

SERMON NOTES
Psalm 89
“Truth or Circumstances?”

Children’s Lesson: Lunch Buddy – Faithfulness / Tardy

Intro:

- *“The number one “vision problem” with churches today is not leaders who “lack a vision.” The real problem is when our primary focus shifts from who God is to what we are doing.”*
- *“It all begins with a vision. But it is not a vision of human activity. It is a vision of God, and how good He is, and how wonderful it is to be alive and a friend of such a Being.”*
- *“Out of this vision of God flows a desire to do good things for such a God.”*
- (John Ortberg)
- Many of us grew up in a church culture that has been suspicious of terms such as social justice or social gospel – and even of emphasizing helping the poor and hungry, fighting injustices, and caring for the needy, getting involved with AIDS, etc.
- *Evangelicals have historically insisted that the Gospel is about personal salvation through believing in the death of Jesus to atone for our sins*
- Caring for the needy is OK if it gives us a platform to proclaim the Gospel, but it is not really Gospel work in and of itself
- Throughout much of the 20th century, much of Protestant Christianity was divided into two camps: *Liberal mainline Protestants who cared only about social justice issues // and Conservative Evangelical Protestants who cared only about saving souls and telling people about Jesus*
- In other words: those who were committed to doing good works and those who were committed to proclaiming good news
- *And both groups were suspicious and judgmental toward the other*
- Today, many conservative evangelicals are recognizing that true discipleship must include doing good works and serving the needs of the poor as well as evangelism and Bible studies
- *It is not either-or // it is both-and – just as Jesus healed the sick and fed the hungry as well as proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God*
- **Cornerstone is a church that is committed to proclaiming Christ and His salvation and also meeting the practical needs of the poor and the needy**

- But there is a more subtle danger in the contemporary debate about churches and social justice and personal evangelism:
- ***We must always remember that the Gospel is not about what we do*** – whether that be liberal or conservative causes – whether that be meeting the needs of the poor and needy or saving the planet or saving unborn babies or saving marriage or saving souls
- **The Gospel is all about what Jesus Christ has done for us and for our salvation and for the redemption of all creation from bondage to sin and death and evil**
- The great danger among all religious people – including both liberal and conservative Christians – is that we reduce the Gospel to moralism – a list of good things to do and bad things to avoid doing
- *Different groups have different lists – but religious faith becomes all about what we’re supposed to do or refrain from doing*
- Even in Bible-believing churches there is a danger that Sunday School lessons and sermons are a series of moral lessons on how we are supposed to live in order to please God
- ***The real problem is when our primary focus shifts from who God is to what we are doing***
- **If we are to become a spiritually dynamic body making a significant impact in vulnerable families through our neighborhood schools – then we must keep our focus – and the focus of our worship services – on Who God Is**

I. WHO IS LIKE THE LORD OUR GOD? (89:1-18)

Psalm 89:1-2 ¹I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever;
 With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.
²For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever;
 Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”

- ***7 times in this Psalm alone God’s mercy or love and His faithfulness are linked together and exalted – as in other Psalms such as:***

