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| Topic | Heman’s Prayer at Darkness |
| Reference | Psalm 88 |
| Date | 28 August 2016 |
| Speaker | Br Arnold Lim |

This morning we are going to look at a particularly difficult topic, ‘praying through times of sorrow’. This psalm is considered to the blackest psalm in the entire collection of the Psalms and in fact some people call this the **blackest book of the Bible** even blacker than Job, but this is also one of the most uplifting and encouraging psalm.

Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

Heman was a man of certain standing in society and King David particularly in Chronicles have picked him to lead the worship of the tabernacle. He was a Levite. He came from the descendant of Ezrah, important lineage. He writes many psalms. Chronicles tells you he was like you and me, he had a family, he had children and there is no record in Chronicles of Heman doing anything heinous. So he was in many ways a model church citizen, a person who contributed much to church.

The first thing we pick up here is that Heman is dying.

**3** For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.

Many commentators he has a disease that he has been trying to cure but for whatever reason is not getting better. He may be dying but Heman feels he is already dead. He has lost the will to live.

**4** I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength,

He is saying he feels like he is going to hell. He has no will to live, the affliction he has is just taken him away and he feels God does not care. Doesn’t this sound quite familiar to a lot of loss when we go through difficulties?

**5** like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

He repeats it in verse 14

**14** O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?

Not only he says that God doesn’t care, he thinks God is punishing him. There are two types of truth in psalms, objective truth and subjective truth. The psalms are written emotionally. This is how he feels. You don’t really know why he feels that way, is it God really punishing him but that is how he feels.

**6** You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.

He is telling God, your punishment of me you can’t get any worse and then he gets into a lot of language which Asian understand. In Chinese culture we like to use nature. Old writers all like to use nature.

**7** Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah.

He feels like he is drowning, a tsunami just hit him and he repeats it in verse 16

**16** Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.

**17** They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.

Not only does he feel God abandoned him he feels his friends have abandoned him.

[**8**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-8.htm) You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape;

[**9**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-9.htm) my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to you.

He thinks he is afflicted and God does not care. Who do you get it worse, when you feel worse when everyone else abandons you and then it gets worse. He suffered since young, it is not a short time he had this.

[**15**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-15.htm) From my youth I have suffered and been close to death; I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

He has been having this since he was young, probably started to get worse that is why a lot of people believe he had a disease he struggled with and he is not only sad he is scared, he is terrified. The Hebrew word for terrors is what you feel when you are been shaken, when war comes. He is in terror and then curtains. The last line of the Psalm.

[**18**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-18.htm) You have taken from me friend and neighbor — darkness is my closest friend.

Aren’t we supposed to use the psalms to worship God, where is Heman praising God in this psalm, nowhere. He is not hopeful. Some of the other psalms are also quite depressing but a lot of psalms have a structure. They start off depressing but they end with hope in the lord. A lot of the Davidic psalms are there but Psalm 88 has been picked up and why it is called the darkest psalm of the Bible and the darkest book is because completely there is no hope. In the end if you read the psalm very brutally he dies.

The first thing I want to pick up is a statement from the Westminster Confession of Faith and this is done centuries ago and this is what the Anglicans believe. When they put it together

*True believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminish, temporary loss in various way*.

By God withdrawing the light of his continence and loving even those who reverence with him to walk and here is that word, in darkness and have no life. There is that word where darkness is my closest friend. We have four points from that.

**1. Let Your Sorrow Be Real.**

Job opened his mouth and curse the day of his birth. What is interesting in the book of Job, the devil is trying to get Job to curse God, he is so close to it in fact his wife tells him, why are you holding on to integrity, curse God and die. That is what the devil wants and he is so close to it, he cannot do it. He curses the day he is born and the rest of it is a long section of it. What is interesting at the end of the Book of Job, God rebukes his friends and says you have not spoken of me as the way Job has. He is a guy who just cursed the day he was born.

