When Darkness Invades - Rev Donald M Macleod

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Preacher: Rev. Donald M. Macleod

[0:00] Well, it's been turned to the book of Psalms and Psalm 88.!

And as you're aware yourself, Psalm 88 is often called one of the most challenging or one of the darkest chapters in Scripture, and for good reason.
When you read Psalm 88, it's quite disconcerting, isn't it, really? It's a psalm that seems to have very little light in it, very little hope. In fact, as the psalm progresses, it just seems to get worse and worse.
At worst, the poor psalm writer, the poor psalmist here, he's having a really rough time of it.
He seems to be struggling mentally, physically, spiritually. It all seems to be going on for this poor man. And some might say, well, why?
[1:16] If this is God's Word, then why is this psalm here, a psalm that's pretty much so devoid of really any sign of hope or help? Of course, it's not, and we'll get to that later on.

But why is this psalm even here? It's there because God's Word is many things, and God's Word is always honest, isn't it?
God's Word is always honest. Psalm 88 might feel strange for us, but if we're very honest tonight, and tonight I want you to be honest. I want you to be really honest with yourself.
Because we all know this very well. We can put on a good face pretty quickly, can't we? Pretty easily. And we can hide things.
I mean, you can hide things from certainly your elders, and I say, I'll say from me, but I can't see you tonight. I don't know what your story is. I don't know what your life looks like.
[2:12] Even my own congregation, you know, we all know behind closed doors, life can be very different to how we portray it, can't it? Even beyond that, behind the closed doors of our own mind, our own experience, things can be so different to how we often portray it.

Psalm 88 is blunt. Psalm 88 is honest. It has no room for niceties. How are you?
I'm fine, thanks. How are you? Let's be honest, how often is that a lie we're telling? Just a plain lie. How are you doing? Well, the writer would say, I'm doing horrendous.
My life is falling apart. My mind is on fire. My family situation is deteriorating. My health is gone. I don't know what God is doing anymore. I don't know how to get through this.
That might be more what Samus would say if you asked him when he was in the middle of this situation. We said this morning with a church family, a good, now this is.
[3:22] Not always the case, I know. But for a good family, not all the time, but in general, a good family, it's a family where you're honest, isn't it, to one another. I'm not saying you share every single detail, but it's a family where you're honest.

We can say to someone, I'm having a rubbish few weeks. Would you please pray for me? We'll see this more later on. We are instructed, but also we're commanded, to share one another's burdens. That takes two things. It means we must be able to share, must be willing to share burdens, must be willing to tell people and to explain to people what life is like for us. But at the same time, we must be people who are trustworthy and people who are safe, but folks will share their burdens with us.
We must be confidential. We must be careful on everything else. But we're a family. And a good family. A good family is a family where each other's burdens are shared as much as we can and where we support one another.
Now, there are many examples throughout Scripture and throughout history of men and women of God who have had difficult lives and difficult physical situations and mental health situations.
[4:35] One man who most of us, all of us will know, who in his life, sadly, these things often came together was, of course, Charles Spurgeon.

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Most, I'm sure, will know that Charles Spurgeon, his whole life pretty much, was faced with either when his physical symptoms would ease off, then it seemed his medical symptoms would come in and then his mental situation would develop.
Then there'd be a congregational problem. The man seemed to have problem after problem for his whole life and his whole ministry. Again, many will know this, but a big part of his mental health decline happened when he was very young.
He was 22, I believe. It's not my notes. He was 22, I think. He was preaching to a packed-out congregation. It was a music hall in London that was jam-packed.
And now, Spurgeon had many admirers and many people wanted to come hear the gospel. And he threw, of course, huge crowds, many thousand, I think it was about 5,000 or 6,000 in this crowd, in this hall.
[5:41] That's big today. But back then, you know, in 1850 or whatever it was, that's a huge amount of people. 5,000 people jammed in. But, of course, with people coming to hear the gospel and with people coming to seek the Lord, there were also folks there among the thousands who were there to cause trouble, who were there to stir up something.

