

God Hiding His Face

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Turn to Psalm 88. Psalm 88. The psalm is probably one of the most striking and impressive psalms of lament, mourning, and mourning.

! As far as I know, I might be wrong, but as far as I know, it is the only psalm that has no turning point. There are many psalms where it starts out sad, and there's a difficulty, a problem, an enemy. But somewhere along the line, the psalmist begins to see light, and then it ends in praise and in salvation. It ends in joy when it had begun in sorrow.

But Psalm 88, as far as I know, is the only psalm that doesn't have that particular pattern. So, just look at the very last verse. Psalm 88.

You see how this psalm ends. Verse 18. You've taken my companions and my loved ones from me. The darkness is my closest friend.

[1:19] Maybe you've seen a movie that fades to black, and that's what this psalm does. And it just leaves this gaping wound that the psalmist is waiting for God to fill.

So, he feels completely deserted, abandoned, and the psalm ends there. Well, I want to begin by reading this entire psalm.

And as I do, I want you to ask yourself, how could this be for my good? How could this be for my good? How could this situation of desertion, of God hiding his face, be for our good?

So, Psalm 88. Let's read the psalm in its entirety. O Lord, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you.

May my prayer come before you. Turn your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of trouble, and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit.

[2:27] I am like a man without strength. I am set apart from the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care.

You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me. You have overwhelmed me with all of your waves.

You have taken from me my closest friends, and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape. My eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, O Lord, every day. I spread out my hands to you. Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave?

Your faithfulness and destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness? Or are your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? But I cry to you for help, O Lord.

[3:27] In the morning, my prayer comes before you. Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me? From my youth, I have been afflicted and close to death.

I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. Your wrath has swept over me. Your terrors have destroyed me. All day long, they surround me like a flood.

They have completely engulfed me. You've taken my companions and loved ones from me. The darkness is my closest friend. Well, have you ever felt this way?

Some ways, this seems extreme. But have you ever felt deserted, abandoned, and you're powerless? He says, I'm a man without strength.

And God seems far away. Maybe not to this extent. Maybe to this extent. But we all know. We all know something of verse 14.

[4:30] Look at what verse 14 says again. Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me? So we've all known that feeling of desertion, of God hiding his face from us.

And so I asked, well, how can this be for our good? Romans 8.28 says that in all things. All things work together for good. But all things, including this experience, is for good.

It's for our good. God uses it for our good. And the question is, is how? And this morning, I want to just give you some truth to hang on.

To hang on to when it seems that God is far away. When you're in verse 14, where it seems that God is not hearing you. You're praying, and yet it feels like God is hiding his face from you.

If you want to read more about this, you can check out Thomas Watson's book, All Things for Good. This lesson is very much taken from a chapter in that book.

[5:38] And so today, I want to begin, this morning, I want to begin with some comfort. If this is your situation, if this is where you're at, I want to begin with just some comfort to give you.

And so we begin, and I want you to think of a ship. Think of Paul. And you remember, at the end of Acts, he's in that shipwreck.

And for 14 days, it says they didn't see the sun. And you're in that ship. Psalm 88, this is where you are. You're in the ship.

It's night. The stars are gone. And all you have is a little light that you can make a small light. And that's what these comforts are.

These comforts are not comforts that make the situation all go away. It doesn't make the situation all better. You wish you could see the sun, but you can't. You wish you could see the stars, but you can't.

[6:40] All you have is this little light. And that's what these comforts are. So, three, well, four comforts first.

Comfort number one, none but the godly are able to understand this desertion. None but the godly are capable of desertion.

Or to put it another way, only godly people experience this kind of desertion. Of wanting to see God's face. Of missing God's love.

Wicked men don't know what God's love means. They might have heard about it, but they have never experienced it. They don't know what it is to have it missing. So, they know what it is to miss health.

And they know what it is to miss friends. And they know what it is to have money taken from them. But they don't know what God's love and smile are about. And so, if you are experiencing this.

[7:40] If you have felt God's love. And even now, if it doesn't feel like it's there. Then you can take heart. Because you're in good company. Only the godly can experience this.

If you have felt the sun on your face. Then that means you are a child of God. And so, you would never complain about God leaving you.

If you had never enjoyed his smiles before. And so, if you're feeling deserted. This is a small comfort. A small bit of comfort. The wicked don't know what this is like.

