

God's Anger with His Christ

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[0 : 00] Friends, lament is a very ancient way of expression, a means of expression. It's common amongst all of those who have believed in God. It is common in many, many ancient societies.

And it's an expression that I think is lamentably largely disappeared from modern Christian usage. We no longer lament. It's vanished in our practice and in my view it has vanished to our great detriment.

You see, lament is a gift from God. It is good. It can be godly. It is a gift from God for the proper expression of grief and of questioning.

Nearly one third of the book of Psalms is lament. And today I want to just look at one example. It's Psalm 89. Now, at first glance, Psalm 89 is not a lament.

But as it winds on, it is clear that it is a lament. And the height of this lament is exasperated by the fact that the first half of it is not.

[1 : 02] And my hope is that as we look at this Psalm today, that it might help us to lament in a way that is godly. However, before we look at this Psalm, we need to sort of put it in its larger biblical context.

So, come with me for a while. What I'm going to do is go from the beginning of Scripture right up to where I think this Psalm is addressed. Now, I want you to remember just the first pages of Scripture.

Remember the great picture that is painted in Genesis 1. Remember how God, the Creator, playfully and joyously speaks. And He creates a universe and He makes it a place rich in goodness. And into that place He puts humans. And His purpose is for them to live in this newly created world in peace and harmony. They're to be at peace with Him, at peace with each other.

They're to be at peace with the environment into which He's placed them. But of course, we all know, don't we, that this is not how it works out. For human sin, it shatters peace and harmony. Relationship with God is shattered.

[1 : 59] Relationship with each other is stained and tainted. And relationship with the environment becomes twisted and ugly and strained. And into that situation, you might remember God speaks His Word.

And He speaks of a child. He speaks of a woman. He speaks of the seed of this woman. And He speaks of a human being who is to come. And He promises that this offspring, this seed will be the agent for the defeat of evil.

Now, as the book of Genesis progresses, we find out more about this seed, this offspring. The language of seed suddenly becomes or gradually becomes the language of kings.

And the language of seed becomes connected with the language of kings. And so, by the end of Genesis, we are beginning to look for a king. And God promises that such a king will come from the line of Abraham.

And so, as our eyes strain into the future, we read the book of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy and Joshua and Judges. And we look and we listen for a king.

[2 : 59] And the first king arrives in the book of Samuel. But Saul is something of a disaster. And so, with God, we look for another. And finally, he arrives. King David comes. Finally, we know we have God's king.

Kingships arrive. God's future is secure. The defeat of the evil has come or will come. And that is the story of the books of Samuel. God has installed his king. But the books of kings tell us that the kings that followed David and even David to some extent are made of the same stuff as Adam and Eve.

There are notable exceptions. But generally, kings are frail. They are sinful. And instead of serving God's people, they corrupt God's people. And the end result is, as we all know in the books of kings, God acts.

The kings of Israel fail. Kingship fails. And God judges. And his people are sent into exile along with their kings. And their kings disappear from history, as it were.

Friends, this is the story. If you want to summarize from Genesis to kings, it is this. A story looking for a king. But a story that ends in the failure of exile and in desolation.

[4 : 06] That's the background for this psalm today. We don't know whether it occurs at the exile or whether it occurs, say, at the end of the reign of Josiah. But it occurs at the end when God's people know that kings, as expected, are on their way out.

So, with that in mind, open your Bible with me to Psalm 89. And I want you to look at the start of this psalm. It is strong and it is grand. I mean, this is a wonderful start to a psalm.

You think, this is terrific. This is the God I know and love and believe in. I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever. With my mouth, I will proclaim your faithfulness.

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever. Your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. Now, friends, in the original language, the very first word of this psalm is the word steadfast love.

The writer's clear, you see, he starts with, he says, this is the God I know. This is his steadfast love. He's the God who is steadfast love forever. He's a God who loves. He's a God who is faithful.

[5 : 11] And that faithfulness is firmly established as the heavens themselves are established. As you can see, the sky in place, so is God's faithfulness in place.

The words of the mouth of the psalmist are just full of the proclamation of the great goodness of this God. And then he goes on and he proclaims where God's faithfulness is directed, where it finds its focus.

Look at verses 2 and 3. Well, verses 2 and 3 say, You have said, I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to my servant David.

I will establish your descendants forever and build your throne for all generations. Friends, can you hear what God is saying? He uses the word seed just as Genesis did.

And he talks about thrones and he talks about kings and he ties seed and kings and David all together. And he says they're the one package. And he says, here's the commitment God made.

[6 : 10] And we heard about that commitment a couple of weeks ago in Psalm 2. The psalmist knows, you see, where the steadfastness of God is concentrated. God's purposes in his world are integrally tied up with David and his offspring.

