

## Session 6 – Psalm 88: the depths of darkness

### Psalm 88

O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.

For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave.

I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength.

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.

You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.

Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. *Selah* You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.

Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? *Selah* Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction.

Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?

From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair.

Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me.

All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me.

You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend

Virtually all the lament psalms end on a positive note with hope or praise, but this psalm?

The ending is one of bleakness and desolation – ‘*darkness is my closest friend.*’ Definitely not one for the start of a Sunday service!!

We may struggle with such a psalm as it is so far removed from where we are ... firstly from our lived experience but also perhaps from a belief’s perspective, i.e. this could never happen to a Christian.

Every spiritual journey has its ups and downs. For some, the experience at its very lowest and deepest and longest has sometimes been described as the ‘*dark night of the soul.*’ It can perhaps be likened to the time when Jesus was on the cross, with darkness covering the land, and him crying out “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”

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We started off by looking at how the Psalms were an edited collection of five books and 150 psalms in total.

Clearly there would have been far more than 150 psalms ever written in Jewish history.

Within this collection, editors choose to include lament psalms, perhaps reflecting the last stage of editing probably during and after the Exile. Israel had been through so much difficulty and pain and was now so far from the heights experienced under Kings and Solomon. There were good reasons for lament as well as praise.

But here’s the question.

- **Why on earth include this particular psalm in the collection?**