

Sermon: Psalm 88

Because Jesus lives, I can face tomorrow

Purpose statement:

In the midst of the storms of life, cry out to God, and fix your eyes on His Son Jesus Christ who gives us strength to face tomorrow in the midst of suffering.

Introduction

Brothers and sisters I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. My name is Todd Khupe of Christ Central Soweto church. Today as we gather around the word of God we are doing the last part of our series on the theme of “**The God who saves**” from the book of Psalms. Let me pray before we look at the word of God from Psalm 88.

Our dear Father in heaven. We give honour and glory to you, the Creator of heavens and earth. Only you Lord deserves glory and honour. Help us Lord as we gather around your word to know you better and to be strengthened by your Word in such stressful times as this, faced with this threat of the Covid-19. May our hope and strength come from you. Thank you Lord that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for us so that in Him we could get forgiveness of sin through your grace and mercy. Amen.

In the past weeks we have had very encouraging teachings on difficult challenges like abandonment, depression, betrayal and doubt. Today we round off by looking at highly stressful situation in Psalm 88. Psalm 88, though a psalm of lament like all others we have learnt from, it is different in that it gives the reader no expression of hope. While other psalms of lament follow a pattern of crying to God, getting comfort and assurance from God’s word and hope ending with, Psalm 88, the situation of depression and darkness gets worse all the time. The Psalmist cries out to God, but God seems silent all the time. On the positive side of it, Psalm 88 however is relevant for us in that it expresses reality in life that many of us will identify with.

The context of the psalm is probably captures the feelings of Israel after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and the majority of the Israelites carried into captivity. It looked like God had completely forsaken His people with no end to their suffering in sight.

Appeal in affliction (1-9a)

In verses 1-9, the psalmist brings his case before God. He cries out to God and appeals to God to hear his cry. He acknowledges that his soul is burdened with many troubles (Read 1-3). Verse 1 starts on a very positive note. The Psalmist knows where to take his problems. Notice the truth that he knows about himself and about God. He needs

salvation. He cannot save himself, neither can any human being do it. Only God can bring him more than the relief he needs for his tormented soul. He knows that salvation belongs to God alone hence he cries to him day and night. Though his tormented soul leaves him as good as dead he refuses to keep quiet, but cries out to God to move him to pity as a small child cries out to a parent to move them to pity. He is as helpless as a child but though his eyes get “..dim with grief V9”, he presses on to appeal to the God of his salvation.

The Psalmist gets to a point where he blames God for the troubles he is experiencing. He is almost saying, “God you have hit me with every weapon in your hands. All I experience is your wrath against me as a result I am stuck in this bottomless pit.”, (Read v 6-7). But notice that, though weak and almost dead, he sees prayer as the meeting point between his weakness and God’s mercy and righteousness. Even though he walks in the valley of death, His soul is still drawn to God’s mercy and he still stretches out his hands to the Lord.

Appeal with no answer (9b-12)

The psalmist’s life has hit rock bottom. He launches another appeal to God this time with a barrage of questions pointing to the hopelessness of death. It is like he is overwhelmed and fearful of dying under God’s wrath. If he dies under this silence from God, then he is completely cut off from God and is no use to God. It is like he is saying, If I were to die in this state, no one wins. I lose because I am completely cut off from you and completely forgotten. At the same time you lose out God because in death I am not able to give you the praise and honour that you deserve (Read v 10-12). When dead I won’t be able to testify of your goodness and faithfulness. What we hear in these verses is a cry of anguish laden with despair, fear and hopelessness and yet very persuasive.

The heavy thing in this tormented soul is God’s apparent silence. In spite of his passionate appeal, he gets absolutely no answer from God. His journey into the dark night of soul gets deeper and deeper. The palmist has no choice here, he has to wait and pray. This brothers and sisters speaks about our lived reality. Even believers experience the pains and afflictions of this world. Unlike the popular teaching on blessing upon blessing we sometimes here on the pulpit, psalm 88 is saying, hey wake up and smell the coffee life is real and suffering does not always come today and tomorrow it is gone. For some it could be for a life time. Many years ago I was impressed by a brother who has been on crutches ever since birth. Fellow church members, the church’s prayer warriors desiring to see him set free were praying for God to demonstrate his power so the brother could throw away his crutches and walk on his feet. This brother however rebuked them and asked them to leave him alone to serve God as he is in his pain. These brothers and sisters failed to see that God’s power was already being demonstrated in this brother’s faith. Up to now he is still strong in the Lord on his crutches.

Further appeal and still no answer (13-18)

Verse 13 starts with “But...!” (read v 13). In spite of God not answering his questions the psalmist still comes back to Him in prayer. Even though he feels at his lowest, he still cries to God for salvation. It is important to note that even though the psalmist attributes his troubles to God, he does not curse him. He is resolute in prayer. He knows that beyond this darkness there is God. He trusts in God even if the physical reality and facts of his life points towards darkness and hopelessness. He sees God’s hand as dealing blows to him like the waves of the sea battering the coastal rocks and reducing them to a rubble of stones. What remains for him, without God and friends is utterly darkness. Darkness is his only companion. In times of great affliction, despair and depression sometimes all we see is darkness, darkness and more darkness. Even friends get fewer and there is no one to encourage us.

God heard the cries of His people

Brothers and sisters, the bible reminds us that after 400 years of slavery and oppression in Egypt, God assures Moses that he has heard the cries of His people, was concerned about their suffering and had come down to rescue them (Exod 3:7-8). May I remind you that our covenant God stays true to His promise to save His people. At a time when you feel you have come to the end, you can’t bear it any further cast your burdens to Jesus, the son of God who come so that you and I can have everlasting life in him. He is risen, he is alive and he calls you and me today, in whatever pain and affliction we are to cast our burden on him. Be reminded that where your strength fails, Christ takes over. The seemingly incomplete story of psalm 88 is completed in Christ.

“²⁸ *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls* (Mt 11:28-29).

We may not get relief from the physical pains in our bodies, but in Christ we can face tomorrow. His promise is that though we are burdened, the good news of the gospel is that our souls obtain rest in him. When we can’t carry it anymore, he comforts our souls and gives us the living hope to look up to the next day.

The apostle Paul has deposited for us great words of assurance in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9.

⁷ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed*’.

Our journey through life will experience all the hardships this world can offer, but the power to stand and remain sane at the most difficult of times does not lie with us, it is from God, though he seems silent. We may be struck down, oppressed, hard pressed in despair but, in the darkest hour of our life, let us draw near to the God, known by the

psalmist in psalm 88 as “the God who saves”. Even though the storms come, let us know that Jesus who is alive comes after the storms and takes us home.

Let us pray

Here we stand Lord as your people called by your own name. In these difficult times gripped by the crippling fear of Covid-19 help us to run into your hands and know that **in** Christ we are secure. Give our souls peace and rest from the afflictions of this world. May the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us always. Amen.

Reflection questions

1. Have you ever felt or are presently undergoing the pain of suffering with no end in sight? How did you/are you dealing with it?
2. Have you ever felt God has abandoned you? If so, what questions did you ask God?
3. How does the reality of suffering expressed in Psalm 88 and death of Jesus on the cross help you shape your response to your suffering and that of others?
4. How can we as a community of believers minister to those in affliction?

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