

**Title:** How Dare You Speak To God That Way?

**Text:** Psalm 88

**Theme:** Jesus suffered all the forsakenness that infinite hell had to offer so that He could take your forsakenness to Himself. And now, He is present even in your feeling of being God-forsaken. There is nowhere you can go where Jesus isn't with you.

**Psalm 88: 1-18**

A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah. For the director of music. According to mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

<sup>1</sup> Lord, you are the God who saves me;  
day and night I cry out to you.

<sup>2</sup> May my prayer come before you;  
turn your ear to my cry.

<sup>3</sup> I am overwhelmed with troubles  
and my life draws near to death.

<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am like one without strength.

<sup>5</sup> I am set apart with the dead,  
like the slain who lie in the grave,  
whom you remember no more,  
who are cut off from your care.

<sup>6</sup> You have put me in the lowest pit,  
in the darkest depths.

<sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavily on me;  
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.

<sup>8</sup> You have taken from me my closest friends  
and have made me repulsive to them.  
I am confined and cannot escape; Selah

<sup>9</sup> my eyes are dim with grief.  
I call to you, Lord, every day;  
I spread out my hands to you.

<sup>10</sup> Do you show your wonders to the dead?  
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

<sup>11</sup> Is your love declared in the grave,  
your faithfulness in Destruction? Selah.

<sup>12</sup> Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,  
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

<sup>13</sup> But I cry to you for help, Lord;

in the morning my prayer comes before you.

<sup>14</sup> Why, Lord, do you reject me  
and hide your face from me?

<sup>15</sup> From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;  
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

<sup>16</sup> Your wrath has swept over me;  
your terrors have destroyed me.

<sup>17</sup> All day long they surround me like a flood;  
they have completely engulfed me.

<sup>18</sup> You have taken from me friend and neighbor—  
darkness is my closest friend.

I. Welcome

- A. Introduction to the Psalter
- B. Discussion of types of psalms

- 1. Psalms of praise
- 2. Psalms of thanksgiving
- 3. Psalms of lament

- C. The unique darkness of psalm 88
- D. What we learn from psalm 88 about faith, hope, strength, and rescue

II. Can we pray despair and suffering?

- A. Psalm 88 and psalm 39
- B. Heman: the worship leader of Israel
- C. Despair can be praise and despair can be worship because despair can be prayed.

III. What does praying despair tell us about faith?

- A. Heman's psalm is complaint directed to God, not complaint to others about God
- B. Protest atheism complains about God to the world
- C. Complaints about God to others makes us bitter and embitters others against us
- D. The faith and doubt of Mother Teresa
  - 1. Her letter to Jesus about her despair and doubts
  - 2. Her letter to Malcolm Muggeridge that overcame his agnosticism

E. The infinite love of Christ promised for eternity overwhelms the finite suffering of this short life.

#### IV. The faithful wrestle with God

- A. Faith doesn't come from blind acceptance, it comes from wrestling with the difficult realities of the universe, including wrestling with the ultimate reality, God Himself
- B. Faith takes courage
- C. What's causing Heman's doubt and anger?
- D. Mark 9:24 is the confession of weak and failing Christians, you and me

<sup>22</sup>“It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

<sup>23</sup> “‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

<sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

#### E. Martin Luther

“Under every sin is the sin of idolatry, and under every act of idolatry is a disbelief in the gospel.”

- F. Faith is confessing my weaknesses and my need and relying on Jesus Christ. And Psalm 88 teaches us that faith requires putting our voice to that need and expressing it.

#### V. The hope of the psalmist

##### A. Psalm 88: 1-2

<sup>1</sup> Lord, you are the God who saves me;  
day and night I cry out to you.

<sup>2</sup> May my prayer come before you;  
turn your ear to my cry.”

- B. The Bible doesn't deny suffering or pain, it recognizes it, it admits the world is broken and twisted.
- C. The Bible's not trying to sell you gain without pain.
- D. Karl Marx alleged that religion promised the false hope of happiness in spite of suffering
- E. But Marx's theory didn't fully account for the flaws in every human heart.
- F. We love and we live and we hope as though we are immortal beings charged with making the world a better place because that's what the Bible tells us we are and what we are to do.

VI. How do we get the strength to follow Christ in the midst of suffering?

- A. The only thing worse than the fear of death is death
- B. The psalmist feels buried alive — Psalm 88:4-7

<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am like one without strength.

<sup>5</sup> I am set apart with the dead,  
like the slain who lie in the grave,  
whom you remember no more,  
who are cut off from your care.

