

July 11, 2010

#### Day Four

Let's now give some attention to the last portion of this Psalm. Read Psalm 88:13-18.

What do these verses add to the emotion and message of this Psalm?

How does the complaint or lament that arises from the psalmist in this last stanza (88:13-18) differ from or contrast with what he spoke of in the first stanza (88:1-8)? (The goal is not to do a precision "analysis" of the words as much as it is to make sure that we fully mine the depths of the experiences being described by the psalmist.)

As you listen to the words of this last stanza, from whom does the psalmist feel separated and distant?

Although the psalmist seems to feel that God is doing something to him or with him (verse 16-17), he also seems to feel that God is, Himself, distant (verse 14). What kind of turmoil does this (or might this) tension create in the psalmist?

Look closely at the last verse. How does the psalmist close out his thoughts? What does life look like or feel like to him?

If you were with someone who gave voice to what was going on in their heart in words similar to what we find in this psalm, what would you tell them? How would you respond?

Many people have had moments when--even in giving vent to powerful emotions in the soul--they really didn't want explanations but the freedom of honest transparency. How do you see that pictured in this psalm?

#### Day Five

There is something wonderfully cathartic about this Psalm--there is a good in expressing one's heart to God even when the feelings are so overwhelming. But, tucked into this Psalm are a few hints about the way forward when one feels or tastes what this psalmist is experiencing. Read the whole Psalm again.

Notice the three "cries" found in this Psalm; 88:1, 9, and 13. What is the psalmist admitting that he continues to do?

In spite of the overwhelming nature of his emotional state, what characterizes the psalmist's days?

Why would he be doing that? What is going on?

Notice how the psalmist addresses God; in each of these cries he speaks to God on a "first-name" basis. (Where you see the word "LORD" in small capital letters, the word behind that is *not* the Hebrew word for "master" or "lord" but the personal name of God.) What is implied in the way the psalmist addresses God?

Look back at the opening verse. What does the psalmist assert in his opening words?

Drawing on these thoughts from the cries, what could you conclude about the foundation in the soul of the psalmist that forms the platform on which his deep and real lament rests? In other words, in the midst of his seemingly overwhelmedness, what is he still resting in?

Psalms:

Turning Down the Noise

July 11, 2010

#### Day One

How bad can things get? How overwhelming can life feel? And when you are in the midst of such distress and trouble of soul, what can you do?

Although the Scriptures call us to a relentless joy in Jesus (for example as seen in Psalm 150 or in Philippians 4:4), there are times when we *do* feel overwhelmed, exhausted, drawn out, distressed. And the Scriptures are honest about that! That's part of what we discover as we turn to Psalm 88. Read the whole Psalm.

What is your general impression of this Psalm?

What feelings stir in you as you read and reflect on these words?

Have you ever known someone who has felt this way? Spoken this way? Have you ever experienced this kind of distress?

It might be possible to think that this Psalm is merely a "downer" and conclude that there must be something missing. But keep in mind that no single Psalm tells us all that we need to know about approaching God, speaking to Him, or relating well to Him. And then realize that there must be something of value (for us!) in this Psalm because God so inspired the author and orchestrated the writing that Psalm 88 is part of our Bible! God intends for this

Psalm (as steeped in lament and sorrow as it is) to be part of His Word for us.

So, with that in mind, realizing that this Psalm is part of what God intends for us to understand . . .

What does this Psalm suggest about how you could deal with the deepest and most overwhelming experiences *you* have?

What does this Psalm suggest about what God thinks about your expressing, to Him, your most overwhelming and discouraged thoughts?

You might not be, today, at the place where the psalmist found himself; but that shouldn't keep you from being transparent and open and free in expressing to God all that *is* going on in your soul. Take some time to fully tell Him all that you are feeling right now!

### *Day Two*

Let's try and mine some of the psalmist's thoughts and feelings from the first part of this Psalm. Read Psalm 88:1-8. (You might notice that this Psalm appears to fall into three basic sections, each leading with a "cry" to the Lord; 88:1, 9, and 13.)

How does the psalmist describe the condition of his soul or his heart in these verses?

Do you think the psalmist is merely using hyperbole? (Hyperbole is a literary device where an intentional overstatement or exaggeration is made in order to underscore the idea being stated; like "I waited an eternity for him to come!") Why or why not?

Given what he is describing, what adjectives would you use to

describe what the psalmist is feeling?

As he continues to reflect on his distress of soul (verses 6-8) what does he say about his sorrows? How does he see God in the midst of all of this?

Do you think the psalmist is--in these verses--speaking about what he has rationally concluded or what he is presently experiencing? Why would it matter to discern between these two options?

What do you do when there is a "disconnect" between what you think you know about life and about God and about what He is up to and what you are presently experiencing? How do you reconcile the two?

Does the psalmist, in this psalm, demonstrate in what he says that he has come to some clear resolution about the distress of his soul? Why or why not?

### *Day Three*

Let's turn to the next short section of this Psalm; read Psalm 88:9-12.

What characterizes this section?

To whom are the questions in these verses addressed?

How would you answer each of the questions asked by the psalmist?

[Does the Lord] work wonders for the dead?

Do the departed rise up to praise [the Lord]?

Is [the Lord's] steadfast love declared in the grave, or [His] faithfulness in Abaddon [the place of the dead]?

Are [the Lord's] wonders known in the darkness, or [His] righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Why is the psalmist asking these questions? What is going on in this outburst?

A good Jew would realize that there was a promised "after-life;" there is something beyond the grave. But apparently the psalmist is struggling with the magnitude of his struggles *in the here and now*. If here and now is where he experiences God's goodness and faithfulness *and things are so bad off now*, whatever is coming after this might actually end up being even worse. Or, so it seems the psalmist fears. How do you come to grips with that idea? Have you ever struggled with similar thoughts or concerns?

Although the psalmist (apparently) does not get any immediate answers to his various questions, why might it be good for him to, nevertheless, address these questions to the Lord?

Why would it be good for you to do the same kind of thing with your questions and struggles?