Psalm 43:2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Do you have times in your life you felt rejected by God and there is David coming out and saying it.

Psalm 39:13 Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!"

He is telling God, I want to die, you want to make me happy turn away from me.

Psalm 69:3 I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched.

We are reading what the psalmist felt thousands year ago. What is the shortest verse in the Bible? It consists of two words. Gospel of John, “Jesus wept” at Lazarus death. The question is not there. The question is can we? We have a slight problem nowadays; we like to present the church as a solution provider and Jesus as the ultimate solution provider. We have this impression you know, come and have your best life now, come to church and be blessed, be an overcomer, God has a way trust him, celebrate Jesus, but there will be days where you really won’t feel like that. The worst thing we do to ourselves we just come to church and leave because that is not what Jesus did when he saw Lazarus and that is not what the psalmist did. The psalmist have done their work publically, we can read what they feel. We can’t even come to church to tell a person how we feel and here is the psalmist is writing it for all eternity.

*Your sorrows will be real by you pray out your pain.*

A committed Christian wrote this before going for his MRI. “*I thought I was lost forever when darkness has no ray of light at the end. My God path lost forever in the maize of false possibilities. In my every waking moment fear clutched my stomach, waking to the wretch of the lies that thunderth in my head”*.

Our God does not get offended by angry prayers, our God does not get offended if you go to him with your fears, your anger, your frustrations, all your issues, he does not get frustrated. So let your sorrows be real.

Sunxi was a very famous scholar. He met Greek philosophers, tremendous humanist and he was very well known for picking up on the nature of man. In fact he was the first few humanist scholar who would say that man is essentially evil. He did not much time for God, in fact many people called him the first Chinese atheist. He said something very interesting about prayer, *Pray all you want, heaven can’t hear you, it is not going to stop the winter because you are cold, it is not going to make the earth smaller because you don’t want to walk so far. You pray for rain and it rains but your prayer has nothing to do with*. *Sometimes you don’t pray for rain and it rains anyway and typical confusion, you want to have a better life, educate yourself, think carefully about the consequences of your actions.* He is half right because in many people whether you are Christian or of any other religion, pray is simply a wish list and you clutch on to it when you are desperate and you pray and you pray and you pray to all the gods and when things go wrong for that split moment it does not matter whether you are catholic, protestant, charismatic, evangelical, reformed, Armenian, Calvinist, you will pray to any god because you are desperate, a lot of people do that and then when the prayer is not answered you turn away from God.

**2. Let Your Sorrow Be Sacred**

1 A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite. O LORD, God of my salvation; I cry out day and night before you.

It has the longest heading for any psalm. The first word here is ‘A Song’. There is a Hebrew terming used here this for times of affliction. A Maskil is a chant or a contemplative prayer.

We always think of uplifting psalms, we think of praying through psalms, we forget one particular part which is integral to worship, and it is this word called lamentation and lamentation is worship and our sorrows have to be sacred. There is a very old singer called Michael Card, he wrote song for El Shaddai and he says this, “*We have forgotten to take our sorrows and bring it towards God and if we do as a concession”* and here is what he is saying. “*We forget what the psalmist is telling us is that this offerings of your lamentations are pleasing to God”*. Because if they are not they wouldn’t be in the Bible, but we have done is we have taken parts of the psalms which we like, Be still and know I am God, we will take that but I am not going to take the part that says, Lord I cry to you all day you don’t hear me but that is in the psalms. Lamentation is worship. In the time of the Exodus the Israelites complain about everything, Moses also complained but the difference was Moses complained to God.

For example, if your son or your daughter does not complain to you it shows they don’t care. If they don’t complain to you it means they don’t want to talk to you.

When you lament to God it shows God matters in your life, but we are very prone to do is lament about God. We sit with our friends and we say, God doesn’t care and what God is telling us today is let your sorrow be sacred and take it to him and it is not just something where your off let which is great we all need to off let. The prayer is an offering, the sorrow is not just real, the sorrow is sacred because you are lamenting to God and this is what God wants. Let your sorrow be sacred and do it persistently.

