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TPG – Psalms

9/24/2025

“God’s Silence in Your Suffering” – Psalm 88 Manuscript

Sermon Legend:

- 1) **Exposition**
- 2) **Application**
- 3) **Illustration**
- 4) **Introduction/Conclusion/Thread**
- 5) **Scripture Text(s) and Notes**
- 6) **Quotations from secondary sources**

Intro:

1. I want to start my sermon with a story about C. S. Lewis. For those of you who don’t know, Lewis is a well-known Christian author and apologist. He’s written dozens of books on Christianity. In 1940, C. S. Lewis wrote the book *The Problem of Pain* tackling “How can God be good when there is so much suffering in this world?” He wrote it as an intellectual defense of the Christian faith. But he was terrified of writing it, so terrified that he actually wanted to publish it anonymously. When his publisher didn’t let him, he wrote an entire preface to the book explaining that he couldn’t live up to his own standards. He was afraid of being a hypocrite. He boldly defended the goodness of God in a world of suffering, but would he believe his own words when he faced a trial of his own?
2. Twenty years later, that question seized Lewis. The problem of pain hit him like a freight train. In 1961, Lewis wrote another book, *A Grief Observed*, this time under a pseudonym. It’s a collection of journal entries he wrote after he lost his wife to cancer. Lewis married his wife Joy when she had bone cancer, knowing that their marriage would probably be cut short by the disease.
3. His stepson writes in the introduction, “*This book is a man emotionally naked in his own Gethsemane. It tells of the agony and the emptiness of a grief such as few of us have to bear; for the greater the love the greater the grief, and the stronger the faith the more savagely will Satan storm its fortress.*”¹ His wife Joy became his greatest joy in the world, only to be taken from him a few short years after they married.
4. The emotions, the doubts, the pain he expresses are so raw and unfiltered. I could feel his grief as I read it, a man who had lost the love of his life. It seemed like the greatest grief for Lewis came from experiencing God’s silence in his darkest hour, and even worse, wondering if God was actually cruel, careless, or incapable of saving him.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), xxvi.

5. Why does God seem to be silent when we need Him most? That's what I'd like to explore tonight. The title of my sermon is "God's Silence in Your Suffering."

Overview of The Psalms

6. As a refresher, we have been going through the book of Psalms the past three weeks. Tony introduced us to the book of Psalms and preached on Psalm 1. The Psalms were Israel's hymnbook, and they teach us how to draw near to God in all sorts of circumstances—in times of joy, lament, despair, fear, and triumph. The Psalms are all about experiencing God.² If I could use an analogy, the book of Psalms is like walking into the temple of God.³ We enter through the two doors of chapters 1 and 2, chapter 1 describing the righteous man who delights in God's Torah and chapter 2 prophesying the reign of God's Anointed Son. As we continue our journey through this glorious sanctuary, we learn who God is from the stories of Scripture and what He's done for His people.
7. There are five different "rooms" within the Psalms so-to-speak, five books. Rather than a random collection of songs, each book has a theme that builds upon the overall story of the book of Psalms. Books I & II focus on the life of David.⁴ We see the history of 1 & 2 Samuel presented throughout the first two books of the Psalms.
8. Book III transitions from the life of David to the history of the kings of Israel up until Israel's exile. It opens with Psalm 73, a wisdom Psalm that can be representative of King Solomon, closes with Psalm 89, a royal Psalm of lament wondering if God has given up on his covenant with David because of Israel's sin (cf. Ps. 89:49-41).⁵ As one commentator puts it, *"Where David maintained covenant faithfulness in books I–II, here his descendants utterly flounder... The poetic arc for the salvific history of God's people falls to its lowest point. Nevertheless, the opening wisdom [in Psalm 73] reminds us that 'God is indeed good to Israel' (73:1). Where human institutions fail, God, the King of all human sovereigns, will never fail."*⁶
9. Psalm 88 in Book III: This sets the scene of our passage tonight. I'd like to share 4 points that Psalm 88 teaches us about the Lord and suffering. Go ahead and write this down as your first point: **1) God wants us to cry out to Him when we're suffering.**