The godly do. And so, you're in good company. Comfort number two. There can be a seed of grace. Where there's not a flower of joy. So, just because you're in this situation.

Doesn't mean there's no grace in your life. It doesn't mean like that God is. That you're not saved. That God is not really loving you. There can be this.

[8:38] There can be a seed of grace. Where there's no flower of joy. It's normal. It's healthy Christianity. For there to be joy in your life. For the grace of God to be warm and stirring up joy.

But there can be a seed of grace where there's no joy. There can be a seed in the ground when there's no tree yet growing out of it.

Or think of a fruit tree in the winter. There's still life in that tree. And someday it is going to produce fruit. But now it's the time of winter.

And so it's the same way with us. There's still secret reservoirs of grace. There's still things that God is doing in the dark places.

Where we can't feel and sense them. In Psalm 51. You remember that song. That psalm that David wrote. In his grief.

[9:34] And in his sadness. Over his sin with Bathsheba. In Psalm 51. David prayed. Don't take your Holy Spirit away from me. Augustine said.

We should notice. That he didn't pray. Lord give me your spirit. Because. David still had the spirit of God. So he still had God's spirit.

Even in the darkness. David's soul was in the dark. He was suffering for his sin. But even in that dark place. God's spirit. Was living within David. And so there can be these secret sources of grace.

There can be these hidden reservoirs of grace. Even in the endless midnight. Of this sadness. And this desertion. When the surface of your life is frozen.

And you're bearing very little fruit. And your spiritual strength is sap. Underneath. There can still be grace. God is working.

[10:34] Even though the joy is gone. And so we can take heart. Just because the winter has come. It doesn't mean there's no life. Under the ground. Comfort number three.

Desertions only last. For a short time. Desertions only last. For a short time. It can seem like a long time. I just said.

Endless midnights. It can seem like that. It can feel very much like. Day after day. It's the very much the same thing. And I cry out to God.

And he doesn't hear me. And I cry out to God. And it seems like he doesn't hear me. It can seem like that. It can seem like endless midnight. But we sing dark.

Dark has been the midnight. But day spring is at hand. Dawn is around the corner. And just listen to a few verses. Isaiah 54.8. In a surge of anger.

[11:30] I hid my face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness. I will have compassion on you. Says the Lord your Redeemer. So God is speaking to Israel.

And he. He's hid his face from them. Because of their sin. And judgment has come. But God doesn't want. Them to utterly despair. Of all hope.

Yes judgment has come. Yes he has hid his face. Because of their sin. But it's only for a moment. Mercy is coming. God is going to. Have mercy upon them.

And so. Low tide does happen. But low tide always turns. To high tide. So when the tide is out. People don't start building.

Permanent structures. Right next to the water. Why? Because. The water is coming back in. High tide is coming. And the tide will turn. It's not permanent. Isaiah 57.16.

[12:27] I will not accuse forever. Nor will I always be angry. For then the spirit of man. Would grow faint before me. God is aware of. The strength of our spirit. And he knows.

If he hides his face for too long. That spirit will faint. And go away. I was enraged by his sinful greed. And I punished him. And I hid my face in anger. Yet he kept on in his willful ways.

I have seen his ways. But I will heal him. I will guide him. And restore comfort to him. Creating praise on the lips. Of the mourners in Israel. So are you deserted?

Well the Lord will come again. Is he hiding his face from you? The Lord will come. And put comfort. Into your life. He will put praise on your lips. Desertions.

God hiding his face. Only lasts for a time. And comfort will come. For those who mourn. Because God is going to do it. He says he will.

[13:26] He says he will. Now here's comfort number four. And this is where we're going to spend. The remainder of our time. Comfort number four. Desertions do work for your good.

This experience of Psalm 88. The experience that David had in Psalm 51. This experience of God hiding his face. And it feels like your spiritual strength is gone.

Your grace is weak. It is working for your good. It's working for your good. It is obviously not a good in and of itself.

It's not good to feel this way. It's not good to have your grace dried up. But Romans 8.28 is true even for this situation. That even though God's smile may be gone.

Even when grace is dried up like this piece of pottery. Even in this time of desertion. God is working it for your good. He's doing good.

[14:29] And so this discipline. This sadness. Is for our good. The teacher in Ecclesiastes. Says it's better to go to a house of mourning.

