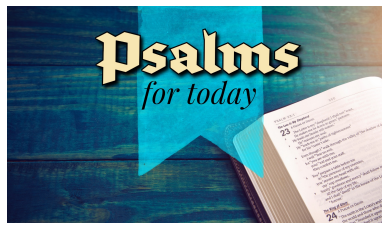


Psalms for Today: Psalm 88

Psalm 88

Job 6: 1-10



Over the last two weeks, we've looked at some very popular Psalms. The 23rd and the 46th Psalms are both counted among the favorites in the entire book.

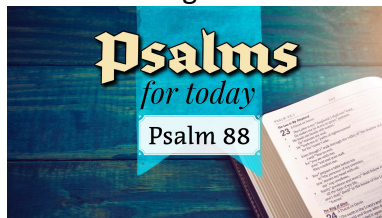
In this series of Psalms, I really wanted to devote time to some of the favorites.

We all have favorites, and there's nothing wrong with that.

However, in a book of 150 different Psalms, that also means there are many to which we don't pay very much attention at all. So over the next two weeks, we're looking at some Psalms I don't think we spend enough time reading.

Not only that, these next two weeks feature Psalms that are *difficult* to read.

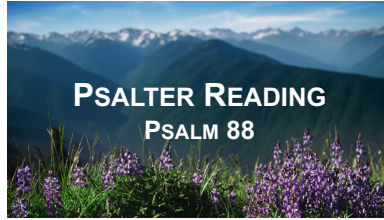
By "difficult" I don't mean there are big words or hard-to-pronounce names or places. In that regard, they're actually rather easy to read. The difficulty is deeper than that, and it means we're going to be talking about some hard things.



Today we are reading the 88th Psalm. It's considered by many to be the saddest of all the Psalms. Some call it the darkest Psalm. Some even call it an embarrassment to conventional faith for its lack of hope.

But before you decide this sounds too depressing for you, before you decide, "Hey, I'm not really feeling sad today and don't really want to feel sad," before you decide, "Well, I'm already feeling sad and don't really want to feel worse," I urge you to hang around.

If today isn't the day you need to hear this, you're going to need it someday. Psalm 88, for how bleak it is, gives us some essential things to tuck away for whenever that day comes around.



Let's read the 88th Psalm together in its entirety right now:

*¹ Lord, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.*

*² May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.*

*³ I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.*

*⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like one without strength.*

*⁵ 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.*

*⁶ You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.*

*⁷ Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.*

*⁸ You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.*

I am confined and cannot escape;

⁹ my eyes are dim with grief.

*I call to you, Lord, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.*

*¹⁰ Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?*

*¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?*

*¹² Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?*

*¹³ But I cry to you for help, Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.*

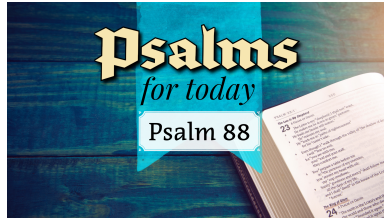
*¹⁴ Why, Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?*

*¹⁵ From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.*

*¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.*

*¹⁷ All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.*

*¹⁸ You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.*



This Psalm fits into a category of Psalms that we call Psalms of Lament.

Usually these set up a problem, then they resolve it, and finally they turn to praise.

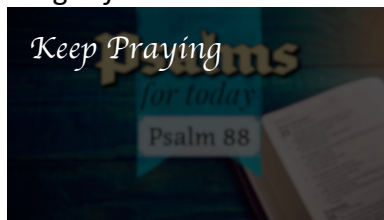
Not here. This one ends in a much darker place than it starts. In fact, it literally ends in darkness.

Where is the hope? Where is the faith? Why is this even in our Bibles when it paints such a bad picture? We can't deny that at face value this isn't much of an example of faith in a God that saves.

And as a result, we often end up ignoring this one. It seems like this is a portion of our Bible we like to pretend doesn't exist.

There are a few passages that the church and its people seem to like to do this with, but let's just focus on this one today.

We need Psalm 88. It teaches us some vital lessons for our walk as Christians. It teaches us some vital lessons for our walk through *life*.



Keep Praying

Psalm 88 teaches us to keep praying.

Sometimes, we are able to look ahead, even in the midst of our current situation, and know that eventually it will work out. Eventually there is light at the end of the tunnel.

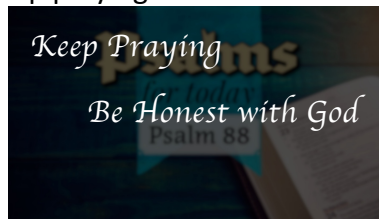
Other times, we don't see any light. In those times, all we see is darkness.