Psalm 36:5 (NIV) ⁵ Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

- ***The word translated love or mercy or lovingkindness is Hesed in Hebrew***

- It carries the idea of enduring allegiance and steadfast loyalty and committed faithfulness to a covenant relationship
- **Once Yahweh enters into a covenant relationship with an individual or a people (such as Israel) – His love is guaranteed to be unchanging – regardless of our failings**
- ***God's un failing love is not a response to our behavior or spiritual performance – God's un failing love is rooted and grounded in His character – in His essential Being***
- **God is holy // God is love // God is faithful – He cannot be otherwise**
- *It is God's faithfulness that sets His Love apart from human love*
- Even the best of human love is sometimes inconstant / fickle / unstable / moody / *hot one moment and cold the next*
- **But God's love is always coupled with God's faithfulness – That's why Heseb is often translated: *un failing love* – *You can always count on God's love and mercies***
- In times of trouble it is the divine faithfulness that is the anchor for the soul during the tempests of life
- *That's why we sing of the mercies of the Lord forever – we don't just speak of His great love – we sing of His great love – we exult in His great love – and we make known to succeeding generations His great love and abundant mercies*
- The mercies of God are like a glorious palace of grace and goodness being built up higher and higher as testimony after testimony – generation after generation – the Lord's faithful mercy is exalted in worship and song
- *God's love stands firm forever – and God established His faithfulness in heaven itself*
- **God's faithfulness is not of earthly origin – for here on earth nothing is firm and steadfast and unchangeable**
- ***Heaven is the birthplace of God's faithfulness – and the best of earthly faithfulness is only a shadow of the divine faithfulness***
- Earthly faithfulness – though well-intentioned – is weakened by human frailty and sinful nature and circumstances beyond our control
- **But when God makes a promise – He foresees all contingencies and circumstances // He has Sovereign power to cause His purposes to prevail // His un failing love and omnipotent strength ensure that He will faithfully bring to pass all that He has promised**

Psalm 89:5 - 8 (NIV) ⁵ The heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. ⁶ For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? ⁷ In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. ⁸ O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

- *The throne of God in heaven is surrounded by angelic beings so glorious and so powerful and so brilliant and so majestic and so awesome – that if you were to see one in all his glory – you would fall at his feet in awestruck wonder and terrifying dread*
- **Yet none of those glorious beings – far superior to anything that has ever lived on earth – can compare with the Creator of the heavens and the earth – the Maker of all living creatures visible and invisible**
- *Who is like the LORD our God? Compassionate and full of mercy*
- *Who compares to His great love – There's none in all the earth*
- *I will sing of Your love and grace that covers all my guilt and shame*
- *In all the earth – who is like the Lord?*
- *None in all creation is as mighty and powerful as He*
- *None in all creation is as loving and merciful as He*
- *None in all creation is as faithful and steadfast as He*
- *None in all creation is as holy and righteous as He*
- *None in all creation is as wise and intelligent as He*
- *None in all creation is as compassionate and kind as He*
- *In all the earth – who is like the Lord?*
- *In all the earth – who deserves our love and devotion as He?*
- *In all the earth – who deserves our worship and reverent obedience as He?*
- *In all the earth – who deserves our highest praises and adoration as He?*
- *Who in the skies above or the earth below can compare with the LORD our God?*
- *Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!*
- **All thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea**
- *Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee*
- **Only Thou art holy – there is none beside thee – Perfect in power, in love and purity**

- ***Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! We praise thy name, O Lord, most Holy, Holy, Holy!***

Psalm 89:14-17 Your throne is founded on two strong pillars—righteousness and justice.

Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.

¹⁵Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of your presence, LORD.

¹⁶They rejoice all day long in your wonderful reputation. They exult in your righteousness.

¹⁷You are their glorious strength.

Our power is based on your favor.

¹⁸Yes, our protection comes from the LORD,

- ***Blessed are those who delight in the Lord's presence and who learn how to magnify the Lord and exult in His righteousness and grace***
- ***The Lord Jesus Christ is our Righteousness – we have no righteousness apart from Him – but we are confident in the righteousness we have in Him***
- ***We exult in the Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ – which is His by His perfect obedience to the Father – and which is ours by faith in Jesus***
- ***The Lord Jesus Christ is our glory and our strength and our Shield and Defender***
- ***We need not fear all the assaults of Satan our adversary – for our Protection comes from the Lord God Almighty and from the One who sits and reigns at His right hand and Who has given us His authority over all the power of the Evil One***

II. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT PROMISES (89:19-37)

- ***August 21, 2017 – that is the date of the next total solar eclipse visible in the United States***
- ***Scientists know precisely where all the heavenly bodies will be in relation to each other one year from now, 17 years from now, and 100 years from now – so dependable are the movements of the sun, the moon and the planets***
- ***But nothing in the universe is more reliable and dependable and trustworthy than God's hesed – His steadfast, unfailing, unconditional, never-ending love and mercy***

- **The middle section of this psalm deals with God’s faithfulness to His everlasting covenant with King David:**

Psalm 89:24-29 ²⁴My faithfulness and unfailing love will be with him, and he will rise to power because of me.

