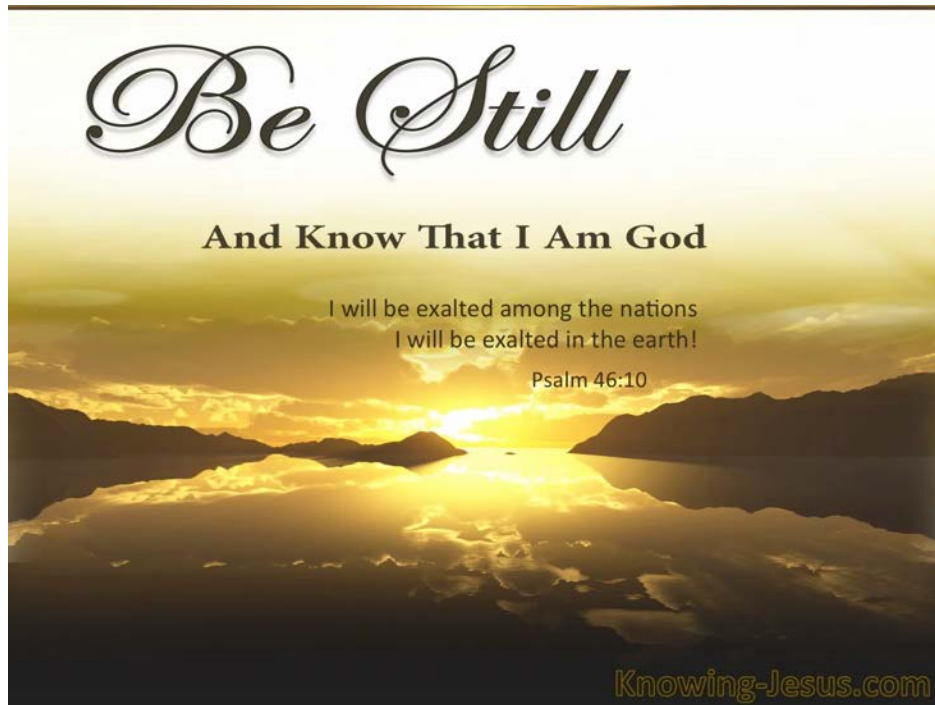


Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

PSALMS OF THE SONS OF KORAH

MAN OF SORROWS
PSALM 88



T. M. and Susie Moore

A Scriptorium Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Psalms of the Sons of Korah: Man of Sorrows

Psalm 88

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Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing

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Introduction to Psalm 88

The psalms composed by the sons of Korah end on a bittersweet note. The bitter is in plain view and emphatic: Heman, a wise and good man from the tribe of Judah, has died or is dying, and the sense of loss is great.

The sweet is more suggested, since Heman serves as a type of Jesus and points forward to when death will no longer be a source of pain and sorrow for the people of God.

Heman is a man of sorrow, and he points foreshadows *the* Man of Sorrows, in Whose suffering and affliction we are made whole.

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May the Lord bless your work in this study, that you may grow to know Him better, love Him more, and serve Him more joyfully.

T. M. and Susie Moore

1 Lamentation for a Great Man

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.1, 2

O LORD, God of my salvation,
I have cried out day and night before You.
Let my prayer come before You;
Incline Your ear to my cry.

Sing Psalm 88.1-3

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

Lord of my salvation, hear me, as I cry by night and day.
Hear my plea, O Lord, bend near me; O, receive me when I pray!
For my soul is weak and weary, and my life draws near the grave.

Read Psalm 88.1, 2, and don't forget the superscription!

Preparation

1. How would you describe the mood of these verses?
2. What do the psalmists want of God?

Meditation

Psalm 88 provides a proper bookend to Psalms 42/43, which opened the collection of psalms written by the sons of Korah. There the mood was one of disquiet and of searching for refreshment from the Lord. Here we return to that mood and theme. But whereas in Psalms 42/43 that longing was realized, in Psalm 88 it is not. The psalms of the sons of Korah end in God remaining silent and the burdened soul unrelieved in his suffering.