Than to a house of feasting. And this very much is a place of mourning. But there's some good here. That God is doing us. There's some good that God is teaching us.

That we can't learn. When his face is smiling upon us. And when there's joy filling our lives. God is working it for our good. And the question is how?

How? And I'm not just saying this as an intellectual question. I'm saying this as a deep spiritual question. Because when you're here. You're crying out.

What good is this God? How could this be for my good? Well seven ways. Seven ways. That God uses these experiences for our good.

[15 : 32] How he works them together for our good. Number one. Desertion helps to cure love for the world.

Desertion helps to cure love for the world. And anything that will cure me of that is for my good. This passing world will soon be gone.

And yet. Too easily. I love it. I love it. And too often we hold the world.

Like it's a beautiful flower. That's going to last forever. And we love it. And we set our hearts upon it.

And it steals our heart away from God. We each fall into the trap of thinking.

That this world is our home. And so we set our minds on the things of this world. And the future that we're going to have in this world. And money.

[16 : 30] And our homes. And the world's glories. And the world's joys. And we love the world. We think this is where my life is. This is so good.

God. And that's a sickness. It's a disease. It's having bad eyesight.

It's not seeing things for what they are. And the way they really are. It's a sickness. It's a disease.

And God's cure is often to leave us then. To hide from us.

Hide his face from us. And so he puts the sun behind a cloud. He puts the sun behind the moon.

And in the middle of all of our glorious daytime. It turns dark. And in that darkness.

We see really the true value. And the worth of this world. And we see the glory of this world. For what it is. And we see that we have loved this world. And not God.

[17 : 30] And that sadness. That desertion. Leads us to repentance. Repentance. And that's good. It's painful. And yet it's good.

So after Samson's strength left him. You remember. Samson's strength has left him. His eyes are gouged out. And in that situation.

Do you think he cared too much for Delilah? Was his heart set on Delilah anymore? No. And when our spiritual strength is gone. And when our eyes are gouged out.

And the world goes dark. It helps us. It cures us of our love for this world. For our Delilah. And so that does us good. God is putting our hearts.

He's curing us of loves that aren't good. And he's putting our hearts on him. That's number one.

Number two. How does God use desertion for our good? It makes us prize God's face more than ever.

[18 : 33] It makes us prize God's favor and God's smile and God's love more than ever. We want to experience that felt love. Especially after we've lost that feeling.

You remember Psalm 63. Your steadfast love is better than what? Life.

It's better than life. But too often we take it for granted. Don't we? You remember how amazingly wealthy Solomon was.

And he was so wealthy. His wealth overflowed into the streets of Jerusalem. Everyone who was even remotely attached to Solomon grew wealthy because he was so prosperous.

In 1 Kings it says, He made silver as common as stone. Silver was like stone. Now.

[19 : 34] Let's talk about supply and demand. What happened to the value of silver in Solomon's day? Anyone know? It.

Right? Went right through the bottom of the floor. 1 Kings 10.21 says, Silver was not considered anything of value. Everyone had it.

And that's what happens to God's smile. And our appreciation for God's love and favor. With these sin prone hearts. We turn something that's very valuable.

And we forget just how valuable it is. And so what God does then. Is he hides his face. He hides that felt feeling. Of God loves me.

He hides that smile from us. And so we grow cold. And we lose that feeling of God's love. But winter makes us prize spring. Doesn't it?

[20 : 32] Come February. Every one of us is looking forward to the spring. And the same thing. When God.

It feels like God is gone. Then we want him. We long for him again. And so these desertions do us good. It's hard. It's painful.

But God is working it for our good. He uses it to make us love him all the more. To prize him all the more. To see how precious and valuable he really is.

Number three. God uses desertion to make us hate sin. To make us hate sin. God uses desertion to make sin bitter in our mouths.

While we have our sin. And we're okay with it. And yet we're still feeling something of God's love and favor.

[21 : 36] Well then we don't taste how bitter that sin is. But is there anything so miserable. As God's displeasure.

Of feeling his displeasure. Hell is so awful because it's nothing but God's displeasure. So last week we heard about suffering in Hebrews 11.

About suffering in dungeons. In prisons. In holes in the ground. And you know what? There is a light that penetrates those dark dungeons.

There is a light that makes that persecution bearable. That makes people keep going. That holds them up. There is a joy that finds its way into the darkest prisons.