² Jim Hamilton describes the majesty of the Psalms well: "Does any literature in the world compare with the book of Psalms? The Greeks have Homer, the Romans Virgil, the Italians Dante, and the British Shakespeare. But nothing sings like the Psalms. As Ronald B. Allen has written, 'Only a Philistine could fail to love the Psalms.' No other body of poetry lyricizes the epic deeds of the living God, celebrating the past, signifying the future, interpreting the present, making God known... We love the Psalms because in them we encounter God and as Scott Hafemann affirms, 'knowing God is not a means to something else.'" James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, vol. 1, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 1.

³ I'm indebted to the Bible Project's videos and resources describing the metanarrative and features of Psalms.

⁴ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, vol. 1, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 7. Hamilton provides the following evidence for this point: 1) 55 of 72 of these Psalms are attributed to David; 2) the historical superscriptions line up with the narrative of David's life; and 3) there is a statement that David's prayers are ended in Psalm 72:20.

⁵ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, vol. 1, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 9.

⁶ Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: Old Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Ps 73:1–89:52.

10. Laments: First, this is a lament psalm, which Adam discussed a couple weeks ago. Laments are powerful prayers of desperation, crying out to God in the midst of suffering, confusion, and despair. Even though the Hebrew title of Psalms is literally “Praise Songs,” laments are the most common type of Psalm in the Psalter. Nearly 50 of the 150 Psalms are laments.⁷
11. But are praising and lamenting opposite? No! Laments are teaching tools that show us how to praise God when our pain is overwhelming.
12. I want to emphasize this because I think the church has been infected by our culture. Lamenting is completely foreign to us. Our culture doesn’t show us how to mourn. It teaches us that pain should be avoided. If we feel bad, we should distract ourselves with entertainment or pleasure. It tells us that we can’t be vulnerable. You can’t cry at work, you can’t cry at school, you certainly can’t cry online. Everyone on Instagram looks like they have their life put together. All the highlights and good times. How often do you see people posting pictures of themselves crying, pictures of deep emptiness or depression? Would you ever post a picture of yourself like that? Would you tell people how you actually feel?
13. That type of culture has become part of many churches. Laments are the most common type of song in Israel’s playlist, but when’s the last time you heard a song of lament in church? I’ve talked to a lot friends who don’t like going to church because it feels fake and cheap. In many churches, there’s this “fake it till you make it” type of culture, the expectation to put on a smile, be nice, and not tell people how you’re actually doing. I’ve been guilty of that.
14. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We can be real with our pain. We can rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. We can be a church that is “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” like Paul says in 2 Cor. 6:10.
15. Psalm 88 teaches us the power of lamenting. It is an invitation for us to be honest about our pain. Lamenting brings healing, hope, and restoration when it is directed toward our God.
16. And Psalm 88 isn’t just a lament; it is the lament of laments. It is a desperate cry for mercy. This is the saddest psalm in the entire Bible. Normally, at some point in a lament, there is a turn of hope. Usually in a lament, the psalmist cries and mourns but eventually concludes, “I will trust in the Lord my God!” But not Psalm 88. There is no turn, no hope, no sign that God will deliver Heman from his misery. Heman, the author of this Psalm, was one of the chief worship leaders appointed by King David to serve in the temple (cf. Chronicles 25:1-6).^{8,9} He was a godly and wise worship leader for Israel. I’m not sure what happened to him to write this Psalm, but the Lord preserved this to teach us something about worship.

⁷ J. Day, *Psalms* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 19.

⁸ James Hastings et al., *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909), 342.

⁹ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, vol. 2, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 125.

17. So why does Scripture give us something so depressing and hopeless? Charles Spurgeon writes, *“Because some poor hearts among us are heavy. We cannot tell how many sorrowing and burdened spirits there may be, but a dozen or two may be driven almost to despair. They need to know that somebody else has been just where they are.”*¹⁰ And that’s exactly what this Psalm does for weary Christians.

88:1-2 - Let’s read verses 1-2:

- ¹ O LORD, God of my salvation,
I cry out day and night before you.
- ² Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry!