And sadly, some troublemakers in this packed hall with 5,000 plus people. Of course, some people in the back started to shout, fire, there's a fire, there's a fire.
They did it to disrupt the meeting. They did it to stop the meeting. What happened was, of course, this jam-packed music hall. There was panic. You know, whatever we might think about health and safety today, we are thankful that there are fire exits.
We're thankful there's plans for these things. There wasn't then. There's one really main exit that they knew about. So these 5,000 people funneled into one exit. And sadly, several people died, and many more were injured pretty horrifically.
It wasn't Spurgeon's fault. But Spurgeon, like you or I, he felt guilty for it. The papers of the day were making, publishing awful headlines about him.
[6:57] And he felt guilty. He felt guilty for the death of these several people. He felt guilty for whoever was being maimed. And logically, it wasn't his fault.

But mentally, Spurgeon, who was already quite fragile mentally, this just tanked him completely. And he took to his bed for a good while. Spurgeon had no shame telling his students about his own mental health battles.
Spurgeon had no shame writing about it, allowing it to be written. Spurgeon had no shame in his sermons mentioning it, carefully, within reason. Why? Because Spurgeon knew and preached and acted like the truth.
He's a fallen man who had struggles and burdens the same as his people did. Throughout history, throughout Scripture, we see that again and again.
Now, we can't say for certain what is wrong with the psalmist here. Whatever is afflicting him, it seems to be from his youth, we find out. It seems to be all-encompassing.
[8:00] But either way, it doesn't really matter for tonight what's the actual problem. Because I'm going to try and be short tonight, succinct, and try and be general.

Because the problem is these kind of sermons. If I start giving risks and reasons that this applies to this kind of person, that kind of person. And you're sitting here thinking, well, the minister didn't mention my situation. Then maybe this doesn't apply to me.
I'm being broad as possible. What does Scripture say to those who are suffering mentally, those who are suffering physically, those who are suffering spiritually?
What does the Scripture say to Christians who are struggling? Christians who have long, long hours and long, long nights. Christians who have many, many questions and there are finally no answers.
What does the psalmist say to them? First of all, we can see some of the reasons that the psalmist says he is in great mental and physical turmoil.
[8:58] Let's start at verse 3. He says, For my soul that is full of troubles, my life draws near to Sheol. I'm counted among those who go down to the pit.

I'm a man who has no strength. My soul is full of trouble, says the psalmist. My life draws near to Sheol. My life draws near to the grave.
My soul is overwhelmed and I feel like I am dying. So says the man of God here in this psalm. One good thing about not being connected to yourself as a congregation is, I generally have no idea as a congregation how you think about things and how you work through things.

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I have no information on the ground. I really don't. I don't listen to things. I don't hear things. So if I'm saying tonight, if it hits with you from God's Word, then take it from the Lord.
Very often, very often in Christian history, not always, but in recent Christian history, kind of the Victorian age onwards to ourselves, some Christians will say and preach and teach that really a true Christian never has problems mentally.
[10:17] Again, some of you have heard this before from others. There's a well-known minister and he preached that for years. He preached for years that Christians cannot face depression.

Christians do not face anxiety, at least not through Christians. And if they do, it's not proper anxiety, not proper depression. It'll pass. Don't worry about it kind of thing. And he preached that in different ways. And he preached it quite forcibly and quite believably to the point that quite a few people who were suffering that were questioning their own faith and questioning their own journey.
And this certain Christian preacher one morning woke up and he felt a bit tired. He couldn't even move his legs or his arms. He had a flu or something he was coming down with.
Well, a few hours later, he had just about got out of bed and was making himself a cup of tea. And he thought, I don't know, my head feels a bit strange. I don't feel ill. I just feel a bit slow and sluggish.
And the next day, he couldn't get out of bed at all. Over the next week, the next few weeks, he was placed into a deep, deep depression that lasted weeks, if not months.
[11:24] I don't know the exact details. That lifted eventually. And he was soon cured of his bad theology that Christians don't suffer these things.

