

The Unquenchable Cry of God's Elect

Psalm 88:1-18

Halifax: 4 October 2020

Introduction:

In our sermon series on the Gospel of Mark, we have come to chapter 14 where preparations begin for Jesus' crucifixion.

- There is the plotting, the gracious anointing by the woman in preparation for His death, the Last Supper, the prayer of agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal, the arrest, and the trial.

As we move into this new section, I want to introduce to you a new Psalm of Focus that we will sing each week as we cover this material.

- The Psalm I have chosen is Psalm 88.
- It has been called the most doleful of all the Psalms and is rarely found in hymnals that do not contain all of the Psalms—for example, it is absent from the *Trinity Hymnal*.
- The reason for this is not only that it is full of lamentation, but most of all that it also ends in lamentation—with no expression that relief has been found.

Nevertheless, I aim to show you that this Psalm is a beautiful expression of unquenchable faith from the heart of one who deeply loves his God.

- This one has great sorrow because he knows how things ought to be with his God—he knows what has been lost because of sin—
- He knows the damage and estrangement that sin has caused and he can't bear to have it so. He knows the glory that is promised and cannot bear to be without it.
- He cries out ardently to God, not because he has given up, but because he knows that God will hear and answer him and that he and all his will be reconciled to God.

My brothers and sisters, this beautiful Psalm of lament is the lament of our dear Lord Jesus Christ who was cut off for our sake—that He might redeem us.

- It is His song and it is the song of all the elect.
 - It is **not** merely the song of a few overly despondent souls.
 - It is the Psalm of those who love Jesus and of whom it is said: **1 Cor 2:9-10: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”** ¹⁰ **But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit.**
- We who believe have a sense of the glory that God has promised to us through Jesus Christ because God has revealed it to us. We yearn for it.
 - We cannot be satisfied with this present world where we are estranged from our God.
 - We long to be freed from our sin and to see His glory, not because we are gloomy and without hope, but because our hope is not in this world.
 - We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen, for the things that are seen are temporary but the things that are not seen are eternal.
 - Our Lord Jesus knows the damage the sin has caused more than any of us and He knows the glory that is to come—and He yearns for it more than we do.
 - In singing this Psalm, we get to join Him in His cries as our worship leader and lift up these verses of hope with Him, knowing that our cry will be answered.

Please give me your attention now as I read this Psalm to you.

Psalm 88:1-18: «A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. To the Chief Musician. Set to “Mahalath Leannoth.” A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite.» O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried 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 the grave. ⁴ I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man *who has no strength*, ⁵ 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. ⁶ You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted *me* with all Your waves. *Selah* ⁸ You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; *I am* shut up, and I cannot get out; ⁹ my eye wastes away because of affliction. LORD, I have called

daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You. ¹⁰ Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise *and* praise You? *Selah* ¹¹ Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? *Or* Your faithfulness in the place of destruction? ¹² Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? ¹³ But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You. ¹⁴ LORD, why do You cast off my soul? *Why* do You hide Your face from me? ¹⁵ *I have been* afflicted and ready to die from *my* youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am dis-traught. ¹⁶ Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off. ¹⁷ They came around me all day long like water; they engulfed me altogether. ¹⁸ Loved one and friend You have put far from me, *and* my acquaintances into darkness.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

May He help us in the weeks to come to sing this beautiful Psalm in full communion with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters,

- Let me tell you that this was most certainly Jesus' cry when He was here in our flesh having come into this world from heaven that He might bear our sins.
 - It was especially His cry when He prepared to go to the cross and bore the estrangement that sin brings to God and to others in His own person...
 - But it is also the cry that He continues to make now that He has ascended to God's right hand to reign.
 - It is His cry until He gathers all of His elect into the fold.
 - We are the members of His body and He will not cease to cry out for us until we are all in glory with Him at the last day.
 - This is the cry of the whole church with Jesus Christ as our head!