18. Heman is crying out to God day and night. He recognizes that the Lord is his salvation. He isn’t turning to idols or anything else for comfort. He’s crying out to His Savior, and he is begging God to listen to him.

88:3-7

- ³ For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
- ⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am a man who has no strength,
- ⁵ like one set loose among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
- ⁶ You have put me in the depths of the pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
- ⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. *Selah*

19. At the end of verse 7, we come to a “selah.” This word invites us to pause, to reflect on what has just been said.

20. Heman is experiencing the worst possible anguish you can think of. He feels like he’s going to die, like he’s falling into Sheol, the underworld of the dead. Look at all the words Heman uses: full of troubles, Sheol, the pit, no strength, the dead, the grave, remembered no more, cut off, depths of the pit, regions dark and deep, God’s wrath, His overwhelming waves. Heman is drowning in the darkness of despair. It’s like he’s set out at sea and surrounded by the most violent storm in pitch black darkness.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, [*The Spurgeon Study Bible: Notes*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 765.

21. And who caused all this? Let's look. Heman says in verses 6-8, "**You** have put me in the depths of the pit; **Your** wrath lies heavy upon me; **you** overwhelm me with all **your** waves; **you** have caused my companions to shun me."
22. That brings us to our second point: **God brings suffering to those He loves.**
23. Is that surprising to you that the Lord is source of Heman's suffering? Perhaps Heman was mistaken. Surely Satan was the one who caused all this suffering in his life, right? That's not what the passage says.
24. God intentionally inflicts pain on His people. Under the Old Covenant, the Lord promised to bless Israel for obedience and punish for disobedience. Deuteronomy 28 has over fifty verses detailing all the covenant curses for rebelling against the Lord and worshiping other gods. It says **the Lord** is the one who promised to bring disease, famine, poverty, and destruction upon Israel.
25. Israel's faithlessness is often the context of these laments and complaints in the Psalms, especially in Book III. "O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?" (Psalm 74:1). "How long O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire?" (Psalm 79:5). And this one: "O Lord God of Hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure" (Psalm 80:4-5).
26. Sometimes the Lord brings judgment upon His people for their sin. We saw that last week in Psalm 51, when the Lord judged David for committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah (cf. 2 Sam. 12:10, 15).
27. But please hear this. Not all affliction from God is punishment for our sin. That's what we learn from the story of Job. He was a righteous man, and yet he faced horrible suffering.
28. **Pruning:** In fact, as Christians under the New Covenant, suffering has an entirely new purpose. Sometimes God allows the worst possible tragedies to happen to some of his most faithful followers. Why? Jesus said in John 15, "I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that does not bear fruit he takes away, but every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it will be more fruitful."¹¹ Pruning is the cutting away of dead branches to increase fruitfulness. It is the intentional inflicting of a wound so that a plant may achieve maximum growth. **This is how God cares for us. Our loving Father knows exactly what His children need to grow. He loves us through the suffering, and He redeems our suffering for our good and His glory. We are sinful, selfish creatures, and like a master gardener who knows how to create the most bountiful harvest, He prunes us with trials and pains that remove all the dead and unfruitful parts of our character. If we never experienced suffering, we'd be such shallow creatures, unable to lift our eyes to those hurting around us. God brings trials in your life because He loves you and wants to transform you from a selfish sinner into a sanctified servant.**

¹¹ For a great sermon on John 15:2, see this article from the Spurgeon Center: [The Spurgeon Library | God's Pruning and the Branches](#).

