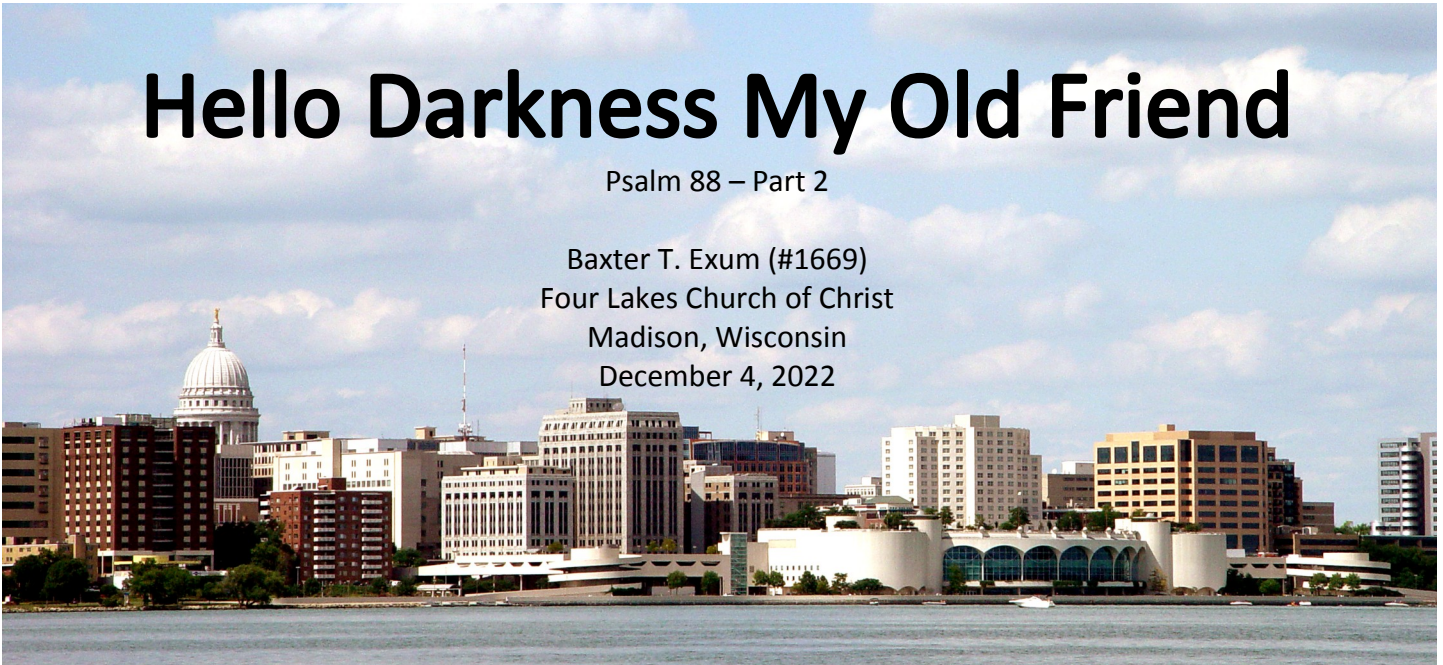


# Hello Darkness My Old Friend

Psalm 88 – Part 2

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We'd like to welcome you to the Four Lakes Church of Christ this morning! We are glad that you are here, and if you are visiting with us today (either in person or online), we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the bulletin or by simply going to [www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor](http://www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor).

One of the reasons why we've come together today is to preach and to hear the good news. The good news is that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to this earth to die in our place. He was buried, but he was raised up on the third day. We respond to this news in faith, by obeying it! We turn from sin, we confess our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and then we obey his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.

And we do have several examples this morning, starting with one that comes from my friend David Sproule, who preaches for the Palm Beach Lakes congregation down in Florida. David grew up in that congregation, attended Freed-Hardeman University, and he moved back there in 1994 and has been with that congregation ever since. But they posted last Sunday and said, "We rejoice with Jamie Green who was baptized into Christ during this morning's services. Please reach out and encourage our newest sister in Christ! To God be the glory!" I love their baptistery, by the way – it's a circle, a very interesting design.