I. See in the opening lines that this song is an ongoing (unceasing) cry to God as our Saviour.

- Look at the first two lines:
 - **Ps 88:1-2: O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You. ² Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry.**

A. It is addressed to God our Saviour.

1. It is not addressed to Him as God our *avenger*.
 - It is not the song of one who feels that he is under God's condemnation, but as one who knows that he has been delivered from condemnation and who is waiting for that deliverance to be complete.
2. There is this very personal note that He is my Saviour.
 - That is the reason He is being appealed to.
 - Those who make this cry are those who realise that they are cut off by sin and that they cannot save themselves.
 - They realise that only God can save them and they have embraced His promise to them that He *will* save them.
 - They make no pretense that their condition is less than desperate without Him.
 - They make no pretense that they can somehow save themselves or even contribute to their salvation.
3. And note that this one to whom they cry is none other than the LORD.
 - LORD written in all caps is God's covenant name—Yahweh.
 - This is the name that He has revealed to His elect people when He revealed Himself to them as the One who came with the promise to save them.
 - Our cry to God as Saviour arises from the testimony of His promise to save all who look to Him for their salvation.
 - For those of us who live in these last days, after the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with His suffering for our sins and His resurrection to glory,
 - it means that we rest in the firm assurance of what our gracious God has done for us—in sending His Son to redeem us and in accepting His offering for our sins.
 - We cry, not because we are unsure of Him, because we are sure that He is our Saviour and that He is able to save.
4. Now someone may say, "But how can this be the cry of Jesus? Jesus **is** God our Saviour."
 - Indeed He is, but He is our God our Saviour who became true human flesh and **"who [to quote from Heb 5:7-9] in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.**
 - He needed to be saved more than any of us.
 - Because when He went to the cross, He became sin for us—for all His people—all who will be saved in the history of the entire world.
 - He offered Himself to bear the curse for all of us, and in doing so, He cried out that His offering would be accepted by the Father for our sins.
 - He did not become a sinner in the sense that He became sinful, but He bore all the shame and all the guilt and was cut off for our transgressions as if He had committed them all.

- You might say that He who was so very near and dear to the Father became estranged from the Father with us that He might secure our pardon.
 - His rejection by the Father was the Father’s rejection of us all for our sins; and His acceptance by the Father was the Father’s acceptance not only of Him, but of Him and all of us sinners.
 - So do you see?
 - He was cut off because He bore our transgressions—and in bearing them, He cried out to the God of His salvation for His offering of Himself to be accepted (and it was) and now He cries out for the blessing to be brought to us in full. He is crying out with us until we are brought to glory.
- So this Psalm is not a cry to God as our avenger, but to God as Saviour.
- B. And secondly you can see from these opening verses that it is an ongoing cry.
- The songwriter says, in the rest of v.1, **I have cried out day and night before You.**
1. This is a prayer that the people God make with their Lord continually until every last one of us is resurrected with Him in glory.
 - Jesus speaks of the elect as (Luke 18:7): **“His own elect who cry out day and night to Him though He bears long with them.”**—doesn’t answer for a long time.
 - In Revelation, we are told of the saints in glory who cry out, and I quote (Rev 6:10): **with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”**
 - In Romans 8:22-24, it says: **For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?**
 - We will not stop crying out to the Lord until we are raised with Him in glory.
 2. We also know that our Lord Jesus Christ is the One who prays the most fervently and most consistently for all for this—our prayers waver, but His don’t:
 - **Heb 7:25: Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**
 - We are the members of His body—He will not have us left in sin, He will not have us left in the grave—He will continue to intercede until we are all in glory with Him. Partial salvation is not acceptable.
- C. Verse 2 of our song shows the intensity of this cry.
1. There is this pleading that God will pay attention.
 - It says: **Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry.**
 2. It is recognised that if He does not hear, there can be no salvation for anyone.
 - It pleases God not only for us to cry out to Him, but to do so earnestly and persistently as those who recognise that we are ruined and estranged from Him until He completes His work in us.