And we can go through all those things. If we know we have God's favor. If we have God's smile. If we know he is loving us. If we feel it we can go through it.

[22 : 40] But if you take away God's smile. Then our best things. Our best days. Our greatest worldly pleasures and joys. Are terrible.

Have you felt that in your life? Have you experienced that in your life? Where you are supposed to be having a good time. It's your birthday. It's Christmas.

You are on vacation. And yet you are doing those things. With God's displeasure. And you put a smile on your face.

But your heart isn't there. Your heart is sick. And whatever takes away. What does take away the Lord's smile.

Except for sin. And so six flags. And Christmas morning and birthdays. Are nothing compared to your conscience screaming. God is displeased with you. You've sinned.

[23 : 36] You're the man. And desertion makes that sin bitter. And what do we do with bitter things? We spit them out of our mouths. It puts a sword in our hands.

And it makes us want to kill our sin. God uses it for our good. Desertion number four. Desertion makes us seek after God.

Desertion makes us seek after God. So how does God use this experience for our good? Well, he uses it to move us to seek him. In the Song of Songs, there's a little vignette.

A little story. A little section. Where maybe you remember. The man comes to visit the woman. And she rejects him. And he goes away.

And soon the woman is out of bed. And she's running through the streets looking for him. Have you seen the one my soul loves? Have you seen him? She's asking people.

[24 : 36] Have you seen him? She goes looking for him. Well, what happens? How does God use this experience for our good? Well, he makes us get up.

Wake up. From our sleep. Wake up from our sin. And go looking for God. The deserted soul gets up and pursues God.

Goes looking for God. So, they're getting up early in the morning. They're knocking on the door of heaven. And the deserted soul gives God no rest until he comes again.

Well, brothers and sisters, are you feeling this experience? Then, get up. Go find your Lord. Don't let God rest until he comes again and he smiles upon you.

Number five. Desertion causes us to go looking. Not just for God. But for the reason that he left. Why has God left?

[25 : 44] What has offended him? What has grieved the Holy Spirit? Thomas Watson says, God never leaves us unless we have left him first.

God left Israel to go down and defeat to lowly Ai. Remember? They had their great victory over Jericho. And the next little city on the list was Ai.

And he let Israel go down and defeat. They were full of confidence. And they were full of hope. They thought they had this one in the bag. It was ready to go. And they were defeated.

God left them to this humiliating defeat. And it's interesting. So what did they do? It's interesting. What did they do? Joshua goes before the Lord and he prays. Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?

[26 : 50] So Joshua's first thought, and maybe the heart is, Lord, what's going on here? Why did you do this?

And the Lord answered. It's very interesting. He said, stand up. What are you doing on your face? In other words, you're in the wrong place.

You're looking in the wrong place. Israel has sinned. They have taken some of the devoted things they have stolen. They have lied. They have put those things in their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever is among you. Whatever among you is devoted to destruction. Joshua's initial thing was to say, God, what's going on here? Why did you do this? And God's response is, it's not me. You have sinned.

[27:50] You have done something. There is something in your camp that until it's destroyed, until it's dealt with. I will not be with you.

And so they went looking for their sin. They went looking for the offensive thing in their camp. And what did they find?

Remember? Who was it? Achan. And he had silver. He had gold. And he had a beautiful robe hidden in his tent.

Desertion sends us looking for what has offended God. Why has God left me? Why am I experiencing this?

What cursed thing am I hiding in my tent? And so desertion puts that magnifying glass in our hands. And we go and we start looking for the sin that has offended God.

[28:55] Am I harboring some secret sin in my heart? Desertion sends us looking. Sin is like a clog in a pipe.

So you go under your house and there's a pipe and there's a clog in it. It won't let the water, so to speak, sin won't let the water of God's felt love get to us. We don't feel his love until we have dealt with it.

And so we crawl under the house. You know? Is your house very pleasant under there? In those deep, dark places of your crawl space and where all those pipes are?

It's not nice, but you crawl under there. In that place. And you find what's clogging the pipe. And that's what desertion does to us.

It says there's something wrong here. There's a clog in the pipe. And so I go down and I look for that sin in my life and I deal with it. And you know what? I need that. How would I know about those secret sins until there was that clog in the pipe?

[30:00] And so it opens my eyes. It sends me looking to take care of the problems and the sins in my life. And I need that motivation. So God is using this desertion to sanctify us and to purify us.

