

# Where Are Your Mercies to David?

By Don Green

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**Truth Community Church**  
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

As we continue our study in the Psalms, Psalm 89 is where we're going to be turning to and one of the things that a careful reading and study of the Psalms over a period of time will do is that it will help you in your expectations about the nature of spiritual life as a Christian. The idea that becoming a Christian will solve all of your problems and make life easy and smooth is a falsehood that is destined to cause difficulty and trouble internally for one who is a true Christian and yet has to go through life; eventually life catches up with you, eventually life brings its difficulties and its sorrows because we live in a fallen world. The perfection of life and the perfection of joy that is promised to Christians is a promise that is still future for us in its fulfillment, the perfection of it. Of course, we love Christ and we experience joy and gladness during our days on earth as he gives blessings, as he strengthens us, as we fellowship with him through the Holy Spirit and as we fellowship with one another, we experience much joy of which we are not worthy in this life, but it's subject to change, life is subject to loss, subject to sorrow because it is a fallen world and the promises of ultimate fulfillment are awaiting glory, they're not for earth right now because even as we sung just a few moments ago, eventually unless the Lord comes quickly, all of us are going to in one way or another be laying on that bed with the death dew on our brow. Man is appointed to die once and after this comes judgment and so we need to have realistic expectations about the nature of things, even as our hope is firmly grounded in Christ, even as our hope is transcendent, even though we know joy unspeakable and full of glory as Peter writes about, there is still the challenge of affliction that we have to respond to and when we come to a text like Psalm 89, we get a really good perspective on these kinds of things.

So Psalm 89 is the third longest Psalm in the Psalter at least by numbers of verses, and so we're not going to read it for the sake of time before I begin my exposition. We'll just kind of go through it paragraph by paragraph this evening as we seek to treat all of them in a single message. Psalm 89 is this, beloved, Psalm 89 is an extended discourse in which the psalmist is seeking to reconcile a conflict in his mind and in his heart. He knows one thing to be true and yet another thing is true and these things seem to be in tension in his mind and what is that tension? There is this tension between, in his experience, God's past promises to his people, specifically to David, there is the tension with that on the one side and then on the other side they are in the midst of a present distress that seems to contradict all of those promises that God had made, and so in this

Psalm, the psalmist is going through this measure of trying to affirm the promises that he knows to be true and reconciling them with his present difficulty.

Now you can relate to that, can't you? There are times, especially those of you that have been Christians for any length of time, you've come to know God and to trust him, you've come to understand that he promises to work all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purposes, you know verses like Philippians 4 where it says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," and you're mindful of these things, mindful of rejoicing in the Lord always, and yet life comes at you like a bowling ball barreling down the alley and you're standing there like a couple of pins just waiting to get knocked over and life hits you and it hits you hard and life is difficult and it is sore and day by day it's difficult sometimes to go through and even to get up in the morning, and the conflict with people just seems to go on and on and there isn't any immediate relief. Whether you consciously frame it in your mind like this or not, there is this tension between the promises of the word of God and what your present experience is that seems to fall short of what those promises are to you. We can be honest with one another. We're not afraid of those kinds of times and the only way that we can really help each other is to address them honestly and not to pretend like it doesn't exist. I would hate to be a Christian Scientist who denies the very existence of evil and the fact that everything is good. That's a horrible philosophy to live by because it's a denial of the nature of life in a fallen world and you just end up pretending and you live in a fantasy world that has no connection with reality. That has nothing to do with true Christianity, true Christianity can look at the difficulties of life square in the face, ask the hard questions and come to a soul-satisfying answer and that's what we're going to see here in Psalm 89.

We're going to break it down into two parts of unequal length. The first two thirds of the Psalm you could put under the title of "The Lofty Promises to David." The lofty promises to David. Then the last third of the Psalm we could describe it as "The Lowly Position of the Nation." The lofty promises to David, going from verse 1 to verse 37, the lowly position of the nation going from verse 38 to the end.

Let's look at it, shall we? Psalm 89 opens with this wonderful praise to God for his enduring character. It opens on a note of praise. He says in verse 1, this is "A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite," it says in the inscription. In verse 1 it says,

1 I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever; To all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth. 2 For I have said, "Lovingkindness will be built up forever; In the heavens You will establish Your faithfulness."