29. I say all of this as one who on the one hand has experienced the amazing power and love of God's suffering and on the other as a spiritual lightweight. I totally get C.S. Lewis. Am I going to practice what I preach when the pain gets real? I want to be faithful so badly. I want to be like Paul. He gave up everything to follow Jesus! He suffered so much. He was hated, persecuted, beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, even stoned to death! And yet he kept persevering and giving himself for God. And this is the path that our Lord commands us to walk, the path of the cross. Whoever wants to be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
30. I want to follow Jesus. I want to be sold out and surrendered no matter what. But sometimes I wonder how much pain I could truly withstand. My mind often goes to the most extreme cases. I think about the stories of Christians in North Korea who are hunted down and starved to death in prison camps, or the Christians in Iran who have lost their homes, families, and everything because of following Jesus. If I was kidnapped and tortured for Christ, would I remain faithful? I feel so terrified, and I know how sinful and weak I am.
31. Corrie Ten Boom: One of my favorite stories about enduring suffering comes from Corrie Ten Boom. Her story is so inspiring. She hid Jews in her home during the Holocaust but was eventually caught and taken to Hitler's concentration camps. She survived and wrote about her experience in the book *The Hiding Place*. Years before she was imprisoned, when she was a little girl, she terrified of death and losing her family. She ran to her father in tears crying, "Don't die! I need you!"
32. Her dad gave her this illustration. He told her, "Corrie, when you and I go to Amsterdam—when do I give you your ticket?" After sobbing and thinking for a bit, she said, "Why, just before we get on the train."¹² And that's the same with our heavenly Father. God will give us exactly what we need when we need it. As Peter writes in his epistle, "Rejoice insofar you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, *because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*" (1 Peter. 4:13-14). God promises to be with us in our trials. We will actually have a special portion of His presence when we suffer for the name of Christ! Take heart in that. [Pause]
33. But right now, Heman can't see that.

88:8-9 – Heman continues his prayer in verses 8 & 9:

- 8 You have caused my companions to shun me;
 you have made me a horror to them.
 I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
9 my eye grows dim through sorrow.
 Every day I call upon you, O LORD;

¹² Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, 35th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), 44.

I spread out my hands to you.

34. Heman is still drowning in the middle of a storm. He is in the middle of a firefight. The bombs are going off, and the bullets are flying, and there is no hope of surviving. This is his Garden of Gethsemane moment. Everyone has abandoned him. He's like a leper that has been banished from society. And he's about to faint from exhaustion from crying out to God for so long.
35. And I think there is a valuable lesson for us to learn when it comes to counseling our friends who are suffering. Everything I've said about the Lord is true. He prunes us, He uses suffering for our good and his glory, and that will give us a powerful hope. But sometimes, we have to discern when to speak and when to listen, when to encourage and when to mourn. Sometimes, people don't need a sermon. Sometimes they just need a shoulder to cry on, a friend to feel their pain.
36. Remember C.S. Lewis? He was an intellectual giant for Christianity. He knew all the truth of God's Word and could masterfully articulate why God is good and loving in a world of pain. And yet, here's what he wrote after losing his wife in *A Grief Observed*, "Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence... The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become."¹³
37. Lewis wrote all the arguments for trusting in God, and yet arguments weren't going to "fix" Lewis. Trauma inflicts great damage to the soul, and facts, logic, and information can't just take someone out of deep darkness, someone experiencing grief. Tim Challies' talks about grief in his book *Seasons of Sorrow*. He's a pastor and writer in Canada who lost his 20 year old son several years ago. His son was studying in seminary to become a pastor and engaged to fiancée. They were playing a game at school when all of sudden he fell to the ground unconscious, never to wake up again. He got the phone call that every parent dreads.
38. Challies writes, "Though my eyes may have remained clear, my mind has not. My heart has not. Everything is muffled and distorted. Things that should be easy are difficult. My memory is full of holes. I've lost the ability to make decisions. I'm lost, I'm confused, I'm discombobulated, I'm weary." It's fascinating comparing Challies' experience with what Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*. They're so similar. They write about the shock, this disbelief that their loved one actually died, then the darkness that overcame them, this deep depression and weight, the exhaustion and forgetfulness, the anger and questioning toward God, and finally the deafening silence of God.

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 5-6.

39. This is what Heman is experiencing right now. In the very center of our passage, Heman says in verse 9, “Every day I call upon you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you.”

