

Hearts That Lament

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 November 2022

Preacher: Kirk van der Swaagh

[0 : 00] It has been said, to cry is human, to lament is Christian. To cry is human, to lament is Christian.

As humans, with the exception of crying tears for joy, we cry when we experience the brokenness of the world, it breaks in on us.

Some sorrow has entered. It can be an emotional blow, the loss of someone or something that we love. Physical pain can cause us to cry.

This is certainly true for children. It's interesting that when someone hurts a child, when something hurts a child, they cry. Even little babies cry. I'm sure we'll hear one in a little while.

They can be hungry. They can have a wet diaper. They can be shocked by some sudden gesture, and their response is to cry. It's an expression of their unhappiness, of their displeasure with the circumstances.

[1 : 03] Now, when they get older, they might add some questions to their crying. Why did our dog have to die? Why was Jimmy so mean to me? Why is grandmother so ill?

With such questions, they're trying to make sense of the world. And their parents have a bit more perspective, and they try to give them answers. Answers suitable for them at their stage of maturity. But there are times, are there not, when it's not so easy to give an answer. I don't know why Jimmy was so mean to you. I guess he's just a mean kid. See, there's a problem.

It causes a response. And that response of confusion, unhappiness, pain, cause questions.

Questions arise. And the child asks someone who they think will have an answer.

This kind of interchange is of a peace with lament. Lament rises up from sorrow, from distress, from sadness.

[2 : 12] It is a crying out to God in the face of tragedy. The mourning of a loss. When life is confusion. When things are not as they ought to be. And the brokenness of the world crashes in.

Now, what's interesting is that nearly one-third of the psalms, one-third of the psalms are categorized as laments. Yet, despite their prevalence, I would suggest that we're largely unfamiliar with them, that is, by their genre.

That is, as laments. We don't really understand lament. And the proof is the fact that we don't practice lament. If we understood it, we would practice it.

Now, that might be a strange way to put it, to practice lament. But it can be seen as a spiritual discipline. Much like reading your Bible, attending worship. And if the Bible is our guide, and it has one-third of the psalms as laments, I guess we are meant to lament.

It is, indeed, a spiritual discipline. Because what it is, is it sees the world as it is. It sees circumstances as they are, and mourns sorrows over the brokenness of things.

[3 : 29] A lament is giving voice to the doubts, fears, questions that arise in the face of tragedy, in the face of loss, of frightening circumstances. It is a crying out to something, to someone, outside of ourselves, seeking he would make sense of the situation.

And in this respect, then lament is prayer. And that's how it becomes a spiritual discipline. It is God giving us permission to honestly express to him our confusion, our sorrow, our pain, and asking him to bring understanding, to bring relief, to bring peace.

And why would we need to make this a discipline? Well, because the world is full of confusion, and sorrow, and pain. And because we experience confusion, sorrow, and pain, and it is God that we must turn to for the answers, for the comfort.

As Christians, we are meant to lament. Now, as someone has noted, most biblical laments follow a pattern as God takes grieving people through their journey.

It's a kind of poetic odyssey. And it usually includes four key elements, not necessarily all in this order, but four key elements, an address to God, a complaint, a request, and then an expression of trust and or praise.

[4 : 59] Yeah? An address to God, a complaint, a request, and then an expression of trust or praise. Psalm 13, very short psalm, but here, all those elements in it.

How long, O Lord? There's the address. See, even in the psalms that are the deepest, darkest psalms, like we're going to read in just a moment, Psalm 44, the person is still crying out to God. So Yahweh, God, the God of Abraham, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the one to whom the psalmist turns. How long, O God, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God.

Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him. Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

[6 : 00] I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. Yes, an address, a complaint, a request, and then following up with praise. That's usually the elements that are involved in the lament psalms.

But what's striking about Psalm 44 that I read is that it does not end in an expression of trust or praise. It enters, excuse me, it ends with a prayer but no assurance.

We're going to look briefly at that psalm. And we don't know the particular occasion for the psalm, but it appears to be a recent devastating defeat by the armies of Israel.

