulness is very much the focus. Five times the psalmist praises God as the faithful God.

[3 : 39] Just have a look at some of these verses. In 1 and 2, he says, Then in verse 5, Then in verse 8, And the rest of these verses are filled with praise for their great God.

For example, saying things like, He is praiseworthy. He is incomparable. He is feared by all. He is mighty with no equal.

They say, I will sing of the Lord's great love. I will declare that your love stands forever. At this point, it certainly does feel like quite a contrast with the expressions of woe and suffering that we heard last week, isn't it?

I wonder if you've ever had reason to express this kind of praise. Has there been a time when your praise for God has just overflowed because of how you've seen Him work in your life?

Maybe in you or in someone close to you and you are so encouraged by His faithfulness and love. Maybe when you saw Him change hearts or change decisions or miraculously heal.

[5 : 31] And so you couldn't contain your praise. Who is like you, God? The heavens and earth are yours. Who in the skies above can compare with you?

Or something that you might say. When life is good, when God feels near, praise can flow. Have you ever praised God like this?

Have you praised God like this in 2025? Was praise one of your five words? Something like, God you are, God you have. Well, there may be all kinds of reasons you've had to praise God.

But what reason does Ethan the Ezraite have? A very specific one. Ethan praises God specifically because of the promises that God made regarding His anointed, that is His chosen King.

Have a listen from verse 19. Once you spoke in a vision to your faithful people, you said, I have bestowed strength on a warrior. I have raised up a young man from among the people.

[6 : 50] I have found David, my servant. With my sacred oil, I have anointed him. The psalmist praises God because He faithfully installed His chosen King.

And not just David, but all the kings who came from David too. When David was king, you might remember, if you've read that section of the Bible.

After years of war, a time came when he decided to build a house for God. David was sitting in his lush mansion somewhere in Malvern.

But the ark was still in a tent. And while this was a great desire, God spoke to him through the prophet saying, You won't build me a house, David.

I will build you a house. And the verses of the psalm reiterate this promise. And in them, God promises both that He will be with His King and He will fight for His King.

[7 : 55] That He will establish His line forever. And He will punish him if he or His sons disobey. Just listen to a few of these promises. In verse 21, it says, My hand will sustain him.

Surely my arm will strengthen him. The enemy will not get the better of him. The wicked will not oppress him. I will crush his foes before him. I will strike down his adversaries.

In 28, it says, I will maintain my love to him forever. And my covenant with him will never fail. If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging.

But I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. These are wonderful promises, aren't they? God will always be with His King and also with His people who this King will rule.

God will fight for him. He'll sustain him. He'll keep him. He'll keep him in line and He'll keep His promise. He'll keep him in line and He'll keep him in line and He'll keep him in line.

[9 : 16] He'll keep him in line and He'll keep him in line and He'll keep him in line. You would think that it would be right to have high expectations for this kingdom in light of this promise. And while these are great promises and it was a great time for Israel, you may know that if you follow the line of David more than one generation, things begin to fall apart.

And so while they are great promises and the King did have God on side, it's also easy to start asking, well, what kind of flogging and punishments are we really talking about here?

And then you follow David's line a few more generations and begin to wonder even more because after a while, there's no King at all.

Doesn't God promise I will continue His line forever? I will not lie? Do God's promises have a shelf life?

I will keep my promise until your grandkids are gone. I will keep my promise unless everyone forgets about me. Have you ever thought like this?

[10 : 32] These are pretty great sounding promises, but has God just forgotten? Or since we don't see any kings around these days, maybe they've just expired.

It can be easy to think this way, can't it? Do you ever? Do you ever? At the start, I said this psalm is a lament.

This is why. This is exactly what the psalmist is feeling, though he's expressing far more than my tame examples. He actually goes so far as to suggest that God has broken His promises.

This is what the next section of the psalm is about and I'm going to read a whole segment and as I do, I want you to listen to the tone and consider, would you ever talk to or about God like this?

From verse 38. But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one, you have renounced the covenant with your servant and have defiled His crown in the dust.

[11 : 50] You have broken through His walls and reduced His strongholds to ruins. All who pass by have plundered Him, He has become the scorn of His neighbours, you have exalted the right hand

of His foes, you have made all His enemies rejoice, indeed, you have turned back the edge of His sword and not supported Him in battle.

You have put an end to His splendour and cast His throne to the ground. You have cut short the days of His youth, you have covered Him with a mantle of shame.

If you think about what happened in Israel after the days of David and Solomon, when the kingdom split and Israel and Judah, how they treated God and led or misled the people until they were eventually conquered and exiled, you can kind of sympathise with this rhetoric.

But it is strongly worded, isn't it? Eleven times in eight verses, the psalmist says, you, in a very accusatory way, you, God, have done this to us.