You have to like his starting point, don't you? You have to like the way and the starting point of his theme, the starting point of his meditation is starting with the loyal love of God and his faithfulness. He is recognizing the fact that God is a God who keeps his promises and he is a God of loyal love, and so he starts and praises him on that basis and

he names these perfections of God in the context of David. Now that's very very important for the outworking of this Psalm.

Look in verse 3. It's spoken in the first person as though directly from the lips of God himself. It says in verse 3,

3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, 4 I will establish your seed forever And build up your throne to all generations."

Now we looked at the Davidic covenant last time from 2 Samuel 7 and we saw that God had promised King David a house and a throne and a kingdom that would endure forever. God had chosen David and bestowed on him these magnificent promises of enduring blessing that would last from generation to generation to generation, and so those who were living in the nation of Israel, living under the kingship of these promises and the outworking of these promises, they understood that they were under the umbrella of some great promises to God that guaranteed the long-term blessing of their nation. So this was their source of stability, this was their rock, this was that upon which they stood, and the nature of the promises were that this was to extend into the indefinite future.

This was to last a very very long time, indeed, the word "forever," the word "forever" is a theme to this entire Psalm and I want you to see it because it helps ground the nature of his appeal to God toward the end. So in verse 1 and 2 you see, "I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever." Verse 2, "Lovingkindness will be built up forever." Verse 4, "I will establish your seed forever." Verse 28, "My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever." Verse 29, "So I will establish his descendants forever." Verse 36, "His descendants shall endure forever." Verse 37, "It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky it is faithful." So what the word "forever" is communicating here in this Psalm is the fact that God's promises to David were to last forever. Just as the heavens do not change during the course of the existence of man, so God's promises were to be kept. God's promise would not be broken and this is guaranteed, beloved, by the loyal love of God. The word translated "lovingkindness," this is guaranteed by his faithfulness.

So God's character lies behind the promises that he is made to the throne of David and this is to guarantee the well-being of Israel into the indefinite future and so these promises aren't like our promises, they are not subject to being broken. You know, we could make promises we fully intend to keep but, you know, if lightning strikes us and suddenly we're incapacitated or taken to glory, we can't keep the promises that we make. You and I don't have the ability to absolutely guarantee what we're going to do in the future, guarantee it absolutely without fail because we're frail and subject to death at any time. So there is always a certain conditionality to our promises even in our best strength, even with our best intentions because we are not the masters of our own destiny. We do not control our fate, so to speak. We cannot guarantee that we're going to be alive tomorrow and so there is always a certain conditionality in the things that we say. Now I get a little carried away with it, you know, and I'll say something like, "Well, hey, I'll see

you tomorrow," but there is this echo in my mind that, you know, I'm kind of crossing my fingers, "Well, maybe I will. Maybe I won't. I don't know. It's my intention but I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow." My life is a vapor. I'm going to pass away. I don't know what tomorrow will bring.

So we realize that there is a certain conditionality to the nature of human existence for us but, beloved, it's not like that for God. He's transcendent. He dwells beyond time. He is self-existent. What he says he is able to do because he is the God of perfect omnipotence. He has the unlimited power to carry out his will no matter what happens and that's what he does and the fact that he is true and the fact that he is faithful means that he will do what he promised. He will do it because there is nothing to prevent him from doing so and his own character, his own love, his own loyalty, his own faithfulness to his word, his own truthfulness guarantees that whatever he has promised will be perfectly fulfilled, and so God is not like us when he makes a promise, he not only makes promises that he can keep, he makes promises that he will keep and that's what the psalmist is extolling here.

Look at verse 3 with me again. He's starting out echoing, "God, in Your lovingkindness, in Your faithfulness, You said this, 'I've made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to David, My servant. I'll establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations.' Selah." Park it there and think about that for a while. This is what God said. This is the promise that God made to his servant, David, and he promised to continue it into the indefinite future and that covenant premised on the character of God – this is so important for understanding Psalm 89, that's why I slow down just to emphasize it because I don't want you to miss it. I realize I get up and I kind of drone on and it's hard to know what's important and what's not, but not here. That covenant with David is the basis for his entire appeal in the rest of the Psalm. There is praise for the lofty promises but then there is trouble later on and underlying it all are these promises that God made to David.

So he starts with, as he moves on beginning in verse 5, he amplifies his praise. He recognizes that God has made these promises as an extension of grace to unworthy people, these promises are an expression of his kindness, and so he realizes that to be under the promises of God, to be on the receiving end of promises that are guaranteed to them as a people, is a position of blessing, is a position of having been on the receiving end of God's infinite kindness and therefore he praises God for it.