TRANS> So having seen that this is a cry of faith to God our Saviour,

II. We speak of our desperate condition—that we are “full of troubles (v. 3).”

A. This is no exaggeration. Like everyone else, we are headed for the grave.

1. Thus verse 3 continues: **My life draws near to the grave. ⁴ I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man *who has* no strength, ⁵ 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.**

- The grave reveals our utter helplessness.
 - No matter how strong a man may have been, how tenacious and spirited a woman may have been, none are so in the grave.
 - There the body lies, helpless, to feed the worms, to rot and return to the dust.
- The phrase in verse 5, “adrift among the dead” is literally “free among the dead.”
 - It speaks of a miserable kind of freedom in the grave from the sustaining hand of God—the hand that sustains all His creatures while they live on earth.
 - In the grave, we are no longer recognised, no longer remembered by Him who used to give us our daily bread and to sustain us by His hand.
 - Now we are, as it says, **cut off from His hand**—cut off from the land of the living.

2. This is a recognition of our hope in the resurrection.

- We go to the grave with all other men, but the grave is no place for God’s redeemed sons and daughters to remain!
 - In this world, we already have death upon us—we have disease and injury—we bear many sorrows in this world related to the death of our bodies.
 - But we cry out to God for these troubles to end because He is our Saviour.
- Jesus is the first one to rise from the dead, and we will not be content until we also have been raised up with immortal bodies like His body.
 - Death and the grave is the place for those who are rejected by God—who go down to the pit forever,
 - but we are looking to be raised up to stand before God according to God’s promise—not to be cast away forever with the wicked.

B. What makes this trouble all the worse is that it is an expression of God’s wrath.

1. Verse 6 & 7 say: **You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted *me* with all Your waves.**

- All of our troubles reveal God’s wrath upon our sin.
 - Not that every affliction is God’s punishment for some particular sin that we have committed, but indeed that every affliction is because of God’s wrath against sin.
 - There would be no affliction in this world were it not for sin.

- Clearly, the relationship of the sons and daughters of Adam with our God is broken.
 - It is not at all what it ought to be.
 - There is this darkness in us—we do not know Him as He is, we do not see His glory—even after we have been redeemed.
 - Things are still far from fully restored.
 - We bear about this body of death with us—we feel the distance from our Maker.
 - Our prayers are weak, our praises are feeble.
 - Our songs of praise are not full and heartfelt.
 - There is lust and corruption, bitterness and anger.
 - There is malice in us.
 - We are proud and we are selfish.
 - Our world is broken and so is the church—filled with heresy and division.
 - There is confusion and idolatry.
 - This is not acceptable for those who have God as their Saviour!
2. And our estrangement from God also estranges us from each other.
- That is the complaint of v. 8: **You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out.**
 - What a doleful thing it is.
 - There is an edge on all of our relationships with each other in this world, even with those that we love—an estrangement that is ugly—a coldness that simply ought not to be.
 - Sometimes it breaks out in ugly quarrels.
 - Sometimes it leads to separations that cannot be repaired.
 - It involves disrespect of each other, lack of care, displeasure.
 - We experience it in various degrees in various relationships, but it is always there and it ought not to be there.
 - In all these ways we daily experience the wrath of God until the day we are restored to glory with Him.
 - This cannot go on. It is not acceptable for the sons and daughters of God who have Jesus as the Saviour.

III. And so the church (under the leadership of Jesus) testifies of our refusal to go on at this poor dying rate.

- A. We see our own state and we see the state of the church and we testify in verse 9, that **our eye wastes away because of affliction.**
1. To the godly soul, our present condition is an intolerable burden that makes us cry out to God our Saviour for deliverance.
 - The more we love Him, and the more He has revealed to us the glory that He has prepared for us, the deeper our lamentation is about the status quo.