40. And how does God respond? [Pause] ...Silence...

41. In his song “The Silence of God,” Andrew Peterson describes God’s silence this way:

*It's enough to drive a man crazy, it'll break a man's faith
It's enough to make him wonder if he's ever been sane
When he's bleating for comfort from Thy staff and Thy rod
And the heaven's only answer is the silence of God*

42. Why is God silent in our suffering? Hear and believe this church. Go ahead and write this down for your third point. **God uses silence in our suffering to drive us to prayer.**

43. The Silence of God is deafening. It’s crushing. But the Lord often uses it to draw us closer to Him. I’ve found that when life is comfortable, we become content. We are so easily satisfied with the fleeting things of this world. We begin to think that we don’t really need God. The lie of self-reliance begins to take over. We slowly become spiritually lazy, blind, and deceived, and the Lord often has to give us a wake-up call.

44. When I’m facing suffering and trials, they force me to cry out to Jesus. God brings these trials to draw our fickle hearts near to Him, hearts that are so prone to wonder away from Him. This is the secret blessing of the beatitudes from Jesus: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Suffering forces us to turn our eyes upward. It reminds us that this world is not our home, we’re just passing through, waiting for the day, when the old becomes new. Suffering reorients our priorities upward to God.

45. And that’s exactly how Heman responds. He says in verses 10-12,

88:10-12

- ¹⁰ Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the departed rise up to praise you? *Selah*
¹¹ Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
¹² Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

46. Heman is asking these questions with the right motivation. He wants to live for God’s glory, and he can only do that if he’s alive. He’s basically saying, “How can I continue living for your glory if I’m dead, Lord?”¹⁴

47. When I was reading this passage, I couldn’t help but ask, “What did people in the Old Testament believe happened after death? Did they believe in heaven, hell, or a resurrection?”

¹⁴ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, vol. 2, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 129.

48. There is a concept called “Progressive Revelation” in Scripture, the idea that God reveals truth in a gradual and progressive way over time and history. We see shadows and types in the Old Testament and the fuller, more complete picture in the New Testament. This applies to the afterlife.
49. At times the Old Testament seems to offer a bleak picture of Sheol, the underworld of the dead. Job describes Sheol as “the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness” (Job 10:21). Ecclesiastes describes it as a place where “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom” (9:10). And here in our text, Heman paints a similar picture of death—a pit of deep darkness where people are forgotten and cut off from praising God.
50. And yet, it is a place where God is not absent. David says in Psalm 139:8, “If I ascend to heaven you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!”¹⁵ God is everywhere, even in the land of the dead. The word **Abaddon** (אֲבַדּוֹן, *avaddon*, Ἀβαδδών, *Abaddōn*) in verse 11 is synonymous with Sheol and in Hebrew literally means “perishing” or “destruction.”¹⁶ It was the mysterious place of the dead that only God understands (Job 26:6), part of the curse of the fall.
51. The Old Testament reveals that it is the place where *everyone* goes after death, both the righteous and the wicked. One of the strongest and most vivid examples was when Saul consulted a necromancer to summon the spirit of Samuel from the dead (1 Samuel 28:11). King Saul was fighting against the Philistines. God had abandoned him, and he was terrified of being destroyed by them. So, in a moment of panic, he sought a necromancer to help him figure out what to do. This was forbidden by Mosaic Law by the way. The necromancer summoned the spirit of Samuel who prophesied against Saul. Even though Samuel was living in an entirely different realm, he was alive in some sense and somehow familiar with events in the world.¹⁷
52. But over time, the Old Testament progressively reveals evidence for life beyond the grave. Job confesses “For I know that my Redeemer lives, ... and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God” (19:25, 26). King David proclaims in Psalm 16:10, “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” Isaiah and Daniel both prophesy of a resurrection, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting judgment (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). So even in the Old Testament, there is hope for something beyond Sheol, the promise of God’s final redemption and judgment after death.
53. The afterlife becomes much clearer in the New Testament. Heaven is the place Jesus has prepared for all who trust in Him (John 14:1-3), the place where we will dwell with our Savior and Redeemer, the better country we are waiting for (Heb. 11:16). As Paul describes, we as Christians await a heavenly dwelling place with God. “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:9). Paul told the Philippians that

¹⁵ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Sheol” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1948.