²⁵I will extend his rule from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the east.

²⁶And he will say to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’

²⁷I will make him my firstborn son, the mightiest king on earth.

²⁸I will love him and be kind to him forever; my covenant with him will never end.

²⁹I will preserve an heir for him; his throne will be as endless as the days of heaven.

- ***God chose and anointed David as His servant and Israel’s greatest King***
- ***God crushed all of David’s and Israel’s foes during David’s reign***
- ***God enlarged Israel’s territory and borders during David’s reign***
- ***God made David first and preeminent among the kings of his time and among all kings of Israel and Judah of all time***
- ***And God promised David through the prophet Nathan that David’s lineage and dynasty would last forever***

2 Samuel 7:11-16 “‘And now the LORD declares that he will build a house for you—a dynasty of kings! ¹²For when you die, I will raise up one of your descendants, and I will make his kingdom strong. ¹³He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will use other nations to punish him. ¹⁵But my unfailing love will not be taken from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed before you. ¹⁶Your dynasty and your kingdom will continue for all time before me, and your throne will be secure forever.’”

- ***This covenant promise to David is the backdrop for Psalm 89***
- ***This covenant promise to David was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David and Son of God***
- ***Though the kingdom of Israel lost all its glory and the Davidic dynasty became obscure during the exile and following when no descendant of David was sitting on the throne in Jerusalem – yet the Davidic line remained unbroken and more than all its former glory was restored by the enthronement of Jesus the King of kings at the right hand of God in heaven***

- **The Lord Jesus Christ now sits on heaven's throne and reigns over all principalities and powers – and one day will return to earth to reign over all the nations of the earth**
- **David's seed lives on in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and in believers who are in Christ**
- ***And David's earthly throne in Jerusalem will one day be occupied by the Lord who now sits on heaven's throne***
- **God is faithful to His covenant promises – and that includes the promises of the New Covenant with us**

Jeremiah 31:33-34 ³³“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day,” says the LORD. “I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their family, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will already know me,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness and will never again remember their sins.”

- ***This new covenant was sealed and ratified by the blood of Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross to take away all our sins***
- **This covenant of grace cannot be cancelled or altered**
- ***This covenant of grace cannot be nullified even by our worst sins***

Psalm 89:31-34 ³¹if they do not obey my decrees and fail to keep my commands,
³²then I will punish their sin with the rod,
 and their disobedience with beating.
³³But I will never stop loving him,
 nor let my promise to him fail.
³⁴No, I will not break my covenant;
 I will not take back a single word I said.

- ***God does not spare the rod with His children – He disciplines those whom He loves and chastens those He accepts as His sons and daughters***
- **Nevertheless – He will never take His Hesed – His lovingkindness – His tender mercies – His unflinching love – from us**
- ***We are in Christ – and therefore we are under God's grace – always enjoying His divine favor – never having to fear His condemnation or wrath***
- **The new covenant can never be voided by our sins because the new covenant has been sealed once and for all with the blood of Christ**

- **God will Never break His covenant with us that was sealed with His Son's blood**
- **If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you have entered into a covenant relationship with God – and God's loyalty and commitment to that covenant relationship are guaranteed – more certain than the rising and setting of the sun every day**
- **Therefore, it is no blind leap of faith to trust in God's unfailing love – when life seems to be crumbling all around you – there is no more secure or certain or rock-solid place to put your trust than in God's hesed – in God's unfailing love and covenant loyalty**
- **God is faithful to all His covenant promises to us in Christ Jesus!**