Look at verses 5, 6 and 7. He says,

5 The heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones. 6 For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD, 7 A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, And awesome above all those who are around Him?

He's saying, "God, even in the midst of the holy angels, You are transcendent above them." Now if you and I were in the presence of just in the presence and the convocation

of the holy angels, we'd be overwhelmed by their glory and their majesty because they are greater beings than us in that way and they would dwarf us and their glory would frighten us, even as they frightened Mary at the resurrection. What he's saying is, "God, when You're in the midst of an assembly like that, You are superior and far above them and You transcend even them. There is no one like You. No one compares to You." His train of thought here is that, "God, if You are exalted among the angels, then how much more are You above men? Angels are greater than men and You're greater than angels. You are exponentially greater than us. You are infinitely beyond us." And therefore he personifies the heavens and says, "They will praise You. They will praise You for Your faithfulness. There is no one like You. You are awesome above everyone that is around You." And it's that awesome God in his faithful loyal love that has extended these promises to his people. So when you trace these things out, you realize how magnificent God is, you realize how wonderful he has been to his people, and the force of that in your heart should compel you, should urge you to praise him for his excellent greatness. Even as the hymn writer said, "Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him for His excellent greatness," that is premised on the reality of who God is, the greatness of his character, and the promises that he has made to his people.

Now let's you and I in this New Testament era take it a step further as I like to do as we go through these Psalms and do our best to keep Christ in the center of our contemplations, here we are in the New Testament and we realize this lofty glorious God became Incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was lofty and exalted, he humbled himself in order to become a man, Philippians 2. Not just to become a man but to be obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross in order to accomplish our redemption which we will celebrate in Communion on Sunday, celebrating the theme of redemption as we come together around the Lord's Table. Well beloved, the more that you explore the various corridors in the palace of the glory of God, as you walk down the great halls of the Buckingham Palace of the glory of God and you realize that there are various corridors to explore and to praise him for, you praise him for his great character down one corridor, and you're lost in wonder, love and praise there, you go down another corridor to the promises that he has made to his people and how gracious and condescending it is for him to make promises like that to unworthy people, and you praise him and you praise him. You go down another corridor of the Buckingham Palace of the greatness of the glory of God and you see Christ in his splendor, you see Christ on the cross, you see Christ in his resurrection, you see Christ ascended to glory, you see Christ promising to come again and you say, "This is magnificent. There is nothing on earth like this." Then you go down another corridor and you realize that this Christ did that in order to secure your eternal salvation that you would become part of the family of God and that you would be perfected in glory, rescued from sin and damnation, made perfect around his throne to enjoy his glory forever and ever amen, and you say, "There is no way out of this. I don't even want to leave this palace because everywhere, every corner that I go to, every corridor or I walk down, every door that I open is just opening more and more wonders for me to see about the greatness of the glory of God." He's transcendent. There is no one that compares to him.

Now the psalmist goes on and expands on it even more. He says in verse 9, he is calling more things to bear to ascribe glory to God in what he says. In verse 9 he says,

9 You rule the swelling of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them. 10  
You Yourself crushed Rahab like one who is slain; You scattered Your  
enemies with Your mighty arm.

Now Rahab there is a reference, a poetic reference to Egypt. We saw that in the past. Isaiah 30:7 makes that connection clear. "God, You rule the oceans." Those of you that have been on the beach and seen the waves coming in, you realize how impossible that is for man to harness. It's his ocean. He rules the waves. His power is so great that he is sovereign over the ocean and what the psalmist is saying is that, "Looking back into our history, You were sovereign over Egypt, the greatest political and military power of the day, and You delivered Your people from slavery in Egypt. God, Your majesty is utterly unfathomable." So he's got this earthly perspective as he looks at God's sovereignty over the ocean, sovereignty over the nations, and then it just keeps going. There is another corridor in the palace to explore.

Verse 11,

11 The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all it  
contains, You have founded them. 12 The north and the south, You have  
created them; Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name [these are  
mountains that are being personified in the nation of Israel]. 13 You have  
a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted.

And you're just swept up in the majesty of this, aren't you? As you recite these things again and again, as you go through wave after wave after wave of the things for which God is to be glorified and to be magnified, you're just swept up with this thought that I would summarize here this evening anyway, of just recognizing that God is so lofty, he is so high, he is so majestic, he is so great, he is so good. There is no one like him. There is no one like him. There is no one like him.

