

Goldingay: *“It is extraordinary that this person keeps praying at all, and the psalm is an expression of extraordinary faith. ...as he sinks away, the dying person clings to God. That is the hidden miracle of this prayer song which is overshadowed by the darkness of death.”*

ii. Secondly this great hope is revealed in the rhetorical questions. (10-12)

Goldingay: *...even as rhetorical questions they might be open to a different answer; that is the nature of a question.... YHWH might answer yes even though the suppliant assumes the answer is no.*

### LIVE THE STORY

*The Gospel is intended to be learned and lived in community. The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.*

- Why is it important that hope not only be the ability to see light in the midst of darkness, but that there is truly a light to be seen?
- Is it okay to “protest” to God over suffering or injustice? Is it possible to do so and still have resilient hope? Explain.
- Why do you think that Asaph, in this psalm, is embittered toward God? Show your thoughts from the text.
- Have you ever thought that speaking this “straight” with God is okay in the midst of sorrow? Should we dare to pray as the psalmist do in these two psalms?
- Have you ever asked the questions of 77:7-9 in a time of suffering? What were you experiencing at the time(s)? Has that resolved? If so, how?
- Is Psalm 88, can you see evidence that the psalmist believed that God could raise the dead? If so, explain.
- How does the resurrection of Jesus vindicate God in regard to the suffering of the faithful?

## The Psalms and Hope

Jerry Cisar — April 10, 2016

Text: Psalm 77 & 88

### Introduction

Desmond Tutu: *“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”*

A. *Hope deferred makes the heart sick...* (Pro 13:12 NIV)

B. The Psalms show us how to pray in times of real despair with surprisingly honest, even risky, language.

*Psalms 77 & 88 present a hope that can hope in the midst of despair, a hope that endures the worst that life offers, not by sticking our head in the sand with naive optimism, nor by pretending that things are better than they seem.*

*Biblical hope is not the absence of despair, but the power to hope in the midst of despair.*

### I. Has God Changed? (Psalm 77)

A. Asaph is deep in despair.

Brueggemann: "...although the address is to God, in fact the psalmist is completely preoccupied with his own sorry state. That preoccupation with self is evident in the recurrence of the first-person pronouns: my trouble, I seek, my hand, my soul, I think, I moan, I meditate, my spirit. Although the prayer is addressed to God, the self remains the center of attention."

B. Asaph considers the character of God.

C. The Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-13)

- i. The psalmist has recited from childhood the realities of what God's right hand does:
- ii. Yet his experience has been quite different.

CSB Psalm 77:10 *So I say, "I am grieved [or NAU: It is my grief] that the right hand of the Most High has changed."*

- iii. We don't have to come to God with resilient hope, we can come to him protesting our sufferings and He will give us resilient hope!

D. Vv 13-20 are the musings of the psalmist.

## II. When Darkness is My Closest Friend (Psalm 88)

A. Psalm 88 is the darkest of the laments.

Allender and Longman, in *The Cry of the Soul*: "*The composer's agonizing scream can be heard from beginning to end, because his pain has lasted from his youth until now... The final line... indicates that the psalmist is on the edge of emotional obliteration. Friends have abandoned him, and he blames God for this... He feels completely isolated, set apart from others. He is overwhelmed with troubles, likening his life to standing up to his neck in water as the waves roll over him, making it impossible for him to catch his breath... Most horrifying of all, as he approaches the grave he feels utterly abandoned by God — not just ignored by Him, but rejected.*"

B. The Psalmist was not consumed with trying to justify God.

- i. The Bible is interested, if not *taken up with*, the justification of God, the vindication of God in light of the evil in the world, but not by blaming other characters.
- ii. God's *justification*, or *vindication* in the face of all suffering, and unanswered prayers; in the face of injustices, in the face of all who have followed Him by faith but were left to die and not be delivered.

iii. Hebrews 11:36-39

C. Two things in this psalm point to the ultimate and sure basis of all hope.

- i. First this hope is manifest in the Psalmist's refusal to quit praying to God despite its evident ineffectiveness.