And there's a good reason for this, although probably not one of which the sons of Korah were aware.

The psalm is set to a melody known as "Mahalath Leannoth", or "The Sickness of Affliction." It is a psalm about being afflicted to the point of weakness, despair, and death. The psalm appears to be an homage to Heman the Ezrahite (the Hebrew preposition *to* here can mean "concerning" or even "for"). So who was he?

Heman was a descendant of Perez, of the tribe of Judah, a contemporary of Solomon and second only to him in wisdom (cf. 1 Chron. 2.5, 6; 1 Kgs. 4.30, 31). My sense is that this great man had died, or was near to dying, and this psalm was meant to be sung as a lamentation for such a great loss.

So a great wise man of the tribe of Judah has died, and the psalm puts us, as it were, in the grave with him. Now why would God want the sons of Korah to write something like this?

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Indeed, why would they write this?

Because with God there is always hope.
Hope for a brighter tomorrow.
Hope for help from His caring hand.

In the midst of their sadness, to Whom do they cry?
"O LORD, God of my salvation." (Ps. 88. 1)

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

In the midst of their sorrow, how often do they seek Him?
“I have cried out day and night before You.” (Ps. 88.1)

In their depression, where is their hope?
“Let my prayer come before You.” (Ps. 88.2)

In the darkness, where is the light?
“Incline Your ear to my cry.” (Ps. 88.2)

As the prophet Jeremiah wrote:
“Remember my affliction and roaming,
the wormwood and the gall.
My soul still remembers and sinks within me.
This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.
Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed,
because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
great *is* Your faithfulness.
“The LORD *is* my portion,” says my soul,
“Therefore I hope in Him!”” (Lam. 3.19-24)

“The LORD is righteous in her midst,
He will do no unrighteousness.
Every morning He brings His justice to light;
He never fails...” (Zeph. 3.5).

Look to God’s love.
It never fails. (1 Cor. 13.8)

Reflection

1. How can we maintain our hope in God in the face of trials or tragedies?
2. Why is it important that we do so? How can we encourage our fellow believers in their times of trial?
3. What does it mean to ask, seek, and knock in prayer to the Lord (Matt. 7.7, 8)? How do you see that attitude reflected in verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 88?

Probably the psalmist described his own case, yet he leads to Christ. Thus are we called to look unto Jesus, wounded and bruised for our iniquities. But the wrath of God poured the greatest bitterness into his cup. This weighed him down into darkness and the deep. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 88.1-9*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.9-12

Those who are dead in their trespasses and sins will not praise the Lord. Today, throughout the day, pray for specific lost people in your Personal Mission Field, that God would open their eyes to Jesus, and that He would use you to help them come to faith in Him.

Sing Psalm 88.9-12

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

All day long I cry in vain, Lord, as my eye is wasting away.
Can a dead man sing Your praise, Lord? Can I testify from the grave?
Will I tell Your love again, Lord? Will I sing Your pow’r and grace?

2 Near to the Grave

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.3-5

For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to the grave.
I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man *who has* no strength,
Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.

Sing Psalm 88.4, 5

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

Like a person thought to be dying, like a man whose strength is gone;
like one with the slain now lying, like a dead and buried one:
For Your mercy I am sighing, cut off from Your hand and gone.

Read Psalm 88.3-5

Preparation

1. How is the psalmist feeling in these verses?
2. What is making him feel this way?

Meditation

We are assuming that this psalm was written for Heman, a wise man from the tribe of Judah and a contemporary of the sons of Korah, who was either dying or had already died. The psalmists intend to honor him by composing a song to be sung in his memory. The psalm is written to be put in his mouth, as though he were the composer, revealing his deepest feelings.

I find myself in disagreement with many of the commentators I have consulted, who chide Heman over what they consider a lapse of faith. Death is not a pretty thing. It's not a happy thing. While believers may face death with confidence, hope, and perhaps even joy, still the *fact* of dying, and the *experience* of it are tragedies God never intended us to face.

