

Psalm 89 • When hardship doesn't make sense

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Psalm chapter 89. This is different from the previous Psalm, at least at the beginning. It is a cry for help similar to what we read in the previous Psalm, but this one begins with just declarations of God's faithfulness. It resonates with hope and faith here at the beginning.

By the way, it is listed as a Maskil of Ethan, the Ezrahite, if you notice at the very top. And he was a well-known temple musician. And the first 37 verses of this passage are very upbeat.

He says,

"¹ I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

² For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."

³ You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; (Now he's quoting what the LORD has said.) I have sworn to David my servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" (ESV)

What's the psalmist doing? Something we've seen David do in many past psalms. Reciting the promises of God. It's very important when you're about ready to lay out your heart. We've talked about that many times in the past.

He says in verse 5,

"Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!"

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

7 a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?

8 O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you?

9 You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

10 You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

11 The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

12 The north and the south, you have created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praised your name. (mountain ranges in Israel)

13 You have a mighty arm; strong as your hand, high your right hand.

14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

"Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,..." A festal shout is a, it means "a cry during the festal - feast celebrations of Israel." That's what he's referring to.

He says,

"15 Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,

16 who exult in your name all the day and in your righteousness are exalted.

17 For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn (and that term "horn" in the Bible means our "strength,") is exalted.

18 For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

19 Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said: "I have granted help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.

- 20 I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him,*
- 21 so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.*
- 22 The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him.*
- 23 I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.*
- 24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn (or strength) be exalted.*
- 25 I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.*
- 26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'*
- 27 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.*
- 28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.*
- 29 I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens."*

Do you see what the psalmist is doing? He's recounting God's promises to the lineage of David. And he's basically, he's reminding the Lord by speaking in the prophetically, in the first person of the Lord, about the choosing of David and his lineage through which to bring about a godly land of kings to Israel, which God said he would sustain forever. And of course we know that is sustained perpetually through Jesus Christ, who is in the lineage of David.

But what the psalmist is doing, because he's about to cry out, is he is reminding the Lord, You promised this. You promised this. I didn't promise it. I didn't make it up. You promised it. You came up with it. Okay?

He's putting it on God, right? That's what he's doing here.

He says in verse 30,

"If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,

31 if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,

32 then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,

33 but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.

34 I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

35 Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.

36 His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

37 Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies."

Now, this is where we're going to see a turn in how the psalmist speaks to God. But these first 38, 37 verses are just all reminding God. And isn't it interesting how he does it. He speaks prophetically, again, from the LORD. In other words, the LORD speaks through him in this reminder that God has established this covenant with David, that one of his descendants would rule on, and reign on the throne of Israel, perpetually.

Here's the problem. It wasn't happening when the psalmist wrote this. It wasn't happening. Enemies had risen. The king had been taken off the throne. There'd been an interruption. And so, the psalmist goes to the Lord and says, but You promised. You promised! Look what he goes on to say as he continues to talk to God.

He says in verse 38,

"But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.

39 You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.

40 You have breached all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins."

Stop there.

What the psalmist is saying is, I don't get this. This doesn't make any sense to me. In the light of all of Your glorious promises, I am at a loss to understand how to explain what appears to me to be a breach in Your promises!

Because the Davidic dynasty seems to be halted and the destruction of Jerusalem has happened - the Holy City. And the psalmist is just beside himself, I can't explain this. How am I going to explain this? It doesn't make sense!

Verse 41,

"All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

42 You have exalted the right hand of his foes; (his enemies) you have made all (of) his enemies rejoice.

43 You have also turned back the edge of his sword, (meaning the king, and) you have not made him stand in battle.

44 You have made his splendor to cease and cast his throne to the ground.

45 You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame.

46 How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

47 Remember how short my time is! For what vanity you have created all the children of man.

48 What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of (the grave, or) Sheol?"

What he's saying here is, I want to see, I want to see you turn this thing around in my lifetime. But he says, he's saying, but my life is really short. And so I need You to do this now. That's basically what he's saying.

Verse 49,

"LORD, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

50 Remember, O LORD, how your servants are mocked, and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,

51 with which your enemies mock, O LORD, with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

52 Blessed be the LORD forever!

Amen and Amen."

This is a tough psalm too, isn't it? Because again, it starts off...We think we've really lifted the mood at the beginning of this Psalm. Because there's all these remembrances of rejoicing in the Lord and all that He has done. But as we get to the end of it, we find out that the psalmist is conflicted. Because it doesn't seem that God is sticking to the plan that He had laid out to David in His promises.

And this is that age old issue that you and I struggle with. And that is seeing God's plan in the perspective, or from the perspective, of this very limited time frame that we live upon the earth. And what we do is we tend to judge what God is doing based on the time frame of my lifespan. And if I don't see it happening, then it's not happening. Right?

But, many times we see in the Bible that God's promises are stretched out over fairly protracted periods of time. And even though there are people who live and die before those promises come to fruition, those promises eventually come to fruition. And God is faithful. And God has not forsaken His promises. Or forgotten His covenant that He has made.

And this Psalm is that ever present reminder to you and I of just God's faithfulness regardless of what we see from our perspective. We have to be very careful about judging the Lord. Judging His plan, His overall plan from our singular perspective.

Very, very important we lift our eyes and see things from His time frame.