

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH (UCC)
Sunday Morning Worship – September 11, 2022
Sermon Title: “Will God Save Me?”
Scripture Text: Psalm 88
Guest Pastor: Rev. Dr. James Kwong

Psalm 88 (NIV)

- ¹ **LORD, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.**
- ² **May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.**
- ³ **I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.**
- ⁴ **I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like one without strength.**
- ⁵ **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.**
- ⁶ **You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.**
- ⁷ **Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.^[c]**
- ⁸ **You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;**
- ⁹ **my eyes are dim with grief.
I call to you, LORD, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.**
- ¹⁰ **Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?**
- ¹¹ **Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction^[c]?**
- ¹² **Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?**
- ¹³ **But I cry to you for help, LORD;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.**
- ¹⁴ **Why, LORD, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?**
- ¹⁵ **From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.**
- ¹⁶ **Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.**
- ¹⁷ **All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.**

**¹⁸You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.**

MESSAGE:

Good morning! It is a privilege to deliver God's Word to you today. I'm so glad that you have been blessed with so many great speakers who have been able to encourage you from God's Word. We are praying for the right person to lead Kailua Christian Church. Today's message is from Psalm 88 which addresses what it is like to wait for what seems like an eternity for God to answer prayer.

What is the longest you have ever had to wait for something? For me, it was probably the time spent waiting for marriage. I knew I wanted to be married as a teenager, but I knew it would be a wait. Even when I was 17 years old, I thought 25 would be a good age to be married. "That's eight years!" When I met Aya, we were just in high school. In college, we were interested in each other, but I wanted to wait until I was ready to get married before starting the relationship. That wait took three and a half years. It wasn't easy, but it was worth the wait. Sometimes being plagued with health problems can make one despair. When you can't see the end in sight, you start to lose some hope. We ask, "Where is God?" Maybe, He hasn't shown up yet, or the answer to the prayers has been "No" or "Not yet." The psalmist addresses this in today's text.

When it seems like God isn't answering our prayers, we must continue to cry out to God for his help, his comfort, and his salvation. Another way of saying this is, "Stay faithful to God in the midst of long-term struggles!" Take a look at vs. 1-9. The psalmist is crying out to God by day and by night, in verse 1. His soul has been overwhelmed with troubles, in verse 3, and he feels "close to death." Verse 6 describes placement among the "dark places" which Tate equates, in the Word Biblical Commentary, to being released into a graveyard to live with the dead or the near dead (402). The reference to the pit describes being isolated from the normal community while God's wrath and judgment are nearby. Again, the psalmist has been crying out to God every day, from verse 9. Tate suggests that the weakening of the eye here refers more to the loss of enduring strength or ability to persevere more than it does to actual loss of sight (402). These trials are having a direct effect on the psalmist's body. Have you ever been so stressed out that it affects your body? You feel neck or back pain in a way that is not normal, or you develop migraines or the inability to even physically function. Some people experience vertigo or they feel paralyzed due to the emotional stress they are under. This psalm presents an especially bleak picture as there are no expressions of trusting God and no declarations of praise. The psalmist feels as though there is no hope. He feels it in his bones.

In verses 10-12, the psalmist asks a series of rhetorical questions asking if God will act to save him before it is too late. Indeed, the language makes it seem as if the psalmist is near death. It's almost as if he is saying, "God, hurry and save me because if I'm dead, it'll be too late." Abaddon is the term used to describe the place where the

dead go. In Revelation 9:11, Abaddon is also the name of the angel of the bottomless pit.

Verses 13-18 continue the appeal to God for help, but now the psalmist asks why God has not yet answered. The psalmist expresses feelings of abandonment. But just because he feels like God has abandoned him does not mean that God has actually abandoned him. But the psalmist cannot help but to express the feelings. If you have ever suffered a profound sense of loneliness or spiritual distress or attack, then you know exactly how the psalmist feels. Verse 9 and 13 create a *bracketing inclusio* or “bookend” for the middle section. This highlights the middle section as the central idea of the passage. Verse 9 tells the reader that the psalmist has called out to God every day. Verse 13 tells the reader that the psalmist has been crying out every morning. Is the psalmist’s trouble caused by God or allowed to happen by God? Why hasn’t God responded? Will he?! These are the questions that are central to the psalm and the main idea.

The main idea is that even though the psalmist cannot see hope on the horizon, he will persist in his faith and continue to cry out to the Lord in faith trusting in his provision. That is some awesome faith! To trust in God even though you can’t see any hope or reason for hope; to wonder if God is even there...but still continue trusting in God even though you don’t feel like it. This is what we must be able to do: trust God even when we don’t feel like it; trust God even if we don’t see any hope; trust God even if we feel God is doing this to us. It’s okay to tell God how you feel even when you are angry, frustrated, or impatient with God. He wants to hear it all from us. When we don’t even have the right words, God’s Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26-27). The end of the psalm is much like the first two sections: allusion to the darkness that surrounds the psalmist and feelings of dread caused by the impending wrath and judgment that seems to be growing nearer.

Here are some examples from the Bible: Mordecai tells Esther (in Esther 4:14) that God will deliver his people - even if she didn’t rise up to the occasion and she and her family was destroyed. The real question is, “Will you be a part of God’s deliverance?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told King Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel 3:17-18) that God would deliver them from the fiery furnace, but that **EVEN IF HE DID NOT DELIVER THEM**, they would still do what was right and refuse to bow down. Wow, what faith. They knew that they could be swept away and destroyed, but they would still do what was right. They faced what seemed like abandonment by their God but still stood up for what was right.

1 Peter 5:6-7 reminds us to cast all anxiety on Jesus who bears our burdens because He cares for us. Prayer is essential in the process of being lifted up or restored. James 5:8 reminds us that God will never leave us or forsake us *even if it might feel like it*. God always comes through on his promises. The 23rd Psalm reminds us that even in the midst of our enemies, God prepares a table for us to sustain us and provide for us. In the valley of the shadow of death, we should fear no evil because God is with us.

There are times when we will feel overwhelmed or crushed: when we lose a loved one, when we experience the disappointment of a failed dream, when we are sick for an extended amount of time, or when we are unjustifiably attacked in character or in person. In these times, we need to continue to wait upon God for healing, vindication, or satisfaction. When we feel overwhelmed or crushed, we must express ourselves to God and to others in a healthy and appropriate way. Babies and children (and adults) cry when they feel this way. There are appropriate times to cry: when we are hurt or when we experience loss. When our souls hurt, it's okay to say that we are not okay.

You might say, "What if my pain is too much?" Reach out to others for help. Talk to a pastor or a counselor. As Kailua Christian Church talks with pastoral candidates, ask him/her about his/her counseling experience and training. Make sure he/she has definite listening skills and is able to shepherd the flock well. Build a network of trusted Christian counselors/therapists for referral. Find a friend and be willing to open up. Take a chance and cross cultural boundaries; depend on others within this community. This is the definition of how strong community is: when the chips are down, can you trust one another to support you? Pray and ask God for strength and deliverance.

You might say, "What if I'm not experiencing these feelings at this time?" Look for others who might be going through a difficult time and sympathize (or empathize, if possible). Provide space and time for someone else to decompress all of these deep feelings. Offer comfort and a listening ear. Allow God to speak through you with reminders from Scripture. Remember, God wants us to remain faithful to Him during our present-day struggles.

When we suffer affliction, we don't have to suffer alone. When we cry out in anguish, there are people who can help us through our grief. Jesus reminds us from the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." and "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." James, chapter 4 reminds us to be patient. "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." Let's pray.