You know, let me do a little foreshadowing here of what's going to come. It's not that the psalmist here is experiencing earthly bliss, it's the exact opposite, whatever the opposite of bliss is, is what he's actually experiencing, but he sets that aside, he puts that on hold in order to magnify the greatness of God and to praise him and what we see is this that is quite the challenge to our own spiritual lives, we don't have to wait until our problems all get worked out and we get all of our inner turmoil sorted out before we praise God. That's not the way to think about the Christian life. That's not the way it is intended to work. God is independently worthy of your praise and honor and worship right now and it is right and proper and good and expedient and the thing to do, to praise him for his great loftiness even in the midst of your turmoil. Don't take the truncated selfish view of the Christian life that says, "Boy, I'll be glad when this is over and then I'll praise God. I'll praise God when He gets me through this." Why, why, why not just praise God now because he's really lofty, he's really worthy regardless of how our circumstances play out

in life and it's right for the believing heart to ascribe praise to him that is unconditioned on how our circumstances turn out. That's just so very critical for us to see, to know and to practice.

So God is lofty and his perfections are a source of blessing. Look at verse 14. Verse 14 says,

14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;  
Lovingkindness and truth go before You.

In other words, "God, everything that You do, everything that plays out in the outworking of Your plan is premised in righteousness, justice, Your lovingkindness, and Your truth."

Verse 15,

15 How blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! O LORD, they walk in the light of Your countenance. 16 In Your name they rejoice all the day, And by Your righteousness they are exalted.

Your people are blessed. To be a part of the people of God is the greatest earthly blessing that any mortal could ever know. To belong to a God like this is better than owning Buckingham Palace. I'm mixing my metaphors here tonight, aren't I? Using it to illustrate God's glory and using it to illustrate the utter failure of earthly things to compare to the greatness of our God.

To be his people is to be blessed and why is that? Verse 17,

17 For You are the glory of their strength, And by Your favor our horn is exalted.

"God, to be Your people, to be in the realm in which You exercise and manifest Your righteousness and favor and glory to Your people, to have You as our God, to have You as our Sovereign, to know that You are at work in us and have secured our blessing forever is the greatest blessing that any human being could know." So he is just swept up in praise.

Now he expands on it and ties this back to the promises that God has made to David in verse 18. In verse 18 he says,

18 For our shield belongs to the LORD [shield being a reference to the king as shown by the parallel line here in verse 18], For our shield belongs to the LORD, And our king to the Holy One of Israel.

So he's recognizing the great character of God, his great work, his great faithfulness, and in that great faithfulness he's established a king for Israel for them to live their earthly

lives under the mediatorial rule of this king who is the representative of God on earth for them and they are blessed because their king belongs to this lofty God.

And at the mention of the king, the psalmist recalls how God chose him in verse 19, how God chose the king, that is. Verse 19 he said,

19 Once You spoke in vision to Your godly ones, And said, "I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people."

Who is this chosen one of whom he speaks? Follow along in verse 20,

20 "I have found David My servant; With My holy oil I have anointed him, 21 With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him."

Now what these verses are indicating, remember he's referring back to the Davidic covenant that we looked at last time, how God promised blessing upon David and his subsequent line, and the fact that God is sovereign means that he would exercise his power to bring blessing to David and to his line. Now what those verses are indicating, then, God would use his arm, that is a metaphor for his power and God would uphold David's throne and protect David from his enemies.

Verse 22,

22 "The enemy will not deceive him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 23 But I shall crush his adversaries before him, And strike those who hate him."

So the promise of God to David and to his descendants, "I will protect him from wickedness. I will defeat his enemies. David and his throne will flourish under My hand and under My blessing." So this is just going on and on and on about the character of God and the promises that he made that surely Israel would live under his blessing.

And what is it that guarantees that blessing? What is it that guarantees the triumph over the enemies? Look at verse 24,

24 "My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, And in My name his horn will be exalted."

Do you see the themes of faithfulness and lovingkindness again? "God, You are faithful and full of lovingkindness. God, You spoke to David and said Your faithfulness and loyal love will be that which would guarantee the upholding of his throne." Verse 25,

25 "I shall also set his hand on the sea And his right hand on the rivers."