Why do Christians suffer mental health problems and spiritual health battles and physical health problems? Well, what a childish question to ask.
Why? Because we live in a fallen world. We are fallen people. Things happen to us. There are chemical problems. There are physical problems. The whole reality that we go through, we go through it with those around us who are not yet Christians.
But we'll see in a psalm that there is one difference between the Christian and the non-Christian who suffers these things. The gospel is never come to Jesus and never have a bad day again.
Or come to Jesus and have an easy, pleasant, no-problem life. Come to Jesus and have clarity mentally for all your days. Now, there are some Christians.
[12:22] I'll be very careful here. There are some Christians, and that is their story. That is you. Praise the Lord for that. Quite seriously, we give thanks to God for that. There are some Christians who have no idea what I'm saying just now.

Who have a happy life. Who don't face any of these burdens and troubles. And that is from the Lord. But for the rest of us, for the rest of us, we can say with a psalmist, yes and amen.
The Christian alongside the non-Christian, we face the same battles, pretty much. Physical problems. Mental problems. Situations outside of us.
Situations inside of us. All affecting what life feels like day by day. Again, this poor psalmist, it seems his problems have been with him for many years.
Verse 15. Afflicted and close to death from my youth up. Whatever it is. Whether it's external enemies, potentially.
[13:26] Or an internal reality. Or a health situation. It doesn't really matter again. But this is a man who has suffered for many, many, many years. This is not just one moment he's having.

One bad day he's having. One bad week he's having. This has been his story. It seems on and off for most of his life. Most of his life he has suffered. Most of his life he feels like he is just dragging himself through darkness at points.
He's a man who is in mental and physical turmoil. But it gets worse than that. He's also a man, it seems, who has been abandoned. Verse 8. Amongst others.
You have caused my companions to shun me. You have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so I cannot escape. That's compounded then by verse 18.
You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me. My companions have become darkness. This is a man who has been abandoned.
[14:31] Not just by his own mind or body perhaps. But also he's been abandoned by those around him. He has suffered abandonment. From family and from friends. Brothers and sisters, we live in a fallen world.

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And again, I don't know your stories at all. But in a room this size with this many people. And definitely online I'm sure too. There are some of you here who grew up in a home that was not easy.
There are some here, perhaps your parents, abandon you. Perhaps literally. If not literally, then emotionally. Perhaps you grew up in a situation that was unsafe, that was dangerous.
I won't keep listening, but you know yourself what I'm trying to get to. You grew up and you can say to this man, Yes, I've been abandoned from my youth by those who are closest to me.
They didn't care for me. They didn't love me as they should. Abandonment. Estrangement. Issues of friendship.
[15:37] Issues of family. This is a man, mentally, he's in turmoil. Physically and also relationally. He can't even turn to others to help him.

Because those he's supposed to have closest to him have also left him. Or let him down. Or abandoned him. And if you're paying attention behind all of this, there seems to be an undercurrent, doesn't there?
Who is he saying is at the base of all this? Verse 8. I glided past it on purpose.
You have caused my companions to shun me. You have made me a horror to them. Carry on, carry on, carry on.
Verse 14. O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Carry on. Verse 15. I suffer your terrors.
[16:42] I am helpless. Your wrath has swept over me. Your dreadful assaults destroy me. Verse 18. You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me.

And so on and so on. You must try very carefully here. Very carefully. A lot of words in the mouth of a psalmist here. On one level, he is theologically correct.
Okay? He is theologically correct. We must be very careful. Just because a situation is difficult, it does not strip away our need to be theologically, doctrinally correct.
God is sovereign. God is sovereign. God is sovereign. God is in full control. The psalmist tells no lies here. On a big scheme, on a big level.
God's in full control with every star, down to every grain of sand. And that is our confessional belief. That is our reformation belief. That's what we hold. But God is also not some distant, uncaring God who is just mechanically working things out in a cold, uncalculated way.
[17:52] Yes, God names the numbers of stars, but also what? He also is the one who binds up the wounds of his people. Brothers and sisters, I wonder if you can say yes and amen or at least give your assent to the psalmist here.