This next one comes from Pedro Luis Acosta, who preaches for the Lord's church in Pinar del Rio, Cuba. He says (as translated by Facebook) that "Today is a day of glory for the church of Christ in Consolation, because we have received as part of the Lord's family after the baptism our friend Felix Antonio Garcia. Thank God a thousand and more. We keep on moving forward," and then he quotes 2 Timothy 4:1-5. I love the artwork on the front wall, where the baptistery is at the bottom of a huge waterfall! I've never seen that before.

We also have a quick update from the church in Honolulu, where their preacher says that "My mom, Falesoa, obeyed the gospel this morning. Praise the Lord!" What an honor, to baptize your mom! We don't see that too often, but great news from Hawaii this week!

And finally, we have an update from the church in Key West, Florida, the church my grandfather established when he was in the Navy back in 1942, the church we visited this summer, and the church where we sent our Spanish songbooks a few months ago. I get their bulletin now, and they say that Peterson Marcellus was

baptized and added to the kingdom a week or so ago. Peterson is pictured here with Rod Aleandre. Rod and his wife Barbi are both retired from the Army and have been doing a great work in Key West for several years now. But we share these examples today just to show what it means to obey the gospel. We invite you to examine the scriptures on the wall up here, and if you would like to study in person, please get in touch.

This morning, we return to our brief study of the 88<sup>th</sup> Psalm, one of the darkest and most depressing passages anywhere in Scripture. In our pew Bibles, Psalm 88 is found on page 941. Last week, we learned that Psalm 88 is known as a “lament” (a sad song), but we also learned that Psalm 88 is unique even among the 70 or so Psalms that are known as “laments,” in that it has no resolution whatsoever. In other laments, we usually have a complaint of some kind, and then the song ends with God answering or saving the author, followed by some kind of praise. But in Psalm 88, nothing! There is no praise at the end. And in fact, in Hebrew, the Psalm ends with the word *“darkness,”* as the author ends by claiming that darkness is his closest friend.

Last week, we looked at the first of three big ideas in Psalm 88, by noticing that the darkness is real. Sometimes, even godly people will experience dark times, and these seasons of darkness may be very lonely, and the darkness may continue on for long periods of time. We emphasized that Heman, the author of this Psalm, was a righteous man, musically gifted, a father of 17 children, and appointed by King David to lead the nation in worship. And we learned from this that even godly people may go through times of extreme darkness.

This morning, I’d like for us to continue by looking at the text once again, and then we will conclude this brief series today by noticing two more very practical applications from Psalm 88. So, let’s start by looking once again at all eighteen verses of Psalm 88. And again, as we did last week, instead of reading the word *“SELAH,”* we will pause for just a moment – doing what the word is telling us to do (a crescendo followed by a pause). Let’s pay careful attention to Psalm 88,

- <sup>1</sup> O Lord, the God of my salvation,  
I have cried out by day and in the night before You.*
- <sup>2</sup> Let my prayer come before You;  
Incline Your ear to my cry!*
- <sup>3</sup> For my soul has had enough troubles,  
And my life has drawn near to Sheol.*
- <sup>4</sup> I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit;  
I have become like a man without strength,*
- <sup>5</sup> Forsaken among the dead,  
Like the slain who lie in the grave,  
Whom You remember no more,  
And they are cut off from Your hand.*
- <sup>6</sup> You have put me in the lowest pit,  
In dark places, in the depths.*
- <sup>7</sup> Your wrath has rested upon me,  
And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. **Selah.***
- <sup>8</sup> You have removed my acquaintances far from me;  
You have made me an object of loathing to them;  
I am shut up and cannot go out.*
- <sup>9</sup> My eye has wasted away because of affliction;  
I have called upon You every day, O Lord;*