I think we can break this psalm down in three ways, past, present, and future. Listen to what he says at the beginning, dealing with the past, how God has been faithful to his people in the past. Oh God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old. You with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted, them, the God's people, you planted, you afflicted the peoples, but you set them, but them you set free.

[7 : 08] For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

And then he seems to perhaps relate a recent event of which he was a participant in, perhaps with the other armies of Israel. You are my king, O God, ordain salvation for Jacob.

Though we push down our foes, through you we push down our foes, through your name we tread down those who rise up against us, for I do not, for not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me.

But you have saved us from the foes, and you have put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever, Selah. But now comes the complaint.

But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies. Now, how many of you have ever said to God, you have disgraced me?

[8 : 06] Would you dare to say such language? But here it is, in holy writ. God, you have disgraced me. You have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies.

You have made us to turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoiled. You have made us like sheep for the slaughter and have scattered us among the nations. You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them.

You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the people. This experience has caused a great deal of confusion.

You have made us a laughingstock. We're an embarrassment. We're a byword among the nations. And he goes on to talk about it in personal terms.

All day long, my disgrace is before me and shame has covered my face at the sound, at the sound of the taunter and revile, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

[9 : 10] Now this is interesting. The next verse is, listen, this is what causes his confusion. All this has come upon us though we have not forgotten you or we have not been false to your covenant.

What's he alluding to? He knows how God acts to God's people. I mean, the entire New Testament, Old Testament has just one story after another how it is that the people have turned their backs on

God.

They've gone after idols. They've run after other leaders and other kings who are going to save them and God comes down on them and causes them to suffer.

Brings persecution upon them. But he says, that's not what we've done. All this has come upon us so we have not forgotten you. We've not been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back nor have our steps departed from your way.

Yet you have broken us in the place of jackals in a deserted place and have covered us with the shadow of death. If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign God would not God discover this?

[10:11] For he knows the secrets of our heart. Yet, yet, for your sake we are killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

So they've gone out it seems in the name of Yahweh to fight holy war in his name. And they for all intents and purposes what he can see he can't see any reason why it is that God would not have gone with them.

Right? You remember all the times when God said I will go with you I will go with you go ahead I will go with you. And so they've gone out but God was not with them to the point of where he has this deep deep complaint.

God you have really let me down. You have left me to hang out there to dry. What is going on? For your sake we are killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. And now his request his request is a strong request of God. Awake! Awake!

[11:23] Why are you sleeping oh Lord? Rouse yourself do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up come to our help redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. All other laments all other psalms that are in lence with the exception of one other Psalm 88 end in expression of hope but not this one.

Despite recounting what God has done despite acknowledging God's steadfast love he is confused he is not assured. And why is this? Well we can't be sure because we don't know the author.

But one thing we can consider is first his humility. despite his speaking to God in ways which we might not be familiar or comfortable with he is emboldened because he has done some self-examination.

If we had forgotten your name if we had spread out our hands to another God would not God know this? He knows the secrets of the heart. See his knowledge of God's history with his people spoken of at the beginning of this psalm must include those times when God has come down in judgment against his people because of their unfaithfulness their idolatry and he implies by appeal that he does not deny the justice of God in acting that way but that's not what's going on now.

[12:51] They have remained loyal to God why isn't God loyal to them? Rise up rise up come to our help redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

There's another reason for his confusion. God's steadfast love that's the Hebrew word chesed. One commentator says chesed occurs over 200 times and most frequently refers to the certainty the certainty of God's concern for people.

A special nuance of chesed is that of firm determination. God's loyalty is shown to his people not merely out of a sense of appreciation for their worship or out of a self interest but because God has determined to be loyal to them.

The chesed stresses the certainty of God's unfailing willingness to help and comfort. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. An example right?