In other words, there would be a geographic spread of the reign of David in a way that would manifest the lofty faithfulness of God to keep his promises to exalt his king. They would reign from the Red Sea in the south to the Euphrates River in the north. Great promises but, beloved, it wasn't simply about geographic conquest or military might or the prosperity of the people. There was a spiritual component to these promises. The king would love God.

Verse 26,

26 "He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'"

There would be in response through the king, there would be this response of faith, there would be this response of love, of obedience, of devotion, of allegiance from the king to the God who had established him on the throne. This was just to be a paradise on earth, so to speak.

In verse 27 God says,

27 "I also shall make him My firstborn [the one of preeminence], The highest of the kings of the earth. 28 My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, And My covenant shall be confirmed to him. 29 So I will establish his descendants forever And his throne as the days of heaven."

So stated in clear, lofty, repeated themes is this idea of the blessing of God on the throne of David secured by his power, secured by his faithfulness, that would be the mark of God's blessing upon his people forever. This is undergirding this first part that we've entitled "The Lofty Promises to David." This is just, you'll understand the sense in which I say this, this is out of this world. This is out of this world how great this is. This comes from another realm and it is heaven brought to earth; the security, the power, the glory of heaven brought to earth to be manifested through the throne of David.

Now there was a certain kind of conditionality to the promise. In verse 30 it says,

30 "If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, 31 If they violate My statutes And do not keep My commandments, 32 Then I will punish their transgression with the rod And their iniquity with stripes."

He says, "To enjoy this blessing there must be a reciprocal obedience, there must be a response of obedience to My promises and if there's not, there will be consequences." And we saw that last time in 2 Samuel 7 as well and, beloved, as you read through the history of Israel in 1 and 2 Kings, after Solomon fell and the kingdom was split under his son, the sad history of Israel's kings shows how this worked out in time but the nature of the covenant was such that though the blessing might be forfeited for a parenthesis of

time the covenant would not be broken from God's perspective. His lovingkindness toward his people would not change.

Look at verse 33, he says,

33 "But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. 34 My covenant I will not violate, Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. 35 Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. 36 His descendants shall endure forever And his throne as the sun before Me. 37 It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful."

What God is saying here is, "That the ultimate outcome of these lofty promises that I have made to David depend on My nature, depend on My character, depend on what I have promised and I won't break off My promise from the line of David even if there is a time in which their disobedience requires My disciplining hand." God promises blessing to his people, he keeps his people, but sometimes they feel the sting of discipline along the way.

Now, flash forward to the New Testament. Scripture speaks about God dealing with us as believers in Christ in that way, doesn't it? In Hebrews 12, everyone the Lord loves he disciplines; that we had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them, how much more should we be subject to the Father of spirits and live? So it's not that sin would go unaddressed as a result of these promises but underlying it all, what is being said here toward the end of this first section in Psalm 89 is that the nature of God guarantees the ultimate outcome of the promises and that means that the promises will ultimately be kept, they will be fulfilled. The performance of men, the sin of men will not break the covenant irrevocably. It might suspend the blessing for a period of time but God's faithfulness means he will keep the promises that he made to David. Period. End of quotation.

The promises to the seed of David as a whole will not be withdrawn and notice what God stakes it on, he compares the certainty of his promise to the course of the heavens above that are so predictable, so certain, so consistent in their spin around the universe. He says in verse 37, look at it with me, "It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful." So we have here from the character of God, the promises of God, the outworking of these promises to David and the people, we see this, that God has made these lofty promises to the line of David and he has promised to keep them, it's as though he swore by his own name. He guaranteed it by the course of heavens that his disposition – here it is – his disposition toward the people of David would not change. He would do what he promised to do. He had made lofty promises to the line of David.

So the question is this: what could go wrong? What could go wrong if this God makes these promises to this people? What could go wrong? Well, that brings us to our second section of this Psalm which we've titled "The Lowly Position of the Nation." The lowly position of the nation. What could go wrong? Apparently everything could go wrong.

Apparently everything could go wrong and now in verse 38, you are met with a collision of a jarring contrast that seems to be completely irreconcilable with the praise that had gone forth in the prior 37 verses. This doesn't even seem to be possible in light of what has just been said. Verse 38, look at it with me. Here the first person voice of God breaks off and now the psalmist speaks in light of his present circumstances. He says in verse 38,

38 But You have cast off and rejected, You have been full of wrath against  
Your anointed. 39 You have spurned the covenant of Your servant; You  
have profaned his crown in the dust.