So Heman is troubled in his soul (v. 3); he feels death breathing down his neck, and that he is descending to the world of the no longer living (v. 4). He feels that death is so final, so terrible, that it will cut him off even from God (v. 5). The psalmists want us to experience Heman's agony, because they want us to hate death and the sin which is its cause (cf. Ps. 97.10).

At the same time, Heman is in prayer, resting his hope in God. He is agonizing over his imminent death, but trusting the Lord as he expresses his pain. To me, this sounds like Jesus in the garden. Would our commentators chide the Savior for agonizing over His impending death? Would they suggest He was experiencing a lapse in faith? Hardly. He was all trust and confidence, even as He sweat great drops of blood.

Jesus hated death so much that He went to the cross to kill it, once and for all. Death is not the way life is supposed to be. We should remember this as we anticipate our own deaths. And we should remember the agony Jesus endured so that death might die and we might live.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Jesus experienced the horror of death. Sweating great drops of blood in anticipation of His physical pain and horrific separation from God. He experienced hell in all its aspects. For us.

We, too, will eventually experience death. And in the meantime, we might meander into some dark places from which only the Spirit can extricate us.

Many of the psalmists offer words to help us sort through the fear of death, but also the disappointments and depressions that frequently assail.

King David expressed these feelings beautifully as he dealt with things his enemies said, the oppression he felt from the wicked, much trouble, and folks who plainly hated him. He moaned noisily with his own complaint, and in the process, gave us perfect lyrics to express our own fears and sadness:

“My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me.

So I said, ‘Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.

I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.” (Ps. 55.4-8)

The apostle Paul shows and tells us how he dealt with physical and mental woes:

“...a thorn in the flesh was given me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me,

‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will

rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in

infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then

I am strong” (2 Cor. 12.7-10).

Because Paul’s affliction was not specified, we are free to apply his remedy to our own pain; but we must also seek to apply his positive overcomer’s attitude to our own hearts.

His remedy leads us to Jesus. “He, by the grace of God, tasted death for everyone.” “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” (Heb. 1.9, 18)

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1Cor. 10.13).

Whether near to the grave of death, or the grave of depression, God is faithful.

Jesus, David, Paul, and a great cloud of witnesses have gone before and proved this to be true! (Heb. 12.1-3)

Reflection

1. Is it wrong for Christians to be troubled and disturbed about death? Explain.
2. Why is it important that we keep looking to Jesus in the face of death?
3. What do we mean by saying that Jesus has put death to death? Why is this Good News?

The first words of the psalmist are the only words of comfort and support in this psalm. Thus greatly may good men be afflicted, and such dismal thoughts may they have about their afflictions, and such dark conclusions may they make about their end, through the power of melancholy and the weakness of faith. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 88.1-9

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.1-3

Thank God for your salvation. Thank Him for hearing your prayers. Thank Him that you can be honest with Him in prayer about your fears, doubts, and concerns. Cry out to Him for mercy and grace to help you in all your times of need today.

Sing Psalm 88.1-3

(Picardy: [Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence](#))

Lord of my salvation, hear me, as I cry by night and day.

Hear my plea, O Lord, bend near me; O, receive me when I pray!

For my soul is weak and weary, and my life draws near the grave.

3 In the Grave

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.6, 7

You have laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the depths.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
And You have afflicted *me* with all Your waves.
Selah

Sing Psalm 88.6-8

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

In the lowest pit You have set me, in a deep and darkening place.
All Your holy wrath has beset me, overwhelming me in waves.
All my former friends forget me; on me now they look with hate.

Read Psalm 88.6, 7

Preparation

1. Where is the psalmist in these verses?
2. How do we know that he still has faith?

Meditation

Let's remember that inspired prophets did not always fully grasp the meaning of what they preached or wrote. Their words captured something important about their times and circumstances; but very often, they pointed far beyond those times and situations to deeper, more sublime and mysterious truths that would await fuller explication as the course of God's redemptive plan continued to unfold.