Jonathan and David they entered into a covenant a chesed covenant that they would both watch out for themselves for each other and for their posterity but for now for the psalmist a chesed rather than be a thing of confidence is actually a source of confusion pastor Mark Vroge notes belief in God's mercy redemption and sovereignty create lament without hope in God's deliverance or the conviction that he is all powerful there be no reason to lament when pain invades our lives see this is the irony it's because of God's promise that the man laments it's because of God's promise that we would lament if God never showed himself gracious or faithful to his word we would not call upon him in times when we think that he's acting otherwise or that he's acting contrary to his past or contrary to what he has said if we didn't know such things we wouldn't call upon him but it's

because of his steadfast love that this one makes an appeal based upon

[14 : 56] God's steadfast love his covenant love it could be a source of comfort but it could also be a source of confusion you have promised steadfast love where is it now let's leave him for just a minute and go to Paul's language in Romans chapter 8 Paul uses language from this psalm in a similar context but with a strikingly different outcome listen to Romans 8 16-17 the spirit himself bears witness our spirit that we are children of God and of children then heirs heirs of God fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we might also be glorified with him this is the path that Jesus walked and we must be ready to walk in a similar path Jesus warned that in the world you'll have tribulation if they hated me they will help you so like the psalmist Paul acknowledges that being loyal to God following Jesus will bring suffering but he says this

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory which is to be revealed in us see he is confident that God is at work in creation through his people to bring redemption not only for his people but for all of creation now it might take a long time and be arduous but he is willing to wait with patience for the fullness of what has been accomplished for us by Jesus and as we wait as we suffer the Holy Spirit comes alongside gives voice to the things that we cannot put into words an illusion I would think even to a lament he continues to work in us leading us through the trials so that we might be conformed more and more to be like Jesus and this is something that God is predestined to take place those whom we predestined he called justified and glorifies Paul's confident confident that the suffering he is enduring will result in glorification for that is what happened to Jesus and will happen for all those who are in union with him whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus see understanding this process this plan

Paul looks at the persecution he is suffering and asks if God is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him for us all how will he also not give us graciously all things the full redemption that's promised all that we need to sustain us on this path to glorification God is going to provide Paul is confident of it because we shall bring a charge against God's elect it's God who justifies our standing before God is something that God has worked out for us people might accuse us but God has silenced the accusers who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us there is no condemnation Paul says at the beginning of this chapter there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and then then he addresses head on the reasons why one might doubt God's loyalty God's steadfast loyal love who shall who shall separate us who shall shall tribulation distress persecution famine nakedness or danger or sword and then then in an echo of Psalm 44 even in a similar context he writes for your sake we are being killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered and yet he ends with the soaring statement of assurance in the steadfast covenant love of God all these things knowing all these things were more than conquerors through him who loved us nothing nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus that's quite a different response isn't it quite a different response to suffering for the one

God's promise of steadfast love brought confusion for the other it brought confidence a different response why well one strong reason is the difference in revelation Paul benefits from having the full light of the story revealed in the coming of Jesus while the psalmist remains in shadows for Paul the coming of Jesus brought all the pieces of the puzzle together and with a greater clarity as to the eternal purposes of God both for his people and for frankly all the creation and this allowed him to look beyond the immediate circumstances and see them as part of a greater plan that has as its end the new heavens and the new earth glorified bodies unmitigated joy in the presence of God now that extraordinary reality that God met the sinful condition of people by putting forward his son as a propitiation for sin absolutely assures Paul that no matter what was thrown at him or he was thrown into nothing would separate him from the love of God in Christ

Jesus our Lord first of all we must acknowledge that the suffering Paul is speaking of is on account of the gospel on account of his being faithful to preach the good news not unlike the psalmist who believed he had gone out in the name of Yahweh because of it because of this faithfulness of preaching the gospel he Paul was charged with blasphemy anthonomianism idolatry he was imprisoned whipped falsely accused so the suffering he speaks of is a suffering that is captured in for your sake for your sake we are being killed all the day long and it's not to say that God is not working all things together for good for those who are called according to his purpose that is that it

will include normal human suffering that comes from living in this fallen sin corrupted world but I think Paul primarily has in view the suffering that he has been called to endure and we may be called to endure for the sake of the gospel the payoff the payoff the glory that should be revealed for being faithful to that calling far outweighs the suffering that Paul is enduring