[**13**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-13.htm) But I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

[**9**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-9.htm) my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to you.

This is what he is praying every morning, why O lord do you reject me and hide your face from me. Can we do this every day? Every morning he comes to God, he stretches his hand and says God you reject me, but what is more wonderful about the word of God is that this lamentation is a worship act.

In whatever conditions we are we have to take it to God and take it to God regularly because it is the right thing to do, because it shows you love your God.

**3. Sorrow has to be God Centered.**

Tim Keller says that the psalmist is putting God on the witness stand and Heman is like a lawyer and he is grilling God, it is actually a very rude psalm.

[**10**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-10.htm) Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

[**11**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-11.htm) Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?

[**12**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-12.htm) Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

At every point he expects God to say “No”. He is saying God save me because if I am dead I can’t show your wonders. If I am dead I cannot praise you. If I am in the grave I cannot declare your steadfast love, if I am destroyed I cannot tell of your faithfulness, if I am the place of darkness your wonders will not be known, if I am the land of oblivion people will not know your righteous deeds and what Heman is saying is, save me God not for my sake but for your sake. That is tremendously important. Lament by itself has no value, lament has to lead to praise but here is the difficult thing and I want to speak honestly, sometimes people say not because we want to be politically correct Christians, we will say, I am going through a very difficult time but I need to fight for joy, I need to say that Lord I still praise you even though it hurts and it is very noble. We say but the heart does not feel it. Lament leads to praise but sometimes it is a long journey and what Heman is saying is God I can’t praise you but I want to praise you, you see the difference in that, it is a very important difference because it is honest, because sometime I feel quite concerned because if you are hurting inside and intellectually you will know, the Bible says God wants me to find, get some goodness out of this. It damages us when we force ourselves to it and Heman’s honesty is very-very encouraging. He is basically saying, you know what God I can’t praise you but I want to, God get me there. It is going to be a long journey but get me there.

When our problems come it gets us angry and they drown us, we think of nothing else but to get out of our problems and if God does not rescue us we come close to cursing God but mature man and woman don’t do that. In the midst of great suffering where it blows and it floods us, we have to find the quiet moment and remembers one thing which makes all of us Christians, we are sinners and he praises God for rescue him from that.

There is a space between lamentation and praise and if you can’t praise don’t come to church and raise your hand and say celebrate Jesus because your heart is not the same there. You will be lying to yourself, don’t do it but see in your heart, God get me there. The fundamental issue of sorrow, in the conversation at Chapter 1 of Job

[**8**](http://biblehub.com/job/1-8.htm) Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

[**9**](http://biblehub.com/job/1-9.htm) “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied.

[**10**](http://biblehub.com/job/1-10.htm) “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.

[**11**](http://biblehub.com/job/1-11.htm) But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

The Devil took Job’s finances out, then the loved ones, then to really break him his life became hell by giving him a disease that caused him so much pain and that is what happened to Job. These are the three things what each one of us makes our life bearable. Good health, financial stability and people we love. You take this three away from us we have no reason to live.

What if this happens to us?

Job never heard the conversation between God and Devil. And despite him really saying, I curse the day I was born, God at the end of Book of Job appreciated Job on speaking well and God blesses Job. Here is the thing about suffering; suffering has to be God-centered.

**4. Your Sorrow Has To Redemptive**:

[**18**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-18.htm) You have taken from me friend and neighbor — darkness is my closest friend.

When we look at the end of it, we say it is crazy way to end the psalm, darkness is my closest friend. When we go through a bad time something dies. At Calvary the Gospel of Mark tells us, when the sixth hour has come there was darkness over the whole land under the ninth hour and at the ninth hours Jesus cried out with a loud voice, my God, my God why have you forsaken me, because Jesus understood the darkness and that is why Heman goes back to this.

[**1**](http://biblehub.com/psalms/88-1.htm)Lord, you are the God who saves me;