*I have spread out my hands to You.*

- <sup>10</sup> *Will You perform wonders for the dead?  
Will the departed spirits rise and praise You? **Selah.***
- <sup>11</sup> *Will Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave,  
Your faithfulness in Abaddon?*
- <sup>12</sup> *Will Your wonders be made known in the darkness?  
And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*
- <sup>13</sup> *But I, O Lord, have cried out to You for help,  
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.*
- <sup>14</sup> *O Lord, why do You reject my soul?  
Why do You hide Your face from me?*
- <sup>15</sup> *I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on;  
I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Your burning anger has passed over me;  
Your terrors have destroyed me.*
- <sup>17</sup> *They have surrounded me like water all day long;  
They have encompassed me altogether.*
- <sup>18</sup> *You have removed lover and friend far from me;  
My acquaintances are in darkness.*

II. **Again, we've already noted that the darkness is real, but this morning I'd also like for us to notice that GOD CAN HANDLE TOUGH PRAYERS.**

And so, the lesson is: Since the darkness is real, we can pray and praise God persistently and honestly, knowing that God can handle anything we can dish out. And I don't know whether Heman gets everything right here, but what he does get right is that he takes his darkness to God in prayer. In verses 1-2, ***"O Lord, the God of my salvation, I have cried out by day and in the night before You. Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry!"*** Dear God, I am coming to you with what I'm going through! I am crying out day and night! Listen to my prayer! When we are overwhelmed with darkness, it's so easy to pull away from those around us, to withdraw from God, to "cocoon" ourselves. Cocooning is a term that's become more popular over the past few years. The world is a scary place these days, so I think I'll just hide myself at home for a while. I'll curl up in bed, order take out, and hide for a few months. And along with hiding from the world, it's also easy to hide from God (although we should probably ask Jonah how that works out in the long run). Heman, though, instead of hiding from God, we might say that he almost lashes out at God. And I say this, because Heman is brutally honest here. He lays it out as it is. He opens up. What we find in Psalm 88 is raw and unrestrained – from the beginning all the way to the end. In verse 3, for example, he says, ***"For my soul has had enough troubles, and my life has drawn near to Sheol."*** To ***"have enough"*** is a word that refers to being "full." We think of what just happened at Thanksgiving. Most of us ate until we were "full," and then some! Well, Heman is ***"full"*** of troubles. He's had enough! He's had it up to here! And this is a prayer; this is a song! He's saying, "God, I've had enough!" He then says, ***"...and my life has drawn near to Sheol."*** Sheol was the place of the dead, often used as a synonym for death or the grave. "Dear God, I'm at the point of death," he's saying. He continues crying out to God. In verse 4, it's as if he's been left for dead. He's in this ***"pit."*** He has no strength. In verse 5, it's as if he's been murdered and forgotten. And specifically, he feels as if he's been forgotten by God. And not only this, but in verses 6-8, he feels as if God has done this to him; so, he accuses

God of afflicting him; he accuses God of taking his friends away; he accuses God of restraining him. And, in verse 9, his eyes are wasting away; in other words, he's crying his eyes out over this.

Then, in verses 10-12, he makes an interesting argument with God. If I understand this correctly, he's basically saying to God, "Lord, I'd like to praise you, but I can't do that if I'm dead, so please help me out down here!" It's not the most solid reasoning, but you know what? He's pouring this out on the Lord, isn't he! He pours his heart out to the One who can do something about it. I've often suggested that the difference between a valid complaint and whining is that a valid complaint is made to someone who can do something about it. Most of us know that there can be a fine line between whining and a valid complaint. If I complain to a coworker about the boss, that's whining. But if I complain to the boss about the boss, then there's at least a chance that my complaint may get me somewhere. And that's what Heman does here: He prays a difficult prayer, knowing that God is big enough to handle it. He takes his concerns to the right place, to the One who has the power to do something about it. One author suggested that Heman is saying all kinds of things he shouldn't be saying, but he's saying them to God. And if we can't talk to God about these things, then who can we talk to?

