

Psalm 88; Jer. 20:13-18; Hope in the Depth of Suffering I. The Deep Scars of this Lament II. The Subtitle Hope of this Lament

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the events of this past week stuck the heart of many. In light of the sad and tragic news and the following email and further responses by others- it is fitting to consider the mental anguish that some of God's people experience. As the Dykstra family and the saints in Walker are still in a state of shock- it is important to see how we can have hope even in the midst of great suffering. Psalm 88 is not a well-known psalm- and it is likely not your favorite. In it we read of a great darkness of the soul. It does not end on a high note like many other psalms- but this lament is a real attitude and song of God's people. This is so counter cultural- particularly in light of the Prosperity Gospel. Where some so-called preachers promise health and wellness- you know God does not want his servants to travel in anything less than first class some say- today we find that this world is not always a happy place. The church has been populated with suffering saints over the years. Remember that Elijah asked wanted to die- I can't do this he would say. Even Moses prayed in Ex. 32- forgive these people their sins or else blot out my name from the book of life. And David Brainerd- who was a friend of Jonathan Edwards- was known to suffer great mental anguish and depression- even as his diary has moved many to pursue gospel missions. Knowing that others have suffered this way is a great help to those who are suffering. It also challenges us to be considerate and compassionate towards those who are suffering. I have learned much from watching others suffer. The loss of a child, going through depression, suffering with great pain and poor health. Like Job, God's people say- the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Should we accept good and not ill from His hand? So today we step back to get a proper perspective of suffering as we live in this veil of tears. Since some of God's people can say- darkness is my closest friend- it is necessary for us as a church to be understanding and compassionate. This anguish is real to life for many. So today we see that Jesus Christ experienced and exposes the true heart of suffering for the comfort of the church.

## I. The Deep Scars of this Lament

Our Psalm opens with a cry- a prayer that arises from a beaten and bruised heart. There are deep scars that many have. As we read in Jer. 20- after the beating and imprisonment- it is then that this cry for mercy and grace is raised! Here the psalmist is experiences pain- physical pain. His life is in v. 3- close to the grave. His breath is rushed- His time is short- His body is wearing out. Like Job who sad on an ash heap covered with boils and scabs. I am like the slain ones- I am as good as dead. I am crushed, beaten and bruised. I cannot take any more! I have no strength! Added to this, is His spiritual anguish- my soul is filled with trouble! Your wrath is heavy on me, I am overwhelmed. I sink down into despair- I have no comfort as you have hidden your face from me! This is no superficial experience; it is a real dread and despair of the body and the soul. The dark blue shade- the shadow of the night- the cold grip of death is on my brow. And I cry out- why? As Jesus said- my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you done this to me? V. 14- why do you cast my soul away- why hide your face? There is a perplexity here! I do not understand- I cannot make sense of this! I am in distress- dejected- I have such melancholy- and I do not know why! I am all alone here- as v. 18 concludes. Darkness is my only companion- you have taken away all my comforters! As v. 8 puts it- all my companions shun me- they flee from me! I even cry to you- and I do not hear- I do not see? Where are you God in all this? Am I truly alone? Have you cast me away? There is a loneliness to this despair! But still- even now I cry out! Day and night- morning and evening- even when I do not feel your presence or see your face- even now I call! Please listen- for my eyes are growing dim! Do not fail to hear and answer my plea! Let's take a breath for a moment and consider one purpose of this psalm. If you have never experienced this sort of anguish- this psalm opens our eyes. And for those who have- learning that others before have suffered this way- brings us great comfort! You are not alone in this mental, physical or spiritual anguish! Many saints have walked this road before you! Your suffering is not unique- we have a shared bond and burden with others! Simply reading about the suffering others can bring comfort and light to us- if others walked this

