

Psalm 88: When God is Silent

I. Typical Lament vs. Psalm 88

A. Structure of the Typical Lament

1. Address to God and cry for help
2. Reference to God's past mighty acts
3. Complaints
4. Confession OR asserts innocence OR curse
5. Confidence in God's response
6. Vow of praise or blessing

B. Structure of Psalm 88

1. Cry to God (vv.1-2)
2. Description of speaker's crisis (vv. 3-9)
3. Rhetorical questions (vv. 10-12)
4. Petition for God to act (vv. 13-14)
5. Further description of distress (vv. 15-18)

"I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, The Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul... there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn ... all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated." - John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, xxxviii.

II. Psalm 88

"Psalm 88 stands as a mark of realism of biblical faith. It has a pastoral use, because there are situations in which easy, cheap talk of resolution must be avoided." -Walter Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 81

A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

O LORD, God of my salvation;

I cry out day and night before you.

² *Let my prayer come before you;*

incline your ear to my cry!

³ *For my soul is full of troubles,*

and my life draws near to Sheol.

⁴ *I am counted among those who go down to the pit;*

I am a man who has no strength,

⁵ *like one set loose among the dead,*

like the slain that lie in the grave,

like those whom you remember no more,

for they are cut off from your hand.

⁶ *You have put me in the depths of the pit,*

in the regions dark and deep.

⁷ *Your wrath lies heavy upon me,*

and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah

⁸ *You have caused my companions to shun me;*

you have made me a horror to them.

I am shut in so that I cannot escape;

⁹ *my eye grows dim through sorrow.*

Every day I call upon you, O LORD;

I spread out my hands to you.

¹⁰ *Do you work wonders for the dead?*

Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah

¹¹ *Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,*

or your faithfulness in Abaddon?

¹² *Are your wonders known in the darkness,*

or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

¹³ *But I, O LORD, cry to you;*

in the morning my prayer comes before you.

¹⁴ *O LORD, why do you cast my soul away?*

Why do you hide your face from me?

¹⁵ *Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,*

I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.

¹⁶ *Your wrath has swept over me;*

your dreadful assaults destroy me.

¹⁷ *They surround me like a flood all day long;*

they close in on me together.

¹⁸ *You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;*

my companions have become darkness. (Ps 88)

1. How does the Psalmist describe his situation? Do you think his description implies there is no afterlife?

"Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people." (Gen 35:8)

"The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely." (Lev 25:19)

"He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!" (Ps 113:9)

2. Is this Psalm *entirely* devoid of hope? Is there implicit hope? Does darkness have the last word here?
3. Describe the rhetorical force of the Psalmist's questions in vv. 10-12? What is the irony of these questions?

"Death comes to the ungodly man as a penal infliction, but to the righteous as a summons to his Father's palace: to the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing. Death to the wicked is the King of terrors: death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory." – Charles Spurgeon

4. Where might it be found if Ps 88 were in the New Testament? What would it mean there for us?

"But I, O LORD, cry to you..." (v.13)

"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears..." (Heb 5:7)

"Afflicted and close to death from my youth up..." (v.15)

"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50)

"For my soul is full of troubles..." (v.3)

"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt 26:38)

"You have caused my companions to shun me..." (v.8)

"And they all left him and fled." (Mark 14:49)

"I suffer your terrors; I am helpless..." (v.15)

"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood..." (Luke 22:44)

"O LORD, why do you cast my soul away?" (v.14)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46)

"Your wrath has swept over me..." (v.16)

"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief..." (Is 53:10)

5. What is so "good" about Good Friday? Therefore, what is so "good" about your suffering?

"The aim of creation is the fullest, clearest, surest display of the greatness of the glory of the grace of God. And that display would be the slaughter of the best being in the universe for millions of undeserving sinners. The suffering and death of the Lamb of God in history is the best possible display of the glory of the grace of God. That is why God planned it before the foundation of the world [Eph 1:4]." – John Piper

"Though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." (Lam 3:32-33)

"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'... Then I looked, and I heard around the throne ...myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:9,11,13)

**Jesus! What a strength in weakness!
Let me hide myself in Him.
Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing,
He, my strength, my victory wins.**

**Jesus! What a help in sorrow!
While the billows o'er me roll,
Even when my heart is breaking,
He, my comfort, helps my soul.
-“Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners”**