When he says, Lord, why is this happening? Why have you let this happen? Why am I going through this? Why are you causing this to take place in my life?
And so on and so on. Can you, in your experience, I wonder, say, perhaps different words, yes. Perhaps not as strong, perhaps.
But can you say, I've been there. See, we might say, well, he's talking to the Lord in pretty strong terms there.
He's talking to the Lord, it seems, in a very almost disrespectful way, isn't he? How could you do this? Lord, why is this happening, God? Why am I going through this? Why are you letting this happen?
[18:54] I think, oh man, this feels a bit close. This feels a bit dangerous. Should he speak to the Lord like this? Well, friends, brothers and sisters also, the Lord has included this in his canon, in the scripture.

It's here for us. God is a God who knows his people. And God is the good and perfect father. God can handle heightened emotion.
God can handle desperate cries. God can handle the oppression, anxiety. God can handle physical and mental and family and society and financial and everything else, turmoil, when we cry out to him about it all.
He is not scared. He is not offended by his beloved children asking him for help. Psalm 88 is not a psalm to teach us how not to pray to God.
Quite the opposite. Psalm 88 is a psalm to show us that when we find ourselves in a similar situation to the psalmist, we can indeed pray. And we'll get to that in a second. Sometimes. Sometimes.

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[20:06] Sometimes. Sometimes. Sometimes. Well-meaning brothers and sisters. Well-meaning Christians. Sometimes. When someone shares with them something they're going through, they'll respond immediately with a nice Bible verse that sounds good, you know.

And they mean well. But if someone shares something with you that's heavy or that's difficult or something they're going through that sounds dark or that sounds terrifying for them, sometimes, and very often, the best response is not just to fire some Bible verses away that may help them. Don't not do that. But actually the reality is sometimes, brothers and sisters, we have to just acknowledge that's hard. That sounds horrendous.
Sometimes the best answer is to encourage them to pray or to pray with them, pray for them in their company, in their presence. Because sometimes, like the psalmist here is showing us, sometimes in response to the darkness and the pain and misery of life, sometimes the answer feels like there's no answer at all.
There is. But it feels like there's not. Darkness. Sadness. Depression. Loneliness. Abandonment. What a miserable psalm. What a miserable 20 of our minutes we've had so far.
[21:38] Well, of course not. Of course not. Where's the hope in this psalm? Where's the hope anywhere in this psalm? Where's any sort of relief at all?

Any sort of peace to be found in this psalm? Well, as I alluded to before, the glorious thing is, this psalm itself is actually a real encouragement.
What do we mean? Let's step back a second. What are psalms? Not always, but pretty much. What are psalms? What is psalm 88? Was psalm 88 written by someone just closing their eyes and imagining very hard, what would it be like if I had a hard life?
Let me think. No. What is psalm 88? It's a prayer. It's a prayer. The psalmist is pouring out from his own heart, his own soul, his own mind.
Of course, led by the Spirit. Of course, we know that cried by the Spirit. But the Spirit makes use of situations and of personalities and of unique people. And the Spirit working through this man inspires him to write his own story.
[22:48] This is a prayer. We're reading and singing a prayer. The fact, even in abandonment and misery and anxiety, perhaps depression, perhaps whatever terms we might use, even in the middle of darkness, he is still crying out to God.

Sometimes people say, how do I know? How do I know if I've gone too far from the Lord? How do I know if God perhaps doesn't want anything to do with me anymore?
How do I know if I've grown too much into my sin, perhaps? How do I know if I've grown too much into my sin? How do I know if I've grown too much into my sin? How do I know if I've grown too much into my sin? A heart that still cries out is a heart that is still with the Lord, you could say.
It's when you stop crying out. It's when you stop feeling the agony, then the worry needs to begin. But here this man is crying out. I'm not saying for a second his own sin has caused this.
We must be careful also. That's not always the case. There's still a school of thought that says, well, someone's depressed or anxious. There must be something they've done. Now, sometimes it is. But sometimes it's an outside thing that's happened to them.
[24:09] Sometimes, of course, it's just their brain chemistry. Sometimes it's in the genes. Sometimes they mix. Sometimes it's nothing. Sometimes it is something external and different to all these things.