[20 : 52] Paul has absolute assurance of God's love for him and that his deliverance his salvation is secure but that's not the case for our brother in Psalm 44 and I suggest part of this is due to the lack of revelation which doesn't offer him that kind of macro level that Paul has on what God is doing in his world but I wonder if it also might be temperament what do I mean well firstly all other psalms of lament end in praise and hope and not this one why well again I don't know him but it might just be that this dear soul is weighted toward sadness now again I don't know but I do know that there are souls that are weighted toward sadness and such souls do not profit at times at least not right away from the soaring language at the end of

Romans 8 there's a song maybe you've heard it it describes some people's hearts are built on the floodplain some people's hearts are built on the floodplain and what the songwriter means is that some people live life with a great sensitivity to the brokenness of the world so it's not a geographical stance but an emotional one a temperament a disposition a matter of the heart and that might just be true for the writer of Psalm 44 those who identify with him I'm going to read the lyrics of this song now there's a flood plain which you know is kind of the ground right next to a river that's prone to flooding every time the waters rise also in the song is named a bluff and that's like a poker time a bluff is like a high hill right that usually runs alongside of a river listen to what what this song says it's called floodplain by a woman named Sarah Groves some hearts are built on a floodplain keeping one eye on the sky for rain you work for the ground that gets washed away when you live closer closer to the life and the ebb and flow closer to the edge of

I don't know closer to that's the way it goes some hearts are built on a floodplain and it's easy to sigh on a high bluff look down and ask when have you had enough will you have the sense to come on up or will you stay closer closer to the danger and the rolling deep closer to the run and the losing streak and what brings us to our knees some hearts live here oh the river rushes to madness and the water it spreads like sadness and there's no high ground no high ground closer to the danger and the rolling deep closer to the run and the losing streak and what brings us to our knees closer to the life and the ebb and flow closer to the edge of I don't know closer to Lord please send a boat some hearts are built here do you know someone like this this is not a optimist pessimist kind of thing a glass half empty or glass half full it's a matter of the heart a capacity for empathy that is not of their making it's something with which they are endowed and it causes them to grieve it causes them to lament over personal loss but it also causes them to grieve for the loss of others God why why a heart built on the flood plane requires that others around them come alongside not with platitudes and easy answers not quoting a scripture verses though that will solve the problem or perhaps the kind of passive aggressive rebuke Paul's statement of emotional and mental health is to the point I believe Romans 12 15 rejoice with those who rejoice weep with those who weep be present with people when they rejoice be present with them when they weep when someone lives close to the flood plane it's not a lack of spirituality it's a sensitivity an inner barometer that picks up on life's dangerous weather a soul that is weighted toward sadness and it would be well to listen to them to learn from them because they know how to lament they might actually have more insight to the situation the one who's always ends up their lament with hope see people cry but Christians lament and I wonder if we would practice this discipline more would we not provide more space for a biblically honest view of the world listen go back to that language of Psalm 44 again have you ever talked to

God like that but the psalmist did God included it in his word and there are many other psalms of that kind of language and why are they there it's in order to instruct us to tell us God gets it he knows what the situation is Jesus came into the middle of this corrupt broken world and gave his life so that we might look forward to a new heavens and the new earth but between now and then we lament and there is much to lament over see if we create space we'll give permission to our brothers and sisters to express their confusion and frustration to God knowing that God has given them permission to do so why else would such language be present in his word is it not because he knows our frames that we are dust what do we confess we have a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses the incarnation is evidence that God knows the world that we live in and he has left us a songbook that reflects the reality of a broken world and we also might provide a

resource for our neighbors because they experience the brokenness of the world it's injustice it's pain it's confusion and they cry out in their own way but if we can join them in their suffering and take up their cause in prayer and let them hear us talking honestly to God sharing our confusion we become much more of a neighbor to them it's like we are the good Samaritan who helps the battered and person left for dead on the side of the road but not with surplus of material goods but with our spiritual goods with our lament to hear us address God state the complaint make the request and express our confidence in God's unfailing love