These verses certainly fall into that category. The sons of Korah speak as Heman, now lowered into the grave, yet somehow, still communing with the Lord. Heman seems to acknowledge the deservedness of his death (v. 7; cf. Rom. 3.23, 6.23), yet his faith is undiminished. We get the sense that God hears Heman's prayer and that, somehow, the grave is not the end of the story.

This is further signaled by the not-so-veiled reference to Jonah 2.1-4. There the prophet sounds very much like Heman in Psalm 88, and we know that God did not leave Jonah in the depths of the sea. This was not the first time the sons of Korah appealed to Jonah 2. They did in Psalm 42.7, which verse is immediately followed by the confident expression of hope in God's reviving power (Ps. 42.8).

In the face of death and loss, echoes of faith and hope reverberate throughout Psalm 88. For the most part, they are left unsaid, yet the memory of them is cued up for those who are familiar with Scripture and who hope in the sovereign grace and goodness of God.

God will raise this wise man from the tribe of Judah, just as He will raise Wisdom Himself in a later day.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

If you were sitting in English class and were given the assignment to write about a frightening place, a place you would like to avoid at all costs, you would be hard-pressed to come up with a darker description than this. Laid in the lowest pit. In darkness. In a deep place. God's wrath overwhelming. God's affliction unending. Rolling to and fro with unceasing storm-tossed waves. In the dark. Alone. No friends. Hated by everyone. Shut up in a small, dark place from which you cannot get out, going blind in the germ-ridden hold of affliction. Rocking, retching, in the darkness (Ps. 88.6, 7).

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

And that cannot even begin to describe the place of suffering to which Jesus was flung for us; “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, He *was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53.3-6).

Back to English class for a new assignment: Write about light and love; forgiveness and new life. Write about emerging from the darkness; justified from sin. Underserved yet experienced:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Rom. 5. 8).

Jesus, the Man of sorrows, experienced the rank darkness of God’s anger, so that we can experience His light.

So in this truth, the sons of Korah tell us how to take the next assignment into our Personal Mission Field:

“My heart is overflowing with a good theme;
I recite my composition concerning the King;
my tongue is the pen of a ready writer” (Ps. 45. 1).

Show and tell.

Reflection

1. How should the suffering and death of Jesus – for your sins – lead you to respond to Him?
2. What “good theme” will you share with someone today?
3. How can we as believers encourage one another in our witness to the Lord?

He complained most of God’s displeasure. Even the children of God’s love may sometimes think themselves children of wrath and no outward trouble can be so hard upon them as that. Probably the psalmist described his own case, yet he leads to Christ.
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 88.1-9*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.1-3

Call on the Lord to fill your soul with peace. Whatever challenges, troubles, or obstacles are facing you today, roll them on Him, and give Him thanks.

Sing Psalm 88.1-3

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

Lord of my salvation, hear me, as I cry by night and day.
Hear my plea, O Lord, bend near me; O, receive me when I pray!
For my soul is weak and weary, and my life draws near the grave.

4 Alone and Rejected

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.4, 5

I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man *who has* no strength,
Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.

Sing Psalm 88.4, 5

(Picardy: [Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence](#))

Like a person thought to be dying, like a man whose strength is gone.
Like one with the slain now lying, like a dead and buried one:
For Your mercy I am sighing, cut off from Your hand and gone.

Read Psalm 88.8-12

Preparation

1. How would you describe the condition of the psalmist in these verses?
2. What does the psalmist regret about dying?

Meditation

I think we learn a bit more about the man Heman, as the sons of Korah put these words in his mouth. Recall that either he had already died and was being memorialized, or he was dying and this psalm was an homage to his life. This wise man from the tribe of Judah was known for many things, which the sons of Korah outline here. And what we learn of him continues to point us forward to Jesus.

Heman was a man of prayer and praise, who declared the lovingkindness of God and His faithfulness to His Word (vv. 9-11). He did wondrous works by the grace of God and spoke of His lovingkindness and righteousness (vv. 10-12), thus making him a faithful witness for the Lord. He was a man of friendships (v. 8), and a man for whom death was a condition to be despised (vv. 8, 9).