road I can too! And the works of this Psalm are so honest! God's Word is brutally honest here! I do not know why- I may not understand- words cannot express my anguish and pain- but even here- even now- I pray! The Holy Spirit puts into words the groans of our heart- and the Son as our mediator intercedes for us- so we continue on! There are many dangers, toils and snares- many enemies that attack- but our God is still God! And so we cry out to Him! He will answer- but His answer is not in our time. As v. 18 ends- my companions have become darkness- or the night is my closest friend. Our prayers often end in waiting! There is a delay- and we need to wait upon the Lord! He will answer in His time! So what do we do while we wait- we sing- and pray- and cry! Our prayers and our songs are not always happy- sometimes they are sour and sad! We live in the not yet- and sometimes we suffer the dark night of the soul. Our hearts break and our bones burn- and we wait! Because even now- even still- our God is God! When we apply this to our salvation- it is good news that our salvation does not depend on our feelings! Our assurance is never based on how we feel! Sometimes the light of God's face does not shine on us- but we keep on praying and worshipping as we wait! Many of God's people carry these deep scars their whole life.

## **II. The Subtitle Hope of this Lament**

But there is a subtle hope here as well. Psalm 88 is a song of church! This is our communal prayer! One application of this psalm is that this mourner is crying for fellowship. This Psalmist felt alone- we need people! Those suffering in this way need the church body! We need others to give us comfort- to help us see the context- to bring to mind what we once knew and confessed! Psalm 88 is the song of the church that we pray and cry and confess together! Job's friends had it right at first- just sit and sufferer with your friends! Be with them! Who wrote this Psalm? Well- it was a song for the sons of Korah! Those who were commissioned to lead worship at the temple. It was a psalm of Heman- known as a mighty man- but Heman was a Levite minister of music! The spirit inspired him to record these words for us- so that we might know it is okay to cry- to question- to sit and be confused- but remember the

recipient of those prayers! Who is the one to whom we cry out? To whom do we question- and raise our prayers? V. 1- O Lord- the God of my salvation! To You- I cry! V. 13- I cry to you- O Lord! The hope is subtle- but it is there! Hope is present because of the recipient of our prayers! To whom do you cry- in whom is your help? In whose hand do we remain? Well- nothing can happen outside of His will- all things come to us from the hand of loving Father- right? All must work together for my good and His glory! Do not lost sight of the One who hold all things! Indeed- Heman confessed- you have done this- v. 8! Your have put me here- v. 6! I have received this ill from your hand- not random chance or bad luck- but loving discipline! A frowning providence from a Loving God! His work is mysterious- but He often works through tears and trials! He is reminding us- we are not there yet! There is something good- great and glorious coming- so we cry out- come quickly, Lord Jesus! We have something better to look forward to! And never forget, who is the epitome of all suffering? Who is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53? Who cried out in Psalm 22 and on the cross- my God, why have you forsaken me? Remember, this is not only the song of the church this is the song of Jesus! Jesus suffered hellish agony- He was touched by our sorrows and He carries our burdens. Jesus was really and truly alone and forsaken on the cross! As our theme said- Jesus experienced true suffering for the comfort of the church! When we look at the depth of what He suffered for us- in our place- only now can we see where our comfort lies! If Jesus went to this place- were darkness was his only friend- when his body and soul were filled with agony- and all his friends and family had forsaken him- if Jesus went through Psalm 88 in our place because of our sins- we can know that whatever we experience is not a foretaste of hell- but a tender blow from a loving Father! He was foraken so that we would never be! He rejected so that we might be embraced! It is because of Jesus that we can move beyond 88- and look into Psalm 89- I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever- his faithfulness to all generations! Psalm 88 is a part of the picture- it is not the whole picture and thank God it is not the final chapter! We are headed for a better place- with no pain and no sorrow- no darkness or night- and no isolation nor rejection! AS

Is. 61: 3 says, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of faint spirit!

Where joy and gladness replace sorrow and shame! That is where all of God's people are headed- and that is why we can cry out to God with a heart of faith!

To conclude, in Psalm we see that Jesus Christ experienced and exposes the true heart of suffering for the comfort of the church. This is a hymn of faith- of hope and trust in our saving God who hears and answers prayers. I may not now understand- I may suffer and morn tonight- but joy comes in the morning. So if you are going through a time like Heman, Jonah, David, Jeremiah and Moses did- take heart! This is not the end of your story! You are not alone- Jesus has gone before you and the church sings this song with you! Praise God that He will lift His people out of despair and that one day He will wipe away every tear!