

Monday, March 24, 2008

## **PSALM 88- THE WORD OF THE LORD?**

This Psalm describes a very depressed (bipolar?) man. It is the darkest and most sad of all the Psalms. O Lord, my God, my Savior, by day and night I cry to you. Let my prayer enter into your presence; incline your ear to my lamentation. I am full of trouble; my life is at the brink of the grave... I have become like one who has no strength; Lost among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave. ...in dark places and in the abyss. I am in prison and cannot get free. My sight has failed me because of trouble; Lord, I have called upon you daily; I have stretched out my hands to you. O Lord, I cry to you for help; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Lord, why ...? why ? ...I have been wretched and at the point of death; ... with a troubled mind....terrors have destroyed me; They surround me all day long like a flood; they encompass me on every side. ...and darkness is my only companion. A more careful look at this Psalm reveals the cause of this man's pain and depression. The Psalmist is not suffering for the reasons most men suffer. He believes God is making him suffer!

O Lord, my God, my Savior, by day and night I cry to you. Let my prayer enter into your presence; incline your ear to my lamentation. He believes in God, that God is his Savior, that God answers personal prayers. He is a man of continual prayer. He believes God works wonders, has shown loving kindness and is both faithful and righteous. These are positive things about this lamenting Psalmist that must be kept in our mind as we continue reading his complaint. He says I am full of trouble; my life is at the brink of the grave. And that, he believes, is God's fault. God is making his life miserable! You have laid me in the depths of the Pit, in dark places and in the abyss. Your anger weighs upon me heavily, and all your great waves [the troubles you send me] overwhelm me. You have put my friends far from me; you have made me to be abhorred by them; [now] darkness is my only companion. O Lord, ... Lord, why have you rejected me? why have you hidden your face from me? Why are you treating me this way? And not just now, but all of my life. Ever since my youth, I have been wretched and at the point of death; I have borne your terrors [the terrible things you have put me through] with a troubled mind. Your blazing anger has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me; They surround me all day long like a flood; they encompass me on every side. Ever since my youth! The Psalmist does not identify his troubles, just that he has them and they are from God and his prayers for God to help him go unheeded. He does not admit or repent of any sin. Does he feel miserable, on the point of dying, because of his troubles or because he feels God has abandoned him or is punishing him? The Psalmist is Heman (see the Title) and he probably is the man mentioned several times in 1 and 2 Chronicles as one of the leading Singers and Musicians serving the King. He was assisted in this Service by his many sons. Although lamenting at the time of this Psalm, the writer was married, had children and a presumably normal life serving in the Courts of the King, by making music for public Worship. Since he complains that he has struggled with all his trouble since his youth, his Depression must have been on and off because he was able to live a normal life and work- as a church musician no less! (Perhaps he was manic-depressive, as many creative people are) Millennia later, we are still served and blessed by his work (and the work of his fellow musicians- 1 Chronicles 6:31-37 see the 12 "Korahite Psalms- 42-49, 84-85, 87-88 ). These words of Psalm 88 are not inspired, out breathed, by God. They come from deep within a very troubled, despondent (mentally ill?) Believer and are addressed to God. But the entire Psalm, this man's prayer, comes back to us from God. The very human words have become God's Word to us. God has seen to it that they are included in the Bible for our benefit. God can use them to speak to our needs, especially if we are like the Psalmist. God uses these tormented human words to reveal thoughts (propositions) from His mind to us. How? Why is this Lament (and others like it) in Scripture? We are to be realists about life and its pain. Believers can suffer emotionally and mentally and physically for many years. There is not always a happy ending to our lives on earth. We are to persist anyway. Doubt and questioning God ("Why, Lord? Why?") are not, in themselves, sin. This Psalm is usually associated with Jesus and his emotions and prayer in Gethsemane and on the Cross. Believing in God and His provident goodness over a life-time is still possible and not a contradiction. Actually, such faith demonstrates that God is working in the struggling Believer's heart. He Himself makes it possible. Believing in prayer and being persistent in prayer in spite of no seeming answer to it is both good and possible. God promises that He does hear and will respond in His own time. ("Ask, Seek and Knock") This Psalmist's faith and prayer life is a testimony to that and a witness to us that we can do likewise, if we suffer as he is. God still can and does use a Believer although he is not perfect or healthy and who struggles with darkness and terrors within. There have been many such Believers through the ages. Actually some of the best or most effective. These very sufferings are the furrowed ground in which God plants his seed. Often saints who suffer are the most spiritual and the most usable instrument in God's Hand. In fact, brokenness seems to be a prerequisite for personal holiness and serious ministry. Put all this together and we may say, "The Word of the Lord"! Thanks be to God!

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 10:06