He knew what it was to be afflicted and rejected, and to be alone with His God in the throes of death.

He was a good man, and he would be missed. The sons of Korah don't want us to forget him. But he was also a type of Jesus, Whose experience was much like that of Heman, before He was raised from the dead.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

If we look at these questions as merely temporal, they must be answered in the negative:

Will You work wonders for the dead?

Shall the dead arise and praise You?

Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave?

Shall Your faithfulness be declared in the place of destruction?

Shall Your wonders be known in the dark?

Shall Your righteousness be known in the land of forgetfulness? (Ps. 88.10-12)

But, if looked at spiritually, they will be answered in the affirmative!

Jesus' work changed the negative into a positive for those who believe.

Trusting in our sure salvation we can answer these questions resoundingly “Yes!”

In Proverbs 30, Agur parsed his questions like this:

“Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?

Who has gathered the wind in His fists?

Who has bound the waters in a garment?

Who has established all the ends of the earth?

What is His name, and what is His Son’s name,

If you know?” (Prov. 30.1-4)

If you don’t know, none of the questions have a believable answer.

But if you do know, you have The Answer.

It is God, and His Son is Jesus.

As the sons of Korah asked questions, so did Agur.

And these questions will have decisively different answers, depending upon our frame of reference.

We can answer with confidence because we know Whom we have believed and are persuaded that He is able (2 Tim. 2.12) to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Jesus... (Heb. 7.25).

Yes. God will work wonders for the dead, and we will arise and praise Him. (1 Thess. 4.16)

Yes. His lovingkindness and His faithfulness will be declared. (Ps. 19.1; 1 Jn. 1.3)

Yes. His wonders are known in the dark. (Is. 9.2)

Yes. His righteousness will be remembered. (Lk. 22.19; 2 Cor. 11.24)

Reflection

1. Since in Jesus we can answer all these questions “Yes!”, what does this suggest about the attitude and outlook we should take into each day?
2. People who don’t know Jesus are stuck with the “No!” answers. What is our responsibility toward them?
3. What do we learn from Heman and the sons of Korah about maintaining continuous communion with the Lord?

See how deep those terrors wounded the psalmist. If friends are put far from us by providences, or death, we have reason to look upon it as affliction. Such was the calamitous state of a good man. But the pleas here used were peculiarly suited to Christ. And we are not to think that the holy Jesus suffered for us only at Gethsemane and on Calvary. His whole life was labor and sorrow; he was afflicted as never man was, from his youth up. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), NKJV Commentary on Psalm 88.10-18

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.6-12

Pray that God will renew your worship, your witness, your relationships, and your walk with Him. Ask Him to help you live like one who has been alive from the dead (Eph. 2.1-10).

Sing Psalm 88.6-12

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

In the lowest pit You have set me, in a deep and darkening place.

All Your holy wrath has beset me, overwhelming me in waves.

All my former friends forget me; on me now they look with hate.

All day long I cry in vain, Lord, as my eye is wasting away.

Can a dead man sing Your praise, Lord? Can I testify from the grave?

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

Will I tell Your love again, Lord? Will I sing Your pow'r and grace?

5 Relentless Faith

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.13, 14

But to You I have cried out, O LORD,
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.
LORD, why do You cast off my soul?
Why do You hide Your face from me?

Sing Psalm 88.13-16

(Picardy: [Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence](#))

Morning comes and, Lord, I am crying: Why do You my soul reject?
From my youth have I been dying; pain and terrors sore afflict.
Fear and anger, sorely trying, overwhelm, destroy, reject.

Read Psalm 88.13-15

Preparation

1. When and how did the psalmists pray?
2. What was the essence of their prayer?

Meditation

As Christians, we do not expect our lives to be all fun and sunshine. Jesus said that in this world we would have tribulation (Jn. 16.33). So we expect, from time to time, to feel downcast in our soul, alone and rejected, and as if God was not listening to our cries.