¹⁶ John D. Barry et al., eds., “Abaddon” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Sheol” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1948.

he was torn between living in dying because he knew death meant being with Christ, which was far better than being in this fallen world (Phil. 1:23-24). “To live is Christ, and to die is gain!”

54. Hell is a place of torment and eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46), a prison for everyone who rejects God. Before the final judgment, Revelation says the wicked will be thrown into the lake of fire reserved for the devil and all his demons (Rev. 20:10-15). Heaven and hell are the two options for every person.
55. If you're in this room today, and you don't know Jesus Christ, you are far more hopeless than Heman. When Heman asks, “Do the departed rise up to praise you?”, the answer for the unbeliever is no. And not only no, but everyone who is not in Christ will rise at the final judgment, not to praise God, but to face His just punishment of eternity in hell. This is what the New Testament teaches. I'm just the messenger.

88:13-18

56. We'll come back to this soon, but for now, go ahead and write this down as our last point:
“**God entered our suffering at the cross.**”
57. As I read this last section of this Psalm, listen to the suffering of Heman.

13 But I, O Lord, cry to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
14 O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?
Why do you hide your face from me?
15 Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.
16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your dreadful assaults destroy me.
17 They surround me like a flood all day long;
they close in on me together.
18 You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
my companions have become darkness.

58. Heman continues crying out in agony to his only Savior. His prayer intensifies. The fear of death, the pain of his suffering, and the silence of God are unbearable. He is drowning in despair. “Where are you, God? Why have you abandoned me? I'm going to die! I know all things are possible for you, God! Why have you allowed me to go through this?”
59. And the Lord's response? ...*Silence, yet again*... that deafening, horrifying sound of silence.

[Pause, breathe]

60. When we read this Psalm, how can we not think of Jesus? When Heman says that He is crying out day and night to the Lord, how can we not think of Jesus crying out in agony

to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane? Jesus preparing himself for His ultimate destiny, entering the winepress of God's wrath before spilling his blood at Golgotha. Mark says he fell to the ground wracked with grief. "My soul is sorrowful, *even unto death*," he said (Mark 14:34). He began to pray, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). This scene of Jesus in Gethsemane, crying out to the Father in ever-increasing agony and earnestness in prayer, an agony so intense that blood begins to pour out in his sweat.¹⁸ Imagine what Jesus must have been praying. Probably something similar to what Heman prayed in Psalm 88.

61. Listen to Heman's words, and think of Christ. "You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness." Jesus' closest friends abandoning Him in his darkest hour. "Afflicted and close to death from my youth up." Jesus being born knowing that He would die, like a lamb led to the slaughter. And when Heman prays, "Why do you hide your face from me?," how can we not think of Jesus' prayer to the Father as he hung on that cursed cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"
62. And finally, the most significant one of all in verse 16: "Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me." While Heman experienced something of the wrath of God, he did not experience the true wrath of God. Unlike Heman, Jesus experienced the most dreadful assault of God—the just judgment of a holy, perfect God poured out in full measure upon Jesus as payment for our sin. Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath and poured out his soul like a drink offering at the cross. He stood in our place, taking the dreadful assaults of God that we deserved so that we might be saved from the ultimate dread of an eternity in hell.
63. If you haven't trusted in Christ, He is not far off. He will not be silent if you cry out to Him. The Bible says, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!" He came to save the world, and He will hear your prayer. Jesus loves sinners, and He loves the suffering.
64. And if you are a follower of Christ, take heart. When the pain is real and God seems silent, remember that God loves you with an everlasting love. Know that because Jesus suffered, He is able to help those who are suffering.
65. I'll close with this final stanza from Andrew Peterson's song. When we're facing the silence of God, remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane:

And He's kneeling in the garden, as silent as a Stone
All His friends are sleeping and He's weeping all alone

And the man of all sorrows, He never forgot
What sorrow is carried by the hearts that He bought

¹⁸ Marvin Richardson Vincent, [*Word Studies in the New Testament*](#), vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 425.

So when the questions dissolve into the silence of God
The aching may remain but the breaking does not
In the holy, lonesome echo of the silence of God

Let's pray.