

Psalm 89:1-4,19-26 <A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.> I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD,¹ forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. ² I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. ³ You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: ⁴ 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah... ¹⁹ Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown¹ on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people. ²⁰ I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him; ²¹ my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him. ²² The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him. ²³ I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. ²⁴ My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted. ²⁵ I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. ²⁶ He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'

“The Rock of My Salvation”

Psalm 89 is a psalm of lament. This psalm is very pointed in its prayer which holds God accountable to his covenant with David which at the time the psalm was written appeared broken. It starts out praising God for his steadfast love and faithfulness and then states how in that steadfast love and faithfulness God promised to David that his throne would be an eternal one and that there would always be one of his seed on the throne. To the folks in ancient Israel that promise would have meant that the kingdom of Israel would always last and that one of David's descendents would always be ruling. But, here stands Ethan the Ezrahite, the Psalmist, in the wake of Jerusalem being destroyed by the Babylonians, the kingdom and the Davidic line effectively ended. Ethan reminds God of when he said: "I will not remove from him (David) my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall continue forever, and his throne endure before me like

the sun. It shall be established forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the skies.’ Selah. But now you have spurned and rejected him; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust” (Ps. 89:33-39). He then finishes the Psalm with his prayer of lament: “Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David? Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted; how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples, with which your enemies taunt, O LORD, with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed. Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and Amen” (Ps. 89:49-52).

It amazes me that in the very end of his lament Ethan comes back to blessing the LORD and not cursing him. Standing in the face of the utterly dashed hopes of his people and it appearing that God has broken his promise, Ethan does not curse God and walk away. He stands on faith in the God whom he knows is faithful and does delight in showing his people steadfast love. Ethan reminds me of the twelve disciples of Jesus in the Gospel of John after Jesus’ long discourse to the Pharisees in which he tells everybody there “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53). It sounded so blasphemously strange that everybody but the twelve abandoned him. Then he asks them, "Do you also wish to go away?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:67-69). Even when Jesus appears to be a lunatic, they can’t go anywhere else because they have come to faith and in faith know who he is. He is the fulfillment of God’s promise

that Ethan recounts, “He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!' “ (Ps. 85:26). Jesus is that one who calls God Father.

Psalm 89 gave seed to a change in how the people of Israel came to understand the covenant God made with David. They stopped looking at the present king and started to wait for the Messiah, the one God would raise up to deliver them from exile in Babylon and then the Persians and then the Greeks and then the Romans. The fall of Jerusalem and the dismantling of the Davidic line of kings by the Babylonians was the last time that an actual descendent of David would rule in Israel until Jesus the Messiah came. Knowing God was faithful and kept his promises, by faith they began to look forward to the day when God, the Rock of Salvation, would restore the nation and the Davidic line by means of the Messiah.

Let me change gears here and talk about the meaning of the name, the Rock of salvation. The Hebrew is Tzur Yeshua. If you have spent anytime at all in a Christian bookstore you will have seen the word Yeshua in someplace or another. It is the Hebrew way of spelling Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua which is how we translate Yeshua. Yeshua means salvation. What did the Hebrews mean by salvation? This is an important question for I think we have all but lost the Hebrew and indeed the Biblical understanding of salvation.

When somebody walks up to us and asks, “Are you saved?” We would understand that they are asking whether we know we are going to Heaven when we die as the result of believing Jesus Christ died in our place taking upon himself the punishment for our sins. If we were to ask the same question to an

Israelite in the days of Ethan on up until after Jesus, they would answer, “The LORD has acted many times to save us.” Then they would tell you about Moses and the Exodus, the days of the Judges, and the several times during the years of the monarchy that God acted to deliver them from their enemies and restore peace and prosperity to the nation. They would also add that they were waiting for the LORD to save them again and this time by means of the Messiah. To the Israelite salvation was something that happened in history not outside of history after you die. Moreover, if we tried to talk about our soul going to heaven after death, they would say we’ve been talking to the Greeks again. When they talked about salvation they spoke of God’s really acting in history to establish his reign and purposes. They talked about the kingdom of heaven coming to earth not of our dying and going to heaven. This is why the gospel according to Jesus is “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.”

In the New Testament salvation means saved from death and the enslavement of sin that we may enjoy God and his good creation. It is the fulfillment of God’s promises of new heavens and a new earth and our resurrection to this new embodied reality. When Jesus was raised from the dead, the future resurrection broke into the present and when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church at Pentecost and continues to be poured upon us new creation life is something we begin to live in the present.

N. T. Wright says this: “The question salvation answers is not ‘How can I get to heaven despite the sin because of which I deserve to be punished?’ The answer to that is Jesus was punished in my place. Rather, it is ‘How can God’s

plan to rescue and renew the entire world go ahead despite the corruption and decay that have come about because of human rebellion?’ The answer to that question is that on the cross Jesus defeated the powers of evil which have enslaved rebel humans ensuring continuing corruption.” With Jesus birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit God, whom we now call Father, the Rock of our salvation, according to his steadfast love and faithfulness has saved his creation. The Father has enacted salvation within history by means of the incarnation of God the Son as Jesus Christ, the divine touch which heals everything, and then the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit who has begun to effect that healing within the creation.

To wrap this up, what this means for us is that it is time that we, the disciples of Jesus Christ quit looking for salvation after death and start living the salvific life of new creation now for the kingdom of God is still at hand. It's time we repented and believed it. We live in a world where hopes of every sort are routinely utterly dashed. In the midst of all this smashed hope, it is within us that the LORD has awakened faith so that we know that all is not hopeless. We are the ones who like Ethan know the steadfast love of the LORD and his faithfulness and therefore we know that we have nowhere else to turn, but to the LORD to wait on him to display his love and faithfulness and so often he does so through us. It is through us that the LORD continues to work out his salvation of his creation until Jesus returns and it is completed. As Paul says “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58). In a

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hopeless world we are God’s evidence that there is reason to hope. Therefore, go forth and make the case. Be as he is, steadfastly loving and faithful. Amen.