But that doesn't mean we stop crying to Him. He is our only hope. He is our reliable help in times of need (Ps. 46.1). He can bring us through every valley of tears by carrying us in His strength (Ps. 84.6, 7). The sons of Korah saw this kind of relentless faith in Heman, who even as the light of life was going out within him, called on the Lord and cast all his burdens on Him.

Our trials may sometimes be prolonged. Day after day, morning by morning (v. 13) we will pray for relief and feel as if God has hidden His face from us (v. 14). We will once again set before Him the catalog of our distresses and cry to Him for relief (v. 15).

And then we will wait (Ps. 27.13, 14). By the grace of God, faith is unrelenting in the face of trials. Like Jesus, facing the greatest of all trials, we will groan and plead, but in the end, we will say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done, O Lord" (Matt. 26.39).

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and
in the morning my prayer comes before You" (Ps. 88.13).

Where else or to whom else should we go?

"You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6.68).

Jesus spoke a parable for the purpose of encouragement,

teaching that His people "always ought to pray and not lose heart":

"There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying,

'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself,
‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me
I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’
Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said.
And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him,
though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.
Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18.1-8)

Will He?

Will He find our faith in prayer believable?

Will He find us working in prayer day and night?

Will God be wearied with our cries for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit? (Rom. 14.17)

We will be found faithful when we are relentless in persistent prayer;
and persistent in our pursuit of peace and holiness in Him (1 Pet. 1.15, 16).

Reflection

1. Would you describe your own faith as “relentless”? Explain.
2. Why is it so important that we know how to seek the Lord in all kinds of situations and circumstances?
3. How can Christians encourage one another to a more relentless faith?

...he modestly intimates by these words, that his pining away in long continued miseries was not owing to his own sluggishness, as if he had not sought God. This is an example particularly worthy of notice, that we may not become discouraged if it happen sometimes that our prayers are for a time unsuccessful, although they may proceed from the heart, and may be assiduously persevered in. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 88.13

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.1-5

What challenges, trials, difficulties, or fears are you currently facing? Have you entrusted them to the Lord and His care? Do so now in prayer, and go forth from prayer to live in joyous faith.

Sing Psalm 88.1-5

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

Lord of my salvation, hear me, as I cry by night and day;
Hear my plea, O Lord, bend near me; O, receive me when I pray!
For my soul is weak and weary, and my life draws near the grave.

Like a person thought to be dying, like a man whose strength is gone.
Like one with the slain now lying, like a dead and buried one:
For Your mercy I am sighing, cut off from Your hand and gone.

6 Sovereign in Death...and Life

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.1-5

O LORD, God of my salvation,
I have cried out day and night before You.
Let my prayer come before You;
Incline Your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to the grave.
I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man *who has* no strength,
Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.

Sing Psalm 88.1-5

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

Lord of my salvation, hear me, as I cry by night and day;
Hear my plea, O Lord, bend near me; O, receive me when I pray!
For my soul is weak and weary, and my life draws near the grave.

Like a person thought to be dying, like a man whose strength is gone.
Like one with the slain now lying, like a dead and buried one:
For Your mercy I am sighing, cut off from Your hand and gone.

Read Psalm 88.16-18.

Preparation

1. From where did Heman's affliction come?
2. What is the effect of this on him?

Meditation

The psalms composed by the sons of Korah end not with a bang, but a whimper.

But it's a whimper of faith.

We are all going to die. It should comfort us to know as we are dying – as in all our trials, troubles, disappointments, fears, and uncertainties – that God is sovereign over life *and* death.

God knows the value of trials to strengthen hope, build character, and increase our experience of His love (cf. Rom. 5.1-5). This will be true as well when it comes our time to depart this life. God will have brought us to that moment. He will be with us in it, receiving our prayers and preparing to receive us to Himself. And though we may feel sad, bereft of loved ones, and slipping away into an uncertain darkness, we know that nothing – not even death – can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8.37-39).