He has made a covenant with his chosen king. He has sworn an oath to David. He has made great and glorious promises to him. And I mean, verses 19 to 29 are just extraordinary in their power.

He says, Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one and you said, I have set the crown on one who is mighty. I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found my servant David with my holy oil.

I anointed him. My hand will always remain with him. My arm shall also strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him. The wicked shall not humble him. I will crush his foes before me, him, and strike down those who hate him.

And my faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him. And in my name his horn shall be exalted. And I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

[7 : 14] And he shall cry to me, You are my father, my God, the rock of my salvation. And I will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Moreover, I will keep my steadfast love for him and my covenant with him will stand firm and I will establish his line forever.

And his throne as long as the heavens endure. And friends, they still endure. And so God is saying that's how long it will be. Till now and forever.

God's promise to David, can you hear it here, is absolutely rock solid. It is steadfast. He stakes his reputation on it.

Israel's kings may sin, but God will not. God will not neglect his word. He will not forsake his covenant with David. He gives his covenant with David a secure and a safe future.

Look at verses 33 to 37. I mean you can't get more categorical on this, let me say. I think this is from the mouth of God. I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.

[8 : 24] 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 and it will be established forever like the moon and enduring witness to the skies.

I mean this is categorical, isn't it? God has appointed David. He has sworn an oath to him. He's given a covenant with him. That covenant has a future. David will always have a ruling descendant. The Davidic line will be forever. Friends, this is the promise of God, the word of God. And then comes the lament.

Look at verse 38. Now I've stressed the lead up to this so that you can hear the words. Look at what the psalmist says. It is set against the unequivocal promise of God but it is equally unequivocal and strong.

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.

[9 : 35] Can you see what he's saying? He's saying you've ripped off that crown and you've just thrown it in the dirt. You have broken all his walls. You have laid his strongholds in ruin and everyone who passes by plunder him.

He's become the scorn of his neighbours. You've exalted the right hand of his foes. You've made his enemies rejoice. Moreover, you've turned back this edge of the sword and you've not supported him in battle. You've removed the scepter from his hand.

You've hurled it to the ground. You've cut short the days of his youth. You've covered him with shame. Now look at verse 38 just so that you can capture it. The word here for anointed is the Hebrew word Messiah or Christ.

And the but now in verse 38 is as strong as it sounds if not stronger. Can you hear what's being said? He's saying yes God you are full of promises. I've spent 37 verses rehearsing them.

You have given your unequivocal word but. But now, but now you, you have spurned and rejected him. But now you are full of wrath against your Christ, your Messiah.

[10 : 41] Now you have renounced the covenant with your servant. You have defiled his crown in the dust. Friends, this is lament and accusation and they're all rolled into one.

And he's saying look God, you are the God of steadfast love, of faithfulness. In your faithfulness you've given your word and that word and that promise have the whole future of Israel and humanity as their focus. But you have been unfaithful.

That's almost what he's saying, isn't it? This is a potent prayer. The sceptre that will never depart from his hand has been removed by you.

It's been hurled to the ground. The Davidic promise in the covenant is broken and failed. As verse 39 says, and it says exactly what it says. He says, you have renounced the covenant with your servant.

I mean, they're tough words to say to God, aren't they? Who's just said, I'll never renounce the covenant. He says, you have. Now with that in mind, look at the final verses of the psalm.

[11 : 42] The psalmist began with a declaration of confidence in God's steadfast love. Now it ends with this massive question. Look at verses 49 and following. He says this, Friends, this is a plea that God's steadfast love might remain, that he will yet remember his covenant and uphold and restore his Davidic kingship.

And with this, the psalm closes with a glimpse of hope. You see, Psalm 1, do you remember how Psalm 1 began? Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of. And do you remember how Psalm 2 ends with blessed are those who have refuge in the sun.

Now can you see how Psalm 89 similarly closes? It's a plaintive cry of hope. Blessed be the Lord forever. Now friends, there's Psalm 89 in outline.

Now I want to remind you of what I reminded you of a couple of weeks ago. See, my view is that Psalm 89 must not be looked at in isolation. You have to interpret Psalm 89 in the light of the whole. It needs to be looked at within the context of the whole book. And now I've got two things going on here. You should have an outline that was given to you when you came in in the newsletter. But if not, unfortunately the writing's a bit small for you to see there probably, if you've got eyes like mine.

[13 : 16] But at least you'll see the diagram. I want you to have a look at what I've got there. I want to remind you about what I said a week or two ago. First thing to remember is five books within the Psalter.

Psalm 1 functions as a sort of introduction to the book, the Psalter. Psalm 2 is a sort of introduction to book 1. It talks about God the King. And this God the King in Psalm 2, so right up front in the

book of Psalms, anoints, appoints, installs David as king.