2 Corinthians 1:18 - 20 (NIV) ¹⁸But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” ²⁰For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

- *God will be faithful to accomplish the vision and calling that He has given to us*

1 Thessalonians 5:24 (NIV) ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

- *God will be faithful to provide strength and an escape route to flee from temptation*

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV) ¹³No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- **God will be faithful to forgive your sins and purify you from unrighteousness when you repent and confess your sins**

1 John 1:9 (NIV) ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- *Notice that it does not say that God is merciful and loving and will forgive us our sins*
- **That is true – but that is not the point here – rather, He is faithful and just**
- **God's justice requires Him to forgive because Christ has already been punished for our sins with the death penalty – and God's faithfulness to His**

covenant promises requires Him to forgive because Christ's blood ratifying the new covenant guarantees our forgiveness

2 Thessalonians 3:3 (NIV) ³But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

- *The evil one has been very active this week – prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*
- **The devil is feeling threatened by Cornerstone becoming a spiritually dynamic body making a significant impact in vulnerable families through our neighborhood schools – and he is striking back with full force against our church body**
- ***But the Lord is faithful – and He will strengthen and protect us from the evil one***
- **Christ is Victor – Satan has already been defeated by Christ's death and resurrection and ascension – and we are in Christ and have been given Christ's authority to enforce Christ's victory over all the power of the enemy**
- *We will push forward in obedience to the vision God has given us – winning spiritual victories with the spiritual weapons of prayer, worship and truth*

III. CIRCUMSTANCES TO THE CONTRARY (89:38-51)

- **Scholars are not sure when this Psalm was written, but it was written during a time when Judah was being oppressed by its enemies and the Davidic throne was either weakened or crushed**
- *It may have been written during the Babylonian exile after the fall of Jerusalem when there was no Davidic king reigning anywhere*
- **What had become of God's covenant promise that David's dynasty would be established forever – as long as there was a sun and moon in the heavens?**

Psalm 89:38-39 But now you have rejected him.

Why are you so angry with the one you chose as king?

³⁹You have renounced your covenant with him,
for you have thrown his crown in the dust.

Psalm 89:49 (NIV) ⁴⁹ O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?

- *Have you ever questioned and doubted the love and faithfulness of God?*
- *Have you ever felt rejected or abandoned or forgotten by God?*

- *Have your life circumstances ever seemed to contradict what the Bible teaches about the character and promises of God?*
- *Tell God about it*
- *The Word of God gives us permission to cry out to God: **Where is your former great love? Where is your faithfulness to your promises?***
- *In this case, the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to David transcended anything the Psalmist ever could have imagined*
- *For Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David – is King of kings not just from Lebanon to Egypt and from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean – but Jesus Christ is Lord of heaven and earth – and one day every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord***

(Conclusion):

- *We all face times in life when God seems to be slow in keeping His promises*
- *We feel a little like my lunch buddy Kyle the other day: **Scott said he was coming to bring me lunch – why isn't he here yet? What's taking him so long? Is he coming at all? Can I count on him to be faithful and keep his promise?***
- *How about you? What do you do when life's circumstances seem to contradict what the Bible teaches about God's unfailing love and His faithfulness to keep His promises?*
- ***Do you choose to believe the truth about Who God Is – or do you choose to believe your feelings based on your circumstances?***
- ***Will you choose to declare the truth about God with the Psalmist?***

Psalm 89:2 (NIV) ² I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

- **Resolve to hold fast to the truth:**
- ***When I am afraid // When I am confused // When I am sorrowful // When I am disappointed // When I am grieving // When I am suffering // When I am feeling insecure // When I am angry // When I am feeling all alone in the universe // When I am depressed // When my heart is breaking– When I am enduring the winter of the soul – I will trust in Your unfailing love***

- ***O Lord God Almighty – who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you***
- **What an honor and privilege to go out and serve our great God!**