<sup>6</sup> You have put me in the lowest pit,  
in the darkest depths.

<sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavily on me;  
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.

- C. Psalm 88: 8 and 18 - The psalmist feels isolated and abandoned

<sup>8</sup> You have taken from me my closest friends  
and have made me repulsive to them.

And then in verse 18, he says,

“You have taken from me friend and neighbor  
— darkness is my closest friend.”

- D. Do Christians get depressed?

1. God knows what you're like when you feel desperate and alone. He knows how you pray when you're desperate.
2. When we're at our end, we're mostly likely to admit our lacking, turn to Christ, and trust in Him.
3. It's in the white hot anguish that we are shaped and molded and our character is refined.
4. When you realize Christ is all you have, you finally see that Christ is all you need.

- E. Has Heman really been forsaken?

1. He writes as though he has been forsaken / Psalm 88:5

<sup>5</sup> I am set apart with the dead,  
like the slain who lie in the grave,

whom you remember no more,  
who are cut off from your care.

2. What do we know about Heman?

- a. Heman was a priest and Israel's worship leader (1st Chronicles 25)
- b. Heman was "exalted" and given 14 sons and 3 daughters, he's called wise and given a high post as the King's top advisor on spiritual issues (1st Chronicles 16)
- c. Heman was appointed over 120 other musicians (2nd Chronicles)

3. Heman wasn't forsaken, he was used by God and is still being used today for people who read psalm 88.

VII. We are rescued by the only one who can truly pray psalm 88

- A. The OT is about Jesus Christ. There's one hero and everyone else is a villain.
- B. Luke 24:44 and John 5:39

"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." (Luke 24:44)

"You study the Scripture diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39)

- C. Jesus is the Psalmist, worship leader, prayer, and great high priest who sums up our despair and prays it back to God.
- D. Did Jesus feel buried alive?

Psalm 88:4-5

<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am like one without strength.

<sup>5</sup> I am set apart with the dead,  
like the slain who lie in the grave,  
whom you remember no more,  
who are cut off from your care.

Luke 22: 42-44 - The Garden of Gethsemane

<sup>42</sup> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

<sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

E. Matthew Chapter 26: 38 and Psalm 88:3

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” (Matthew 26:38)

“I am overwhelmed with troubles, my life draws near to death.” (Psalm 88:3)

F. How does Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane end? He says, “not my will but your’s be done.” Only one person can keep being faithful no matter how deep the darkness.

VII. Jesus is our redeemer and our rescuer

A. His nation rejects Him, His religion excommunicates Him, His enemies torture and mock Him, and on the night He’s arrested, His disciples abandon Him. Then, His Father in heaven rejects Him pouring out wrath for sin on the one who becomes sin.

“Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.” (Psalm 88:7)

B. 2 Corinthians 5:21

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

C. God the Son takes God’s forsakenness onto Himself, so He can meet us in our forsakenness, and pray our sense of God-forsakenness back to God.

D. There is nowhere we can escape the presence of Christ, not even in God’s forsakenness

E. Psalm 88: 10-11

<sup>10</sup> Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? <sup>11</sup> Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?

F. We know the answer to Heman’s ironic questions because God didn’t leave Jesus in His forsakenness. He’s raised from the pit, conquers death, and pays the price for sin

G. The answer to Heman’s questions posed in psalm 88: 10-11 are answered over and over in the Bible

Philippians 2:10; “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth.”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- H. Jesus is our great high priest who represents His people by praying psalm 88 for us
- I. And He's still praying for you in the midst of your suffering
- J. Jesus doesn't yell down from heaven, "Get over it, be grateful for all I've done for you" He joins us in our suffering and says "me too"

#### VIII. Application

- A. What do you do with your suffering, hurt, anger, and loneliness?
- B. You pray it
- C. Pray psalm 88 or the other psalms
- D. Make the psalms your own by personalizing them with your specific circumstances
- E. Build your faith by remembering what God has done for you, and that He's with you no matter where you are - in the pit or on the mountaintop
- F. Gather the hope we have in Christ
- G. Allow pain to build character in your life
- H. Preach the Gospel to yourself everyday and remember that Christ suffered forsakenness so you never have to be alone in your own felt forsakenness

#### IX. Communion

#### X. Benediction

From writer and Bible commentator Max Lucado

May the Hero of all history talk personally to you. May you find in Jesus the answer to the deepest needs of your life. May you remember your highest privilege: you are known by God and cherished by heaven.