Psalms 72 is probably a prayer by David for his son Solomon. And it's a prayer that says, look, here are the benefits and the responsibilities of kingship.

That is, he's handing on to his son. This is what kingship's about. But Psalm 89 says, well, the kings after David, they failed to do it right. And so Psalm 89 is the sort of low point of the book of Psalms. It says, look, kings have failed in their responsibilities. That's what Psalm 89 is all about in the end. The benefits, therefore, of kingship have been lost.

[14:22] And it poses this massive question. If God is king, then how can his human kings fail? If God is a king who appoints a human king and gives him an eternal kingship, then how on earth can God just take the throne off him and throw it into the dust?

Well, Psalms 90 to 150, I think, give an answer to those questions. So you can see you've got down to the bottom and now you begin to ascend up again. And these Psalms say, look, remain faithful to God despite the fact that the Davidic kingship is gone.

Remain faithful to God by continuing to take refuge in him. Remain faithful to God by continuing to have confidence in his law. Be godly like Psalm 1.

People have confidence in God's word and his promise. And then Psalms 107 to 150 have their climax in Psalm 145. For Psalm 145 is a Psalm of David.

It is the very last Psalm of David. If you want to put it this way, it is David's swan song. He's about to disappear. He will never say another word in the Psalter.

[15:34] And so his words are going to count at this point. And do you know what he does in that very last Psalm? He celebrates God the appointed, God as king. You see, in this Psalm, David praises God the king and he glories in God's kingdom.

Not in his own kingdom, but in God's kingdom. In other words, David says to God's people as they hear him speak for the last time in the book of Psalms, don't focus on my absence. Don't focus on the absence of human kings.

Focus on God and his kingdom. Focus on God the king and trust him. He's the God of steadfast love. He's the God who gives his word. He can be trusted.

He can be adored. And with that, the book of Psalms ends in a crescendo of praise as the people of God join David in exalting in God the king. So the book of Psalms ends in praise and in trust.

Now friends, can you see how the writers of Psalms, the people who put together all those 150 Psalms, can you see how they dealt with lament? Can you see what they're doing? Can you see what their attitude is?

[16:44] You see, they don't run away from God's word or promise. They listen to God's word. They listen to God's promise. They imbibe it. They love it. But they also know and listen to reality. And as they look around them, the reality is there is a massive gap between what God says and what they have encountered.

For God has said, I have set my king upon Zion. I have installed him. And they experience the desolation of exile with kings gone.

They don't deny the gap between God's word and reality. They admit the tension, but they're willing to hold on to the attention by turning their focus back to God.

And they focus on God the king. And they know that that God is good and generous and benevolent. And they know he's the God of steadfast love. And so they trust that.

And they cling to it. Despite what reality seems to look like. They trust it. They don't deny their reality, but they accept there's a greater reality in the world.

[17:45] And the greater reality that they have is a God that is God. And that can be trusted and adored even when he doesn't look as though he's doing his job. And friends, let me say, if you cannot believe this about God, then there will be times in life where you have nowhere else to go.

We might as well give up in a God if we cannot believe this about him, that is, that he is not, that he's faithful to his promises. If we cannot believe God is a God who is king and faithful, we might as well give up on faith in him.

Now, friends, I want you to notice, though, do you notice where they end? Do you remember what I said? The Psalms end with a praise of God who is king.

But it leaves this massive unanswered question which I spoke about a few weeks ago. And the question is this. If God is king, if God is faithful, if God is the God of steadfast love, then he must still be committed to the promise of a Davidic king, mustn't he?

And it's there that the New Testament helps us for, the New Testament tells us that God sends his son into the world as a Davidic king. He does what kings should do. He does what the book of Psalms says the people of God should do.

[18:56] He lives according to God's word. He lives under God's rule. But more than that, he also acts as a true king. And he has the best interests of his subjects in mind. And he lays down his life for his subjects like the kings did not do.

Friends, can you hear what the New Testament adds to the book of Psalms? The book of Psalms leaves the question lingering. And the New Testament tells us that God has not deserted his promise.

That God is a faithful king, just as the psalmist knew that he was and that they clung to. God is the God of steadfast love. God is a benevolent and kind king that they were sure he was.

And God's promise to David has its yes and its amen in Jesus. For in Jesus we see that God that they gloried in can be trusted. And that tension that they lived with has been resolved.

For God is faithful. He is the God of steadfast love. He is true. And he has shown this in his son.

Now friends, we've come a long way in just one little psalm, haven't we? It's a massive distance.

[19:59] We started at the beginning of the Bible. We've got to the end. Now I want to return to the idea of lament. I want to be frank with you. You see, I think that all of us at some time in life experience what the book of Psalms captures.