To make us more holy and devoted to him. And that's, he's doing us good. He's doing us good. Even in this. Number six.

He uses it to cure us of sloth. He uses it to cure us of lazy Christianity. God uses it to wake us up. And to get up and at them. To get going. To throw off the sleep. You remember in Revelation 2. The church in Ephesus had lost their first love.

They'd been at it for a while. They lost their first love. They had grown cold. And what was the Lord's remedy? Remember your first love. And do what you did at the beginning.

[30:59] He gives them something to do. They need to be at work. The answer was to take action. Get up. Shake off the sleep. Do the things you did at the beginning.

Now desertion does that to us. It puts. It moves us to put time and energy into our walk with God. It encourages us to do what we did at first.

It encourages us to find the sin and deal with the sin. It encourages us to work harder at our life with God. And that's for our good.

God is disciplining you. He's training you. You might not have been faithful to him. But he's faithful to you.

He's faithful to those who he's called according to his purpose. And so our love might grow cold. But his love doesn't. He's always pursuing our good.

[31:58] Even in this. Number seven. And this is where we'll end. Desertion works for good. Because it shows us what Jesus suffered for us.

Desertion shows us. It helps us in a small experiential way. To feel and to know what Jesus suffered for us. And so Psalm 88.

And David's experience and our experience. Is definitely sipping on the cup. But Jesus drank that whole cup down. He drank the whole cup of deadly poison.

And he felt that loss completely. He had the most son. He had the most joy. And it was all taken from him.

And so it hurt the worst. He cried out. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? Those are. That's Psalm 22 verse 1. David first wrote those words.

[33:05] And so David felt those words first. But Jesus felt them. In the truest sense. And we felt it from time to time. But Jesus felt that power.

And the depths of the feeling of being forsaken. And God. And so if you have felt deserted. Then you.

Know something. Of what Jesus suffered. And you can appreciate. His sufferings for you in a new way. And more than that. You can know the depths of his love for you.

Because he did this willingly. He had done no evil. There was no sin on his lips. His hands were clean. And yet because he loved us.

He felt this desertion. He felt what you are feeling. Except a hundred times worse. And so have you been humbled and weakened? Well Jesus knows how that is.

[34:04] He experienced it the most. And so desertion. If we keep believing. If we keep looking to God. It can be a powerful experience.

Of Christ's love for us. It can be a powerful teacher. Of what Jesus experienced for us. He went through this for us. That emptiness. That fear.

That darkness. He did it in love for us. And he did it. So that we would never taste hell. But only heaven. So even here.

Even in this dark place of loneliness. Even in the midst of Psalm 88. In this place of despair. And you're crying out to God. And it seems like God is hiding his face.

And not answering. God is working for your good. The Lord is a good shepherd. And he will bring you into places like this. And he does it. That he might save you.

[35:04] And not damn you. They might cure you of your love of sin. And make you love him more. He does it to perfect you. He does it to discipline you. And he's doing it to prepare you.

For a place. Where nothing like this. Will ever happen again. He's preparing you for a place. Where you'll feel his love forever. And there will be no more clouds.

To hide his face. So take heart. God is doing you good. God is doing you good. Well.

That's our lesson. Let's pray. And then we'll be dismissed. Heavenly Father. We. We would say.

That it was good for us to be afflicted. You have taught us. Some of our best lessons. In the place of darkness. In the place of discipline.

[36:03] In the place of. Of desertion. And you've taught us. And you've trained us. And you've. You've prepared us. In these places. Thank you that.

Even when we are. Faithless. You keep. Faith. You stay. Faithful to us. And you do us good. Thank you that your love is.

Is grounded. And is sure. And is everlasting. And so. Because you love us. You never stop working. All things together. For our good.

And I pray that you would please then. Help us to hold on to these truths. Help us to hold on to these comforts.

When. Because of our sin. We've come into this place. Will you please. Remind us of these things. And help us to go looking for our sin.

[37:00] And getting rid of it. And repenting. And believing. And go running. And looking for you. And loving you. We thank you that you are at work among us.

We thank you that you are always faithful to us. And we praise your name. Yours is the glory. And the power. And the wisdom. And the righteousness. Forever and ever. It's in Jesus name I pray. Amen. Amen. Well we are dismissed.