You are responsible. You have forgotten. Listen, you have left us alone. And while we may be able to say, well, Israel and Judah did do terrible things and they were warned time and time again that unless they repented, they'd be destroyed and they didn't repent and they were destroyed.

[13 : 33] And while we may be able to say with the psalmist things like, you've broken through his walls, you've not supported him in battle, would you go so far as to say, verse 39, you have renounced the covenant of your servant.

You have renounced your covenant. It's a tricky question. Has God renounced his covenant? Did he renounce it? And if not, which he said he wouldn't do, what is the psalmist teaching us about how we might lament when it feels like God has forgotten?

In 46 to 51, there's a change.

Less accusations, more questions such as, will you hide yourself forever, God? How long will you, your wrath burn like fire?

[14 : 38] It's still lament. The psalmist and God's people are desperate. They feel as though God has abandoned them. He promised strength and victory and love and protection and they're having none of that.

Instead, whole generations are suffering God's wrath. They've been brought so low by the failure of the kings and his people that they can no longer see the point to life.

All they can see is death and so they're saying things like, for what futility have you created humanity? Who can live and not see death? Who can escape the power of the grave?

I wonder if you've ever felt these feelings. The feeling that there could be no good or happiness in life again. Do you feel it sometimes when you're sick for days and weeks and longer when nothing seems to go right?

Why hasn't God done anything? That's what these people are feeling. God has brought this on them because of those who've rejected him and his love.

[15 : 58] Who can escape death? It's our lot in life. God, you've clearly forgotten us. And so the lingering question of this lament is, has God not kept his word?

Has he forgotten us? Has he abandoned his covenant? It's easier to feel he has, especially as we look forward from the days of Solomon and David and the glory of Israel onto their suffering and their exile and even in their return, it never came back to the former glory.

But that isn't the end of the story and it's not the end of God's memory or his relationship with his people. When we look at Jesus, we see that God relates to this anointed king in the same way that he did the kings of old.

that is, he is faithful to him and he keeps his promise even though he suffers greatly and even though he lives, sorry, even though he doesn't live without seeing death.

When the apostle Peter speaks to the crowd in Acts 2, he mentions promises of God from verse 16 in which the anointed says, my body also will rest in hope because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay.

[17 : 38] And in Psalm 89 it says, the enemy will not get the better of him, the wicked will not oppress him, I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries.

Yet from a certain point of view, this didn't seem to be the case even for Jesus. In particular because he was constantly opposed and so much so that he was eventually sent to death.

And while he was naked and hanging, dying, do you remember what his enemies said about him? If he's the son of God, let him save him. He saved others, why can't he save himself?

That's the scorn of enemies, isn't it? It sounds very much like the enemy getting the better of him. His foes not being crushed.

In that moment, it seemed like God had not kept his word. The enemy of God's anointed seemed very much to oppress him and have victory over him.

[18 : 50] And that's not surprising, is it? Because death very much feels like a defeat. Just as it's slowly getting the better of each of us, as time and gravity do their work, defeating us, pushing us down.

But even in death, even when we feel forgotten and left alone, God is faithful. Even when it feels like he isn't. And he doesn't abandon any he's promised not to.

Peter goes on to say in Acts 2, fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried and his tomb is here to this day.

But he was a prophet and he knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on the throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.

God raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of it. God's anointed King Jesus was put to death, but there was no decay.

[20 : 08] He was sent to death, but not abandoned to the dead. Because as Peter explained to those listening, God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

And so we know, we know that God keeps his promises even when his chosen king suffers and dies. And we know that God keeps his promises even when his people suffer and they die, love. Because God is faithful and he doesn't leave his king and the people of his king alone. So this year when your expectations have let you down and you're feeling alone and God is feeling distant and he never seems to answer your prayers, may the words of this psalm be your comfort, its praise and its lament.

How long oh Lord will you hide yourself forever? Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

Blessed are those who have learned to praise you. Let me pray that God would help us do this. Our Father, you are our wonderful, powerful, incomparable and loving Father.

[21 : 41] you have rescued us from death and you keep your promises forever. Father, when we forget this, let us remind, would you remind us that you do not forget us.

May we live always knowing and praising you because of your goodness and faithfulness which we see most clearly in Jesus. Amen.

I think we're going to sing about God's great faithfulness. Thanks, Ben. Amen. Amen.

Great is thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed, thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto thee.

[23 : 42] Summer and winter and springtime and harvest. Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above.

Join with all nature in manifold witness. To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed, thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto thee.

Pardon for sin and the peace that endure in. Thine all dear presence to cheer and to guide.

[25 : 02] Strength for today and words of God tomorrow. Blessings, O Lord, with ten thousand beside.

Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed, thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto thee.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto thee. Thank you.