You see, if you are God's person then you know that life and fullness is found in God, don't you? I know that. You know it. You know that fullness of joy is found in his presence.

I know it. You know it. And yet at times in our lives God seems distant and he will seem distant or he will seem overwhelmingly absent.

At other times he will seem to be angry. Sometimes we'll find ourselves questioning whether he is good at all because of our circumstances. We will doubt or we'll sense that there's this massive gap between what his word says and what we are experiencing.

And we will find ourselves knowing that God is good but yet we'll find ourselves saying to ourselves this sort of dual thing. On the one hand we'll be saying like the psalmist O Lord God of hosts who is mighty like you O Lord your faithfulness surrounds you your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens as much as the sky is in there in the sky you know the heavens are in the sky so your faithfulness is.

[21:15] But we might also find ourselves saying to each other and to ourselves how long O Lord will you hide yourself forever how long will your wrath burn like fire remember how short my time is for what vanity have you created all mortals who can live and never see death who can escape the power of Sheol and in between those two extremes is the reality of life what we desire what we thank God for what anguish we feel the questioning we have about justice and judgment the fear that we have about abandonment protest longing to be at home in His presence longing for reconciliation longing for just multitudes of things so what do we do while we wait in this world sort of caught between these two things what do we do well first I want to suggest three or four things today they're just very short things first do you know what the laments of scripture do and particularly this one

I mean this lament this is no fudge is it this is no fudge I mean he's been very frank and open with God hasn't he he has said this is what you said this is what I'm experiencing you see like the psalmist we must not fudge that's what the lament psalms tell us in God's seeming absence we can approach him with boldness we can plead with him we can be honest with him we can express our anguish to him we can tell him look God I seek you and I long to be back in intimacy with you we can long for the reality to match his word friends psalms like Psalm 89 tell us we can talk to God and that what we are experiencing is not to be explained away it is to be worked through and to be worked through openly and frankly second we should bring such angst and such doubt into the open friends we live in a Christian world that has forgotten lament except perhaps in the privacy of our own hearts if you don't believe me turn up to a Bible study group and tell people what you often say you know what you might say in your heart at times you won't turn up and say it at a Bible study group because people won't know what to do with you because we don't know how to lament anymore and we don't do it publicly anymore friends the reasons that we have gone this way I think are multiple but they are deplorable you see one Old Testament scholar argues that no text in the New Testament prevents a Christian from lamenting and I think he is right we cannot find any New Testament text which would express the idea that faith in Christ excludes lamentation from a

person's relationship with God no friends you see many Christians myself included are rightly lamenting the loss of lament among Christians I think we need to learn to lament by all means let us sing songs of rejoicing let's rejoice in the Lord always friends if you notice we never sing songs that are lament a third of the book of Psalms is lament but I mean if you can think of a song that's a lament a hymn in our hymn book show me afterwards because there aren't many of them we don't include them but let's rejoice in the Lord always but let's urge and let's urge each other on when God is our light and our salvation but friends as the New Testament says let's weep with those who weep when people are lamenting let's get alongside them and cry out to God with them and on behalf of them friends as we remembered last week for our brothers and sisters in parts of the world who are dying because of their faith let's groan and sigh before God for them that life is not yet what God promised it would be and let's ourselves publicly bring before God our doubt and our grief friends dropping of the reading of the

Psalms in church I think is a very sad thing for a lot of reasons but one of them is that it's stripped out one of the only remaining echoes of lament within the church you see lament is not blasphemy it is an appropriate and honest response to God in a world which is still subject to futility and groaning about that gap between what God wants and what we experience is a godly response even God's rich gift of the spirit in Romans 8 helps us to groan in that sort of way and to say things that are unutterable and often too deep and to give us signs that are too deep for words third thing do as the psalmist does so you continue to nurture our desire for God in the midst of distress you see although subjectively we feel that God is distant we know that fullness of life is found in him he alone is God he alone is worthy of worship in his presence we know his fullness of joy he loves us we can be confident in his love we will see his goodness if not in this life in the life to come and finally here's my last thing we should acknowledge that we have a guarantee that the psalmist did not have you see he knew that God had forged him he knew that God had given great and glorious promises to him and his people he knew that God was a great king who could be trusted to bring about his purposes and fulfill his word but he stared into the future and didn't know what we know he didn't know what we know and still hoped he did not know that God has fulfilled all his promises in

Jesus the anointed Jesus the Christ so what is a sort of whispered plaintive cry from him at the end of the psalm is a joyous refrain for us isn't it blessed be the Lord forever amen and amen let's pray together Hail to Church from heaven the first oh Webb I can happen to Andrew and when you asked the host of poem," tō,"": talking about—nn