2. Think of how displeasing it was to Jesus to bear estrangement from God and from other people in this world.
 - He knew how it ought to be—more than any of us know.
 3. The cries of this Psalm are the cries of those whose hearts are knitted together with His heart.
 - It is a cry of faith and a cry of hope.
 - It is the cry of those who believe the promises of God and will not accept our present condition. They yearn for glory.
- B. We testify again of our relentless cry.
1. Verse 9 goes on—**LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You.**
 - The cry of faith is a cry that gives God no rest until He makes Jerusalem (his church) a praise in the earth.
 2. We, the church under Jesus our Master, remind Him in yet stronger terms that death is no place for His saints to remain.
 - God neither works wonders for the dead, nor do they arise to praise Him.
 - Verse 10: **Will you work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise you?**
 - Of course not—they can do nothing of the kind unless God raises them up. Yet, we were saved to be His worshippers.
 - Verse 11 goes on explaining that there is no proclamation of His lovingkindness—His covenant love and faithfulness in the grave.
 - Verse 12: There is no sense of His wonderworking power and grace or His righteousness among the dead. And of course there is too little of it in the world.
 - We must not be left here to continue as those still bearing the marks of spiritual death,
 - nor with our bodies in the grave (as those who have departed among us are). This is no place for the saints, for the people of God.
 3. We remind Him that we are among those who cry out to Him in faith and yet continue without deliverance.
 - a. Verse 13 speaks of our cry to Him as our first order of business.
 - **13 But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.**
 - Though as individuals, we often fail to make this our first order of business—we have other concerns that we elevate too highly—
 - With Jesus as our head, this is our first order of business.
 - Though our prayers fail, the church’s prayers cannot fail because Jesus is our head and He ever lives to make intercession.

- But brothers and sisters, you ought to make it your first order of business when you get up in the morning—taking precedence over everything else—to cry out the Lord to complete His work in us!
- b. And in a godly way, we should be distressed until He fully answers us.
 - Like the martyrs in Revelation, we should ask Him why He does not?
 - Verse 14: LORD, why do You cast off my soul? *Why* do You hide Your face from me?
 - We should testify with our Lord Jesus Himself of our affliction:
 - **15 I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. 16 Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off.**
 - Was it not so with our Lord? Was He not cut off by God’s terrors out of the land of the living? Certainly He was!
 - He, more than any of us, could testify that His troubles (v. 17): **came around me all day long like water; They engulfed me altogether.**
 - And He could say (v. 18): **Loved one and friend You have put far from me, and my acquaintances into darkness.**
 - How painfully did He taste that sorrow of our loveless world, even from those His disciples and from those He had healed.
 - When you complain in a holy way, you become more holy, because the thing you complain about most is that you are still in your sin., still not praising God and loving Him.
 - If you don’t complain and look to God for what He has promised you will start pursuing paradise in the world, it will make you impatient in the way that God condemns.
 - You will make idols to satisfy yourself instead of waiting on the LORD.

Conclusion:

My brothers and sisters, this is no faithless Psalm.

- This is a Psalm that recognises the ongoing condition of the church until we are brought to glory.
- This is a Psalm that helps us to join our Lord Jesus Christ in giving God no rest until He makes His church a praise in the earth.
- This Psalm does not destroy, but elevates our hopes in the glory to come.

Let this Psalm give you a holy discontent with the condition of the church.

- With the sin and the estrangement from God that you continue to have until you stand before Him in glory in Jesus Christ.

And by all means, if you have never yet acknowledged the condition of this world of sin and misery, I plead with you to do so at once.

- Join us, the people who believe, and cry to God for His deliverance in Jesus Christ.

- Join us by coming to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and new life so that you can join us in our cries for the complete restoration of the church to God.

This Psalm closes with an ongoing cry because He has not yet answered our cry or completed His restoration of His church.

- Don't look at us as those who are the finished product—we are far from that.
- The true church is found among those who cry out to Him day and night as the God of our salvation—as the LORD who alone is able to deliver us and who will deliver us by His Son our Saviour.