"God, we do not have Your promised blessing," and there were times in the history of Israel where this was just so painfully obvious. It was certainly the case in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. If you want to read about how bad it got for them, read the book of Lamentations and see the awfulness of their destitution and their desperation after they had been invaded and carried off into exile.

Now a number of images follow here beginning in verse 40, to illustrate the devastation. These are illustrations of how bad it had become and what I want you to see, just give you a little preface of what's about immediately to come is this, is that the psalmist holds God responsible for this devastation as shown by the repeated use of the pronoun "You. You have done this, O God." Look at it as we read these next six verses, verses 40 through 45. The "You" started immediately in verse 38, "You have cast off." Verse 39, "You have spurned the covenant. You have profaned his crown in the dust." Now look at it in verse 40 as that "You" carries on.

40 You have broken down all his walls; You have brought his strongholds  
to ruin. 41 All who pass along the way plunder him; He has become a  
reproach to his neighbors. 42 You have exalted the right hand of his  
adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice. 43 You also turn back  
the edge of his sword And have not made him stand in battle. 44 You have  
made his splendor to cease And cast his throne to the ground. 45 You have  
shortened the days of his youth; You have covered him with shame. Selah.

Ponder that. Think about that.

He says, "God, here we are in this current experience in our nation. What's happening to us bears no resemblance to the promises that You made to us beforehand." It's mournful. It's explicit. It's painfully honest. He says, "Lord, we're defenseless. We are subject to roaming invaders. Our walls are broken down. We can't even defend our city. We're like a soldier with a dull sword who can't stand in battle and all of this, Father, has come from Your hand." And here is the virtual fracture of his mind in the midst of that circumstance. "God, when I look at the nature of our existence right now and compare it to the promises, the character, the covenant that I've been reciting," for the prior 37 verses in our English Bible here, "when I compare it to that, this makes absolutely no sense to me. This is completely inconsistent. This seems to be a complete contradiction of Your lofty name and the promises that You made to David. The crown is not exalted, it is profaned

in the dust, God." You could say it this way, the God who made the promise has now unmade the king. It is as though God has forgotten the covenant of which he himself made such a fuss over.

How do I put this together, is the tension that he has, and so he turns to prayer in verse 46. He says,

46 How long, O LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?

In these circumstances for the psalmist, it is as though God was hiding. He could not be found and notice how the word "forever" has sprung up in the theme of this Psalm again. In the first 37 verses we saw it in this glorious promise of how God's promises would extend and the glory would just continue and God's blessing would pour out, and now he's saying, "God, this has been going on so long it seems like this is the new reality by which I will understand my existence. How long will this go on? Are You just going to hide forever? In the years in which we have suffered this affliction and You have not intervened? Is this darkness just going to continue without end after You've made all of these glorious promises of which I have rightly praised You for? God," the prayer is, "God, where is Your faithful love in this?"

Now look, you're entering into the mind of the psalmist here, you can't help but sympathize with him, can you? This breaks your heart to realize this and the challenge for the believer in Christ, the challenge for the believer when this kind of dark cloud spreads over your life and becomes the new nature of existence for you, is this: it's not just the outward circumstance, is it? It's not simply the fact that life is hard. It's the fact that God seems nowhere to be found. The prior times when you prayed and answers quickly came seem to have no relevance to a time like this. "Is this going to go on forever?" The great promises seem distant when the sorrow and the affliction and the seeming contradiction of God's faithfulness is right in your face day after day with no relief to be found, and meanwhile there are these chirping voices sometimes of so-called friends, sometimes of your enemies, "Where is your God? Where is your God?" Job's wife, you'll remember, seeing him suffer in like manner said, "Why don't you just curse God and die? This isn't worth it. Your God is nowhere to be found anyway so relieve the tension by cursing Him. Die and get it over with." "Thanks, babe. That's helpful."

Now a lot of people, a lot of so-called Christians, find this kind of text and these kinds of discussions very uncomfortable because to their ears, to their, I'll just say it, I'll say what I'm thinking, why not? To their immature ears this sounds like a lack of faith. It sounds as though it is rebellion against God. "Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?" That sounds like rebellion to the untrained ear but, beloved, this is not a cry of unbelief. This is not a call of rebellion. This is not a sinful spiritual temper tantrum that is taking place here. This psalmist has a legitimate tension in his heart and it is a tension, let me say that again, it is a tension in his heart that is prompted by the very reality that he believes everything that he said in the first 37 verses. It's because he believes that this is so difficult. It's because he's a man of faith that this seeming

contradiction troubles him so much. You know, no one gets worked up over the loyalty of God if they don't believe in it.

