

# “Praying in the Dark”

The Six Psalms, Part 4

Psalm 88

Brandon James McCulloch

Calvary Chapel Twin Peaks

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# I. Black Holes

The depths of the human heart can be like a black hole.

[Black holes are] huge concentrations of matter packed into very tiny spaces. A black hole is so dense that gravity just beneath its surface, the event horizon, is strong enough that nothing—not even light—can escape.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the gravity is so strong that not even light has enough energy to escape it.<sup>2</sup>

Our hearts have similar spaces: through sin, Death has invaded our entire lives and creation.

## II. Psalm 88: The Darkest Psalm

Psalm 88 is the darkest Psalm. Psalms of lament end with praise.

- *Psalm 3*. “How many are my foes, O Lord; how many are rising up against me.... Salvation belongs to the Lord.”
- *Psalm 6*. “O Lord, rebuke me not in Your anger; reprove me not in Your rage.... The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will receive my prayer.”
- *Psalm 13*. “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? ... I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful with me.”

Psalm 88 is the only exception.

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<sup>1</sup> NASA, “Black Hole Basics,” NASA, accessed March 10, 2024, <https://science.nasa.gov/universe/black-holes/>.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, “Black Hole,” Wikipedia, accessed March 10, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_hole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hole).

- v. 1. “O Lord and God of my salvation; I cry before You day and night.”
- v. 18. “Friend and neighbor You have taken away: my one companion is darkness.”

Questions:

- Have you ever been so lost or in such pain that nobody understands you?
- Have you ever been in a place where the only fellowship you share is darkness?
- Does darkness really have the last word?

Psalm 88 invites us into the depths of darkness.

- Death permeates this Psalm: sheol (v. 3), pit (v. 4), grave (v. 5), perdition (v. 11), dark (v. 12), and oblivion (v. 12).
- The greatest horror of death: no remembrance of God (vv. 5, 10–12).

Why follow Psalm 88 into this black hole where not even light can shine?

- Because Death, corruption, and the Fall have tainted every part of our lives.
- We distract ourselves from darkness with food, friends, fun, and future plans.
- But we have a guide.

### III. Deliverance from Death

**Death is the black hole no light can escape. But Christ entered the darkness of death and overpowered it with His light and life.**

*Psalm 88:5.* Like one roaming [Heb. = set free] among the dead.

*Henry Patrick Reardon.* Reaching to seize Jesus in the moment of His final breath, death found itself, instead, cast down and trampled by the rush of His abundant life crashing into that realm where the grave, hitherto undisputed, had so long held sway.<sup>3</sup>

*St. Maximus the Confessor.* In this way, by enticing the insatiable serpent with the bait of the flesh, He provoked him to open his mouth and swallow it. This flesh proved poison to him, destroying him utterly by the power of the Divinity within it; but to human nature it proved a remedy restoring it to its original grace by that same power of the Divinity within it. For just as the devil poured out his venom of sin on the tree of knowledge and corrupted human nature once it had tasted it, so when he wished to devour the flesh of the Master he was himself destroyed by the power of the Divinity within it.<sup>4</sup>

*Hebrews 2:14–15.* Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Psalm 88 may have been the experience of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>5</sup>

- Fear of Death leads us into sin.
- Christ chose obedience and broke the power of Death.
- We pray Psalm 88 with Christ: entering with Him into His death that we may rise with Him in His life.

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Patrick Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, revised (Chesterton, IN: Conciliar Press, 2011), 174. Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> Maximus the Confessor. “Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice.” *The Philokalia*. Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 88 is the appointed evening Psalm for Good Friday in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662. Calvary Chapel Twin Peaks’ Easter Vigil prays Psalm 88 just before the harrowing of Hades procession.

**Praying Psalm 88 guides us to the depth of our heart that we might know the depth of Christ's love.**

Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us; for You are good and You love mankind. Amen.