Sometimes we have no idea why we go through these things. But this is a man who's still praying. He is still crying out. Now, this is a rough prayer, isn't it? It's a prayer that feels, again, like we said, almost a bit too rough.
A bit too disrespectful at points. To me, anyway. But it's a prayer, nonetheless. This is a man who still talks to God.
And look within the prayer. When you stop and look carefully, look how he addresses God. First bit there.
O Lord, God of my salvation. Carry on down. Look at every time he's speaking to the Lord then. O Lord. Verse 9 again there.
[25:12] O Lord. Verse 13. O Lord. Verse 14. O Lord. There is a personal nature, isn't there, there?

In the cries of this man. He's not talking to God coldly from a distance. This is a man who knows the Lord. This is a man who has known the salvation of the Lord. Verse 1.

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O Lord, God of my salvation. This is a man who has before in his life seen and known God's salvation in his experience. He says, Lord, you've done it before. I know you're able.
I know you're a God alone. You are Yahweh. The capital L-O-R-D there. You are Yahweh. You are the God who needs nothing and needs no one. And yet, I cry out to you.
You're the God who has been my salvation. You're the God who has heard me before. Hear me again. O Lord, my God. O Lord, my God.
[26:13] Again, brothers and sisters, I don't know how much you can identify with this man or his situation. Have you ever cried or prayed prayers or cries like this man?

But if you have, you know yourself. Even in the silence of an unspoken wail to the Lord, you know there's a connection there.
Why? Because the Holy Spirit has made his home within his people. The Holy Spirit lives and moves within his people. And as we hear elsewhere, of course, that even through groans itself, the Spirit is able.
Of course, he is. He is God. He is able to interpret and transmit and transpose that to be a glorious prayer before God the Father. Whether it's prayers like this prayer here.
Whether it's just screams. Whether it's just silence. Whether it's a depressive numbness. Whatever you can manage or not manage, the Lord sees.
[27:16] The Lord knows. God is gracious. God is good. Even in the midst of perhaps the most challenging moments of our life, for the believer, we know we stand side by side.

We stand before a Savior who has walked a path before us. That's what we read there in Isaiah 53. That well-known account of a Savior who has endured much.
A Savior who endured physical pain. Humiliation. Embarrassment. Stripped. Naked. Tortured. Crucified. But beyond that, a Savior who mentally endured much. A Savior who mentally endured the horror.
Think in the garden. What do we hear? As he tells his close friends to stay awake. Can you not stay awake a bit longer? Can you not remain awake a short while more?
[28:23] And what does Jesus say about himself? His soul is what? It feels like his soul is drawing near to the grave.

He's almost quoting the psalm here. Our Savior has known anxiety. Our Savior has known horror so much it feels like his soul is overwhelmed.
Overwhelmed, he says, to the point of death. You have a Savior who goes before you who says, I have felt in my soul so overwhelmed by what lay ahead of me.
What lay ahead of me. So overwhelmed by my situation. It felt like I was near death itself. And he was. You have a Savior who goes before you and says, I understand what you're feeling.
I have been where you are. And I have felt much, much more than you can ever imagine. So when you say with a psalmist here, Lord, why is this happening?
[29:24] When you say to the psalmist, Lord, how is this happening? You cry out to a God who says, I see, I know. But also God just says, I have experienced it.

And sometimes, in the darkest moments of life, that is all we have, isn't it? Friends and family, if you try and help, it goes so far. Medication helps, it goes so far.
Circumstances change, that helps, it goes so far sometimes. Sometimes, you're left in the darkness. It's only the vague, vague, but sure, steady, unchanging hope. There is a Savior who has gone before you, who will not leave you, nor abandon you, nor forsake you, who has gone before you, quite literally, in experience.
Who has endured what you've endured, and much, much, much more. Jesus is a Savior who knows abandonment.
Jesus is a Savior who knows shame. Jesus is a Savior who knows the horror and the abuse. Jesus is a Savior who knows pain physically, emotionally, and mentally.
[30:40] Jesus is a Savior who knows you. Jesus is a Savior who commands in love all who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him, and to cast, cast your burdens onto Him.

When life is difficult, and I say this to the friends here, you know, again, all of us endure many things in life. What is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian who go through suffering? Many things we endure, the exact same circumstances. Grief, depression, darkness, and so on. Anything we're listed tonight, and many, many more. We're not listed. What's the difference?