You know, as we read this Psalm, we might be tempted to think that this man has given up on God, and yet that's not really the case at all, is it? Here is a man who feels forsaken by God, but he is still praying. He feels as if he's being punished by God, but he's still singing! Yes, he seems to have some doubts, and yes, he seems to have some issues with God, but he pours this out to God. And God can handle it. God is big enough to handle some tough prayers. God is with us in the darkness, even if we don't feel like it at the time, he sees what we're going through, so why should we ever try to hide it? Why pretend that we are doing better than we are, when God already knows? Psalm 88 gives us permission to pray as we are.

As we apply this to our own lives, let's realize that there are times when we may not want to worship - maybe because we feel like hypocrites, maybe because we're struggling, maybe because we're worried about what other people might think of us, maybe because we think God is far away, or maybe because we think that maybe we'd rather be dead - but Heman reminds us to keep on singing, even in the darkness, because God wants to hear from us.

Maybe you've heard of the ACTS method of praying. It's an acronym suggesting an outline for prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. That is, we praise God, we confess our sin, we thank God, and then we ask for something. It's a good tool, but do we see it here? No! I'm just giving the friendly reminder that not everything in our lives needs to be "blue skies and rainbows" before we come before God in prayer. Sometimes, our prayer may be, "Dear God, I'm miserable! Please help me!" And God hears that kind of prayer. Not only that, but God has given us Psalm 88 as a model! He wants to hear from us. There's nothing we can say that will scare God into not listening. In fact, when we go to God with tough prayers, we are actually expressing faith that God CAN handle what we're telling him.

By the way, we have an interesting reference over in Hosea 7:14 where God is upset with his people, and he says, ***"And they do not cry to me from their heart when they wail upon their beds."*** In that case, the people were crying into their pillows at night, but they refused to take those concerns to God. And God was upset at that. He wanted them to cry out to him from their hearts, which is what we see happening in Psalm 88. In fact, this is one of the most heart-felt prayers anywhere in Scripture. God isn't looking for fluffy prayers; he's looking for prayers that are real. And this one is definitely real. We find, then, God can handle tough prayers.

### III. The final big idea I hope we notice from Psalm 88 is that even when we pray, GOD DOESN'T ALWAYS ANSWER.

In our society, it's almost as if we've been trained to think that most problems in life can be resolved in an episode, in a 30-minute sitcom; or, at worst, in a season, or in the time it takes us to watch a movie. When we watch a movie, we know that within the next two hours something will happen. It may be good or it may be bad, but chances are almost 100% that by the time we leave the theater, we will have some sense of resolution. Most of us have lived long enough, though, to know that life isn't like that. And what is true of life in general continues to be true for God's people – even when we pray. Very rarely will we fully understand the “Why?” behind the terrible things that happen to us. And not only that, but sometimes, terrible things continue to happen, even when we beg God to fix some situation. Sometimes, suffering is long and hard and drags on for weeks, and months, even years, even to the end.

And I think we see this in Psalm 88. Heman is crying out to God by day and all night. He's begging to be heard. He's had enough. He's close to death. He's in the pit. He's weak. He feels forgotten. He thinks God is doing this to him. He's alone. He's stuck. He's cut off from his friends. He's surrounded by darkness. He feels distant from God. He feels like he's drowning. And it's been this way since he was a kid. He takes all of this to God in prayer, and...NOTHING! He pours his soul out to God, and God refuses to answer.

Most of us have heard, and I've probably taught this before, that when we pray, God may say “Yes,” God may say, “No,” or God may say “Later.” Haven't we heard that? Again, I might have taught something like this in the past. But there is another option, isn't there? Sometimes, God is just quiet. Sometimes, there is no answer at all. Sometimes, God is completely silent. And that seems to be what we have here in Psalm 88. This righteous man is calling out, but God doesn't seem to be fixing this.