[27 : 48] I wouldn't be surprised if they might turn to you and say can you really talk to God like that see those among the church whose hearts are built in the flood plain they are a gift to the church for they force us to keep things real but their sensitivity to the brokenness of the world might mean just might mean that they need that arm of support a gentle word of assurance a gesture that indicates we will walk through this with you isn't that what our brother in Psalm 44 needs he needs assurance he needs comfort again there are some among us whose hearts are built on the flood plain and we don't want to be quick to dismiss them as just you know man there's such a drag to be around they're so depressing but they feel the pain of the world and we want to give them permission and join them in crying out to God and asking why like the child does to the parent that we talked about at the very beginning why why does this happen what are they doing they're looking to their parents to give and it makes sense of this for me and that's what we do when we lament before God

God makes sense of this for me it doesn't make sense you've promised your steadfast love why am I hung out to dry but because so many Psalms virtually all of them except to end with that word of praise when we approach God in this way with honesty of hearts and expressing our dependence upon him to make sense of the brokenness of the world that has crashed in on our lives God makes himself known he gives us reason to praise he is faithful to his steadfast love he does remember us he knows our frame that we are from dust and so we can indeed end up where all the other Psalms of lament end up with praise to our God but it begins with being honest before him crying out to him expressing our childlike questions to our great father in heaven we need that assurance those who are more prone to this kind of temperature reading of the world need our assurance that God has not forsaken them that

God has not forsaken us and when we come alongside what we're not God but we are at that moment representing God we are bringing God and his word of assurance to them when it would seem almost to cause them to despair Paul was such a person wasn't he he was almost despairing to death he says at one point because of the trial that he was under and yet just a few verses later he speaks that he doesn't despair because God brought him through it but he's not a lone man standing there he's with others others are reminding him of what God has said and that's what we can do for those who's hearts are built on the floodplain remind them remind them that God is indeed good and he will bring them through but yet to be honest about the brokenness that they are experiencing and crying out we are meant to lament we as the people of God who see the world for what it is we are meant to lament not to act like it's not broken not to act like it's there aren't problems there are problems it is broken and yet we know that God who has promised that all things there will come a day when all the causes pain all the causes sorrow all the causes crying will be done away with and we will be standing in that place free from the corruption of the world and free from the corruption that we've caused in the world and then we'll know the answer to all of our cries of lament but again between now and then God gives us permission to make our request known to make our complaint known and to call upon him to bring salvation to bring deliverance because he has promised to us his steadfast love let's pray

Lord God we take you seriously at your word this is your word God this is a word that that you have kept for us inspired by the Holy Spirit preserved by your good providence your wisdom and here it comes before us and it just it's just so real and and you just the the men who wrote these Psalms were just open-hearted before you and express their confusion and we know that this particular brother we trust somewhere along the line he he understood because you are faithful to your steadfast love so Lord when we encounter such people Lord help us remind us that it's okay it's okay for them to be confused it's okay for them to express that confusion I mean and that we won't shut them down tell them to be quiet not talk to God that way when they can just open up the scripture and say here I'm just quoting God's word back to him and so Lord help us to be more sensitive to those whose heart seems to be weighted toward this and as they pick up and they feel the the weight of the brokenness of the world Lord may we come alongside them and pray with

them and learn from them for God this is a world that is in need of salvation in need of restoration and that we want to be used of you to that end and between now and that time when that day comes and it will surely come there will be things to lament and may we not hold back and we speak our hearts out to you in Jesus name amen heard him willude I am at home because he seems to be an end-lady king and that is very reicht from her hand to him to him and watch you and I feel co Zweck the glory of this so allünde perhaps why not what do we do in need of silence that he■ed not what love to and make that he sait hide away that I've gotta hold up we can to full you can't you