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The Christian goes through it, whether they are conscious of it at times or not, whether they feel it at times or not, whether they even still think of it at times or not. It doesn't change the reality.
The Christian goes through these times, surrounded, supported, and kept by the Lord. And again, I'm not saying the Christian's always aware of that, but sometimes we are, but not always.
[31:54] Not always. We must be careful there to not be too precise, because sometimes, for some Christians, they're aware of them being kept. We praise the Lord for that. Other Christians, they have no awareness at all.

We just trust that God is faithful and true to His Word. We have a Savior who has gone before us, who endured the cross, and all of that meant.
A Savior who has now ascended at the right hand of the Father, making constant intercession for us. A Savior who is the great high priest, who has endured the horrors of this world, so He can say to you, I see you, my brother, my sister.
I see you. I know you. I know what it is you're going through. Take my hand, and we go through this together. There's also a Savior, as we heard this morning briefly, a Savior who all things made through Him and made for Him.
He didn't just pat your head and say, oh, I know. He says, no, I know, but also I am God. I am with you in this, but also I have the eternal power to take you through this.
[33:08] I'll close with some words of a hymn. This hymn, the hymn writer, when he wrote this, it was after, there were the various many disasters that happened in his life.

He had lost his possessions. Before that, in a fire, before that, he had lost, I believe, his financial investments, and then he lost, was it two or three of his daughters in a sailing, a ferry accident.
He lost everything he had. Mentally, physically, emotionally, he lost everything. From that, he wrote words, well, known to many of us.
He writes, and this is, he wrote this just in the aftermath of it all. When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.
Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, have shed his own blood for my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.
[34:33] My sin, oh, the bliss of his glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh, my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, that the clouds be rolled back as I scroll, the trump shall resound, the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul.
Lord, we bless these few thoughts to us. Let's join again in a word of prayer. Lord, we give you thanks for the blessedness we have in having your word before us.
Your word is truth. Your word which speaks to us truth in a way that perhaps for many of us the many times we do not desire to hear. We pray just now for any who are able to give their yes and amen in various ways to the words of the psalmist.
We ask for those who are yours this evening. You surround them, be with them, bring them to that full knowledge of a saviour who loves them, cares for them, who has gone before them, who has endured much for them.
[35:50] A saviour who promises them a travelling companion through the darkest of days, who promises them to receive them to himself.

We pray for any here enduring many things who as of yet cannot say that they have help or support found in you. We pray even in the middle of dark days that they would come to see they need not suffer alone, they need not suffer by themselves, but in darkness and sadness and suffering and loss there is a saviour who tells all who are weary, all who are burdened, all who are heavy laden to come to him and to find rest and peace for their souls.
We pray that be the reality for all this evening. Bless all that goes on in this congregation. Lord, bless even our time with our young friends tonight. That you be glorified in all that goes on here. Glorified in the days and weeks and months ahead. Let's call these things in Christ's name and for his sake alone. Amen. Let's sing the final few verses of our psalm.
psalm. Amen. Just reading this for completeness sake. Psalm 88 verses 15 to the end.

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[37:11] As we sing these words of dereliction and distress, remember these words are words that find their help, support, and find our help and our support in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 88 verse 15 to the end. Distressed am I and from my youth I ready am to die. By terrors I have borne and I am distracted fearfully. The dreadful fierceness of thy wrath quite over me doth go.
By terrors great have cut me off but did pursue me so. Psalm 88 verses 15 to the end. God's praise. Distressed am I from my youth I ready am to die Thy terrors I have born and I distracted fearfully. The dreadful fierceness of thy wrath quite over me doth go.
Thy terrors great have cut me up they did pursue me so.
[39:02] for round about me every day like water they did roll and gathering together they have compassed my soul my friends thou hast put far from me and him that did me love and those that might await us where to darkness is removed now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only

God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time now and forever Amen long time be next time'll let them come down now and when they want to come go go will let into may God should hand again time have their heart need will well who know what they will come many may may happen près près près près près près près près près près près près près près kans près Todd près près près■ sle Turk près Christianity Noodles

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