I know it's dark, but I would suggest that we have a good reminder here, that prayer doesn't always fix everything. We have a righteous man coming to God in prayer, and the Psalm trails off into darkness. One author gives the reminder that “We don't always walk away from prayer with our faces shining like Moses.” Prayer doesn't necessarily solve all of our troubles instantaneously. In fact, there are times when we may feel worse after we pray than we did before. That's hard to say. And yet, not only is it true, but God made sure to put this in Scripture. The word of God itself, then, reminds us that sometimes God is silent.

And all of this is indeed terrible. This is dark. But what I hope we notice, even now, is that the Psalmist continues to pray! The Psalmist continues to worship! God may not be answering, but God's silence doesn't keep this man from praying, ***“O Lord, the God of my salvation, I have cried out by day and in the night before You. Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry!”*** God is silent, but this man continues to call out. And he continues to call out, even when many people would have given up on God. Sometimes, when the darkness comes, it's easy to conclude that God doesn't love us, that God is punishing us, that God is displeased with us, that God hasn't saved us. But, this isn't necessarily what God's silence means. So, thankfully, the author of Psalm 88 continues to pray. One author, in fact, suggests that Psalm 88 is the opposite of a lack of faith, and I would agree with that. To continue worshiping, even when God is silent, is a bold expression of faith. Someone who has lost faith in God would stop praying (obviously). But continuing in prayer acknowledges that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, that his mercies never come to an end. One author says that “This Psalm, like the faith of Israel, is utterly contained in the notion that Yahweh is here and must be addressed. Yahweh must be addressed, even if Yahweh never answers.” And this is the last big idea we are noting in this Psalm.

**Conclusion:**

To summarize, we've learned that even for God's people, the darkness can be very real and lonely, and it can last a long time. We've learned that God can handle tough prayers. And we've learned that even when we pray fervently, God doesn't always answer; sometimes, God is completely silent. This isn't a positive Psalm by any means; in fact, this is one of the most challenging, one of the most depressing chapters anywhere in Scripture. But, it is here for a reason, and the reason is: Sometimes life is like this. Sometimes life is messy, and we may not figure it out until the end.

Yesterday morning, I sent a message to three of the craftiest women I know, asking to borrow a cross stitch for today's lesson. And they came through in a big way. This one comes from Kenna, representing the group! And it is a beautiful piece of art! There is no way I can comprehend what's involved in doing something like this. This is absolutely amazing! But, of course, when we turn these over, it's not quite as amazing, is it? When we look at the backside of these, we have what some of us might describe as a bit of a mess. We have knots, and strands, and random colors; and the backside, obviously, doesn't look very artistic at all, does it? This is not worthy of framing. We turn it over though, and everything changes. On the front side, everything makes sense. On the back side, we might have some sense of pattern, some sense of design, something's going on there, but it's a mystery. It's unfinished.

Well, based on Psalm 88, I would suggest that the darkness is like that. Here in this life, there are times when we are upset, and angry, and overwhelmed. We call out to God, and God doesn't seem to answer. Here in this life, we have these seemingly random knots, and strands, and it seems as if something might be happening, but it's not good, and maybe we don't see what it is. God, though, is still God. He is the artist, he loves us, he wants what is best for us, but sometimes that plan may not be clear to us until we cross over to the other side.

So, as we close, I would ask: What do you think Heman is doing right now? What do you think Heman is doing right now? One author has suggested that "for nearly three thousand years [Heman] has been singing a very different song before the throne of the Eternal; and his eternity is but just begun." Amen to that! At this moment, Heman is indeed singing a very different song. At this moment, I am very confident that Heman is now looking back at his life from God's point of view.

Before we continue with our song before the Lord's Supper, let's pray together:

Our Father in Heaven,

We know that you have been with us as we have studied these words from the 88<sup>th</sup> Psalm. The message from your word has been somewhat difficult, but we are thankful for it. We are thankful, because we know that even in dark times, you are still God. And today, we pray for those who struggle. We pray for comfort. We pray for understanding. We pray for salvation.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. We come to you through Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)