It's very tempting in the middle of those times to seek help anywhere but in the one place we should be seeking help. It's easy to get swallowed up in our distress and forget to keep talking to God.

But Psalm 88 starts off with "...day and night I cry out to you."

In the light or in the dark, the Psalmist continues to cry out to God.

Psalm 88 shows us that we can keep praying in the middle of the darkest time in our life.



Be Honest with God

But if we're going to keep praying, we need to be honest in our prayer.

Far too often we feel like we need to be someone or something else when we pray. I think we have this tendency to make ourselves more presentable because we know we're going into God's presence.

It's kind of like when you know you're about to get company at home, and you realize just how messy the house is. So you spend the next 20 minutes in a frenzy to make it look like you really have it all together.

Meanwhile, the closet door is about to pop off its hinges with everything you stuffed into it.

Do we do that with God? Do we try to stuff all that junk in our lives into some closet, thinking that God can't see it?

How futile that is, anyway? God knows our heart and sees us in our trouble, so what use is it to hide from Him?

The Psalmist in Psalm 88 is definitely not trying to clean up his own mess. He tells God exactly what is going on in his heart.

I feel like I can't go on anymore. I'm one step away from death.

Don't you hear me, God? Don't you want me alive on this earth so I can praise You?

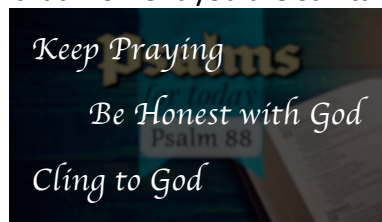
Why aren't you answering my prayers? Are you angry with me?

I don't even have friends to talk to – everyone hates me.

I am overwhelmed and tired. I am confused and lost. I am grieving and crying.

Nowhere in here are we hiding our feelings from God.

And guess what? God is big enough to take that. He's big enough to hear from you when you really need to unload, because in that moment you are still talking to Him.



Cling to God

And that means that even in despair, you are clinging to God.

Before the Psalmist sat down to write this thing, he knew how he was feeling. He knew how far in depression he was. And yet, how does he begin it?

"Lord, you are the God who saves me."

The Psalmist knows how this conversation is going to go. He knows he's about to unload on God.

And still, he also knows that he's talking to the God who will save him.

Sometimes, the most honest praise we can offer God is a prayer soaked in tears.

Why?

Because even when all we see is darkness, even if we need to unload and be very honest with God, in that moment we are still affirming our ultimate trust in Him.

When we keep that knowledge that our God is the God that will save us, that's something worth clinging to. That's something worth coming to in our darkest days.

I know, sometimes that sounds impossible. When we are this hurt and this down, sometimes it feels impossible to still come to God in that moment.

Psalm 88 is proof that it's very possible.

Psalm 88 is also proof that even lament can be an act of praise.

I'll end today with something else that reminds us of the same thing.



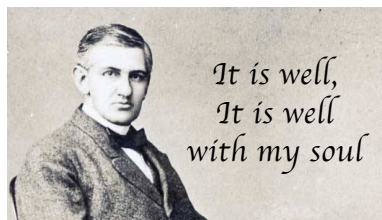
In 1871, Horatio Spafford was a lawyer and real estate investor living in Chicago. In the fall of that year, the Great Fire of Chicago ripped through the city, devastating Spafford's investments.

Two years later, the family was planning a vacation across the ocean to Europe. Business demands unfortunately kept Spafford from joining his family, and so his wife and four daughters set sail without him that November.

On the 22nd, tragedy struck again. The steamship carrying Spafford's wife and daughters struck an iron sailing vessel, killing 226 on board, including all four of Spafford's daughters, ranging in age from 12 years old down to 18 months. Only his wife Anna survived.

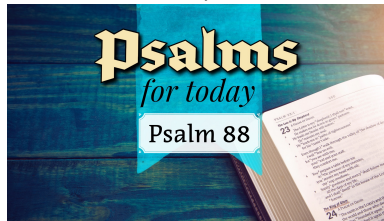
Shortly afterward, as Spafford was traveling to grieve with his wife, he passed near the spot where the liner was sunk and his daughters died. And as he passed near that spot, he was inspired to write a song. You may know it:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*



*And Lord haste the day, when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

What an amazing expression of faith, that in the middle of the greatest grief he has ever known, he can write a song that proclaims over and over, "It is well with my soul."



What an amazing expression of faith, in the middle of terrible pain, the Psalmist clings to God and declares, "Lord, you are the God that saves me, day and night I cry out to you."

You may not be a song writer. You may not write poetry.

But you can go to God, no matter what you walk through in life.

You can be honest with God, even if it means sharing those things you'd rather bottle up.

You can cling to God, because He is the God that saves you.

And all of God's people said...