Trials and death sadden us, cause us to grieve and moan, and leave us feeling perplexed and downcast. But they do not leave us forsaken. God Who is sovereign over death will hear our prayers, keep us through death's flood (v. 17), and receive us unto Himself. That hope is sought here, but for us who know Jesus Christ, it is assured.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The sons of Korah remind us that each one – themselves, Heman, David (Ps. 31.11; 38.11), Job (Job 16.20), Jesus (Matt. 26.47-50; Mk. 14.50)), us – will be afflicted, overwhelmed, forsaken by friends and family, and suffer terrors and wrath from God or from others (Ps. 88.15-18). Life is like that. Jesus promised (Jn. 16.33).

But we also possess the promise that He will never forsake us (Heb. 13.5).

We have, through the Holy Spirit, access to the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). So it is possible, when we are surrounded and engulfed by troubles, that we can imagine ourselves flooded by His Living Water (Jn. 4.10). Up to our necks. Engulfed by His Presence; more pervasive than any problem.

“When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.”

“For I *am* the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior...” (Is. 43.2, 3).

“God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed,
and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
though its waters roar *and* be troubled,
though the mountains shake with its swelling” (Ps. 46.1-3).

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Rom. 11.33)

There are no depths. Not even death. Deeper than His love for us.

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8.38, 39).

Reflection

1. How should we prepare for the trials we will face in life? For our own death?
2. What does it mean to have the mind of Christ? How can knowing that help us as we go through trials?
3. Why is it so comforting to know that God is sovereign over life *and* death?

Had the prophet thought himself rejected and abhorred by God, he certainly would not have persevered in prayer. But here he sets forth the judgment of the flesh, against which he strenuously and magnanimously struggled, that it might at length be manifest from the result that he had not prayed in vain. Although, therefore, this psalm does not end with thanksgiving, but with a mournful complaint, as if there remained no place for mercy, yet it is so much the more useful as a means of keeping us in the duty of prayer. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on the Psalm 88.14-18

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.13-18

Set your mind on Jesus, exalted in glory. See Him, with the eye of your heart (Eph. 1.15ff), radiant in beauty, welcoming your gaze and your praise. Call on Him to be Living Water in you today.

Sing Psalm 88.13-18

(Picardy: [Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence](#))

Morning comes and, Lord, I am crying: Why do You my soul reject?
From my youth have I been dying; pain and terrors sore afflict.

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

Fear and anger, sorely trying, overwhelm, destroy, reject.

All day long my foes surround me, like a threat'ning, rising flood.
Circling round they sought and found me, taking from me all that is good.
Friend and lover gone, they hound me – all my friends in darkness stood.

7 The Assurance of Things Hoped For

Opening Prayer: Psalm 88.13-15

But to You I have cried out, O LORD,
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.
LORD, why do You cast off my soul?
Why do You hide Your face from me?
I *have been* afflicted and ready to die from my youth;
I suffer Your terrors;
I am distraught.

Sing Psalm 88.13-16

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*](#))

Morning comes and, Lord, I am crying: Why do You my soul reject?
From my youth have I been dying; pain and terrors sore afflict.
Fear and anger, sorely trying, overwhelm, destroy, reject.

Read Psalm 88; meditate on verses 13-15

Preparation

1. How would you describe the overall mood of this psalm?
2. How can you see Heman's faith even amid his anguish?

Meditation

There is an art to dying well, and that art consists in living well all the way to the day of your death.

Heman was a wise man, whose reputation for wisdom was second only to Solomon's. He walked with the Lord, and he was able to help others know and commune with Him as well. He was a man of sound faith, daily worship, constant prayer, and loving service to others. Heman kept communion with God throughout his life, even as he was sinking into death.

By trusting God and obeying Him throughout his life, Heman was able to hold fast to Him at life's end. His continuing in prayer as he was descending into death shows us that he was trusting himself to God even as life, friends, and light departed from him. We are meant to hope from this that Heman would not be disappointed in his desire to continue praising and serving God, that in a way yet veiled from the sons of Korah who composed this psalm, God had further – and doubtless greater – things in store for His faithful servant. Faith, the writer of Hebrews explained, involves being assured of things hoped for (Heb. 11.1), even though we must pass through valleys of tears during our sojourn to our eternal dwelling.