What he's doing here is he's calling on God in faith, holding God to his own word, to his own character, saying, "God, how long can this go on?" My heart breaks for him. My heart breaks for those of you that are finding yourselves in situations like that. I know it's hard. I've been there and it is so important for us, in my humble opinion, it is so important for us to realize that this tension is real. This is not an academic exercise for him, his whole heart is engaged in this and what you must understand is there could not possibly be any visible sign of hope that relief is on its way. If you could see that relief was coming, then there wouldn't be any tension to it. It's precisely because you see no possible resolution, it's precisely because you see no possible good outcome that creates this convulsion in your soul saying, "God, what am I to do with this?" It's hard. It's hard and I shouldn't say this but I just thank God that I'm in a position to stand in a pulpit and to tell that to somebody who needs to hear it. Yeah, it's hard and it's not a lack of faith on your part that finds you in the place of difficulty. Of course, of course your heart is brought to the breaking point when everything that matters to you is going contrary to what you thought God had promised you. Of course that's hard.

Well, Scripture gives us perspective, gives us help in it, and so he turns to prayer now in verse 47. He appeals to God with his broken heart and he says, "God,

47 Remember what my span of life is; For what vanity You have created  
all the sons of men! 48 What man can live and not see death? Can he  
deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?

It's an appeal of desperate desperation. He is desperately appealing to God to show some mercy in this situation because he's just a dying man of flesh. "God, I can't go on like this much longer. This affliction is so heavy. Don't You remember that I'm just a man of flesh that's going to die and go away? Don't You understand, God? I'm a mere mortal. I can't stand under the affliction that You have brought to our people, that You have brought to my life. I don't have the constitution for this. I wasn't made for this. I wasn't made to endure the brunt of Your anger. I don't have that capacity. It's too much."

"So God," he appeals to God and he says, "God, You need to act for the sake of Your own character and Your own promises." Look at verse 49. He says, "God, the reality of this situation is calling Your character into question." Verse 49,

49 Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, Which You swore  
to David in Your faithfulness?

"God, You swore that You would be loyal to David and to his descendants. You promised to be faithful. You said You would keep Your word and You would never break it. Everything about existence says that that is in jeopardy now. Where is it, God? I look to the north, I look to the south, I look to the east, I look to the west, I don't find any relief. I look up, I look down, I look in, I look out, there is nothing suggesting that You're

being faithful to what You said You would be. Where is it, God? Point it out to me because it ain't here."

And the Psalm comes to a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion, you might say, in verse 50, because there is no circumstantial change here and the tension in his soul can only spurt up into a simple prayer as he says in verse 50, he ends this lament with a very simple prayer. Verse 50,

50 Remember, O Lord.

That's the one request that he makes after baring his soul like that. "Remember. Lord, look upon us. Call to Your own mind

50 ... the reproach of Your servants; How I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples, 51 With which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed.

He's saying, "God, my only prayer here is that You would remember us." But in light of everything he said in the first 37 verses and the magnitude of the affliction that he was responding, his one request is that God would remember, and in that way this Psalm has come full circle. He doesn't try to outline for God exactly what he should do and how he should act. He's saying, "God, all I ask from You is this, I just ask You to remember everything that You Yourself have said and to look on us and see our reproach because I know if You remember, You'll do something about it. You haven't really forgotten, Lord, but I'm asking You to act as though You're remembering something that has passed Your mind so that You would now intercede and intervene for us and help us and bring relief to these circumstances while I'm alive to see it. Just remember us, Lord. Look on us with favor."

And with that simple but profound prayer, he closes with praise. Verse 52. I should say the Psalm closes with praise.

52 Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

This praise in verse 52 closes Book 3 of the Psalms. It's an appropriate response. It summarizes the sense that this Lord, Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, there all caps, LORD, verse 52, the covenant-keeping God will respond to that prayer. "Blessed be his name forever. Amen and amen. Let it be, let it be."

Now let's just bring a couple of thoughts to bear and close this out. Beloved, just as a pastoral matter, a pastoral word to help you to discern life when it gets difficult, sometimes our experience seems to fall far short of the faithfulness of God. It's our experience, it seems that way in time. Adversity comes, affliction comes, prayers that seem to be just on the verge of being answered suddenly go up in smoke, shattering hope, shattering expectation, great loss, no way of recovering what has been lost, and you're left with the faithfulness of God in what I see in front of me today, I can't fit those things

together. What you have to do as you think through Psalm 89 is this, beloved, you have to accept that momentary tension, I use momentary, that temporal tension, it might go on for a very long time, it might go on for years, you have to accept that momentary tension that sometimes in this life the lofty promises of God that we understand, the wonder of his character, the wonder of his faithfulness is not necessarily going to be what we experience in time in this life, and in those times you learn something really important; the thing that sustains you is this, is that in those times you can live simply on the promises of God rather than what you see at the time. What you see is not a reliable indicator of what's good, what you see is not a reliable indicator of what the outcome will be.

You see, in the midst of the tension and all you see is darkness around you, you're tempted to rely on your own understanding and conclude that this cannot get better, that there is no good outcome here, and that's when Proverbs 3:5 and 6 kick in, it says,

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Life isn't always giftwrapped, sometimes it comes with more thorns than roses, and bear with me here for just another moment or two as I just make a point that I know some of you need to hear. Some of you, many of you even because I've heard it with my own ears, have just lamented greatly in the midst of your affliction, "Oh, I lost this or that. This circumstance didn't come or this relationship didn't work out, or what about this and this person lied to me and blah blah blah blah blah," and you voiced and articulated this kind of despair that now you're on the other side of. Now you're in the midst of blessing about it and, beloved, just look back and let the current blessing inform the way that you view those past times of affliction and bring your praise and thanks to God. "God, I had given up. I had abandoned hope. I was on the brink of apostasy. I thought there was no way that You could ever bring good out of that and yet, Lord, You did. Thank You, God. You did have mercy on Your unworthy servant. You did help me through the tension. It was temporary. It was momentary and now I see the fulfillment of the promises here on this end." Beloved, if you can relate to anything at all about what I'm talking about there, you owe it to God to thank him for the present blessings that you are enjoying or are about to enjoy when in the past you questioned whether he was even being faithful to you or not. Being on the other side of it now should motivate you all the more to praise and honor and thank him for his goodness because what you are experiencing now on the other side of that affliction is you are experiencing in firsthand reality in your own life the fact that God was being faithful to you all along. Through the darkness, God knew what he was doing. God was loving you. God was being faithful. He was being good even when you thought that he had abandoned you. Now that you can see it, look up and thank him for the fact that he was so good to you all along.

I really need to stop talking but I'm not ready to stop talking yet. There's something else I want to say, okay? I remember long ago, it's from a teacher that I would no longer follow or pay any attention to, but he said something useful that's proven to be true that I think is

true to experience, true to Scripture, more importantly. He said the thing that you would most have God take away from you is the thing that you most want to keep because it is what he will use to bring you closer to himself. Your worst trial is ultimately going to be the stage upon which God displays his faithfulness all the more gloriously and in the darkest hour, God is preparing to show a greater light than you could ever dream, and our privilege and our responsibility is to trust him until we see the fulfillment of that and that trust can be as simple as, "Lord, remember me in the midst of it." Beloved, the lowly position that you experience is not permanent. While you wait, you do not despair because God has promised and Scripture assures us that he who believes in him will not be disappointed.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we sort through these tensions in our mind that we see in Scripture and in our own experience and we just see how weak and mortal we are but You are lofty, You are exalted above the heavens, You are good, You are faithful, and even when the affliction seems great, Father, You haven't forgotten Your promises and so we appeal to You to remember them in the midst of our times of affliction. Father, I pray that You would strengthen those who are in the midst of the affliction now, perhaps bodily affliction, perhaps marital affliction, perhaps other relational conflicts that just seem relentless and never to end. Father, would You strengthen, perfect, confirm, and establish the souls of Your servants that they might persevere and walk by faith in the midst of it all, and help them and show them, Father, Your faithfulness in Your time. Thank You for the trials which You have brought us out of. In the midst of our present trials, Father, we thank You for deliverance we are yet to see but is sure to come, and thank You for that ultimate deliverance when we are glorified in heaven, glorified around the throne of Christ, all affliction, all sin, all tears wiped away, and we will know nothing but the fullness of Your presence and joys forevermore. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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