Heman is a type of Christ, Who also experienced distress and anguish, yet trust and hope, as His own death approached. Jesus is the answer to Heman's questions. No, death is not the end. Yes, we will triumph over the grave. No, our praise and service to God are not finished. Yes, we will be raised in Jesus to worship the Lord forevermore. No, our prayers do not fall on deaf ears. Yes, God hears and cares and will provide for us, even to the day of our death and beyond.

Heman, a man of sorrows, points us to Jesus, the true Man of Sorrows, Who by His grief and suffering made a way to eternal life and joy for all who cling to Him throughout their lives. We may expect to die well, in the full confidence of God's ongoing care, so long as we live well for Jesus through all our days.

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

To die well, we must live well. And to live well, we must belong to Christ and follow Him daily.

Psalm 119.161-168 gives us guidance in how to do this daily. The Twelve Step antidote to the poison of betrayal, affliction, weakness, depression, sadness and terror (Ps. 88.1-18) is found within these eight verses:

1. Underserved persecution, within and without, drives us to be awestruck by God's Word. (Ps. 119.161)
2. In all circumstances we rejoice at this Word as one who finds great treasure. (Ps. 119.162)
3. We hate and abhor all sin in our lives. (Ps. 119.163)
4. We love God's Law. (Ps. 119.163)
5. All day long we praise God because of His righteous judgments. (Ps. 119.164)
6. God, in turn, gives us great peace because we love His Law. (Ps. 119.165)
7. Because we love and obey His Law no sin trips us up or causes us to stumble. (Ps. 119.165)
8. We have faith and hope in the unseen salvation that awaits us. (Ps. 119.166)
9. Because we have hope in His salvation, we do His commandments. (Ps. 119.166)
10. When we do His commandments, our soul is strengthened to keep His testimonies. (Ps. 119.167)
11. Because we keep His testimonies it makes us love them exceedingly more. (Ps. 119.167)
12. We believe all this to be true, therefore, we are encouraged to be obedient to His precepts and testimonies, because He sees everything that we do, and knows the contents of our hearts. (Ps. 119.168)

Love and fear of God and His Word, hold the key to the art of living and dying well (Jn. 14.15; 15.14).

Jesus Christ, the Man of Sorrows, suffered life and death for us, that we might live and die well. (Jn. 3.16)

"Man of Sorrows', what a name for the Son of God who came ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

"Guilty, vile and helpless, we; spotless Lamb of God was He; 'full atonement' can it be? Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

"When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring, then anew this song we'll sing: Hallelujah! What a Savior!"
(Philip P. Bliss, 1875)

Reflection

1. It's a good thing Jesus became the Man of Sorrows for us. Is it also good that we experience sorrows and afflictions at times? Explain.
2. What can we learn from Heman about how to deal with our trials and afflictions?
3. What do we mean by saying that Heman is a type of Christ? Why is it important we understand that? How does knowing this help us in reading the Old Testament?

...the pleas here used were peculiarly suited to Christ. And we are not to think that the holy Jesus suffered for us only at Gethsemane and on Calvary. His whole life was labor and sorrow; he was afflicted as never man was, from his youth up. He was prepared for that death of which he tasted through life. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 88.10-18

Closing Prayer: Psalm 88.1-3

Give thanks to God for the trials and challenges He allows to come your way, and praise Him in advance that not one of His precious and very great promises will ever fail (2 Pet. 1.4).

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

Sing Psalm 88.1-3

(Picardy: [Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence](#))

Lord of my salvation, hear me, as I cry by night and day.

Hear my plea, O Lord, bend near me; O, receive me when I pray!

For my soul is weak and weary, and my life draws near the grave.

Man of Sorrows: Psalm 88

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What do we learn about faith from the example of Heman?
2. Why does God allow His people to go through times of trial and suffering? How can these be of benefit to us in our journey with the Lord?
3. In what ways is Heman a type of Jesus? Why is this important?
4. We are all going to die. What would you suggest are the keys to making sure you die well?
5. What's the most important lesson you have learned from our study of Psalm 88? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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