

Hope-Filled Tears

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[0 : 00] would you pray with me? Father, you know the pain, you know the brokenness that lies deep down in every one of our hearts.

And so would you speak to us in those deep places tonight? Would you make yourself present? And would you shine your bright light of hope in the midst of our darkness, we ask.

In your name, amen. Darkness inevitably comes into our lives. Suffering and friction is a part of human existence this side of heaven.

And so the question is, what are we going to do when we experience it? How are we going to live in the midst of it? And that's what Psalm 102 is about.

To put it simply, I think God wants to teach us about lament this morning. He wants to teach us about grief and mourning. He wants to teach us what it means to seek the face of the living God in the midst of suffering.

[1 : 25] And what it means to cry out to God in the midst of affliction. That's what Psalm 102 is about. Now lament is not a popular thing in our churches these days.

Am I right? We would much rather avoid it like the plague to put it simply. I actually went online and did a search for Psalm 102 because I didn't quite know what to do with it.

And I found, I went to some of my favorite sites with all these preachers and nobody had preached on it. I'm talking people who preach for 40 years.

And then I went to Regent Library and I did a little search looking for books on lament psalms. And I found about two books. And that was it.

We would much rather deal with the happy stuff, right? With that which is lighthearted and makes us feel good and makes us laugh.

[2 : 24] It's just a lot easier to gloss over the suffering and the pain. It's a lot easier because it's messy. And when you stare in the face of darkness, most of the time you don't know what to do with it.

But one of the beautiful things about our scriptures, my friends, is that they have a tremendous realism about human life. The Bible never glosses over human suffering and affliction.

Rather, it devotes whole books to it. And it gives us prayers and psalms and words so that we know what to say to God when we are in the midst of deep darkness.

So, brothers and sisters, if there's one thing I can tell you with certainty today, it's that you're going to suffer at some point. Affliction and darkness will be your portion at some point in your life.

And the question is, what are you going to do when you're there? who are you going to go to and what are you going to say? Psalm 102 helps us know who to go to and what to say.

[3 : 41] Now, if I'm correct, there are some of you here today who have relationships that feel like they're breaking at their very foundation. And there's probably others of you who are struggling with the fact that you have dreams that have seemed to fall in at the wayside.

And others of you who have hopes that seem that they remain unfulfilled year after year. There are others of you who are experiencing sickness and disease that is debilitating.

There are others of you who I'm sure have lost loved ones over the recent years and you're still grieving from it. And there are others of you, lots of us I'm sure, in the midst of Vancouver winter, that are experiencing darkness and depression so deep that just getting out of bed in the morning seems like the biggest feat of your life.

It feels like climbing Mount Everest. And there are others of us who have sin in our lives that seems to have a grip on us and just won't let go.

And there are some of us who are actually ridiculed and scorned for our faith, whether it be in the workplace, in the marketplace, whether that be at school or even in the comfort of our own home.

[5 : 03] And the question is, what are we going to do when we're in that place? Who are we going to run to? And what are we going to say? And Psalm 102 helps us this evening.

He gives us words to speak to God when we feel like we have no words. would you pray with me again? Living God, would you just speak through your word now, we ask?

And Holy Spirit, would you blow through each of our hearts and enable us to hear what you want to say tonight? Amen. All right.

It would be good to have a Bible in front of you. There are four things that we learn about lament, about crying out to God in this passage.

Number one, lament addresses God. Number two, lament describes the suffering. Number three, lament discovers hope.

[6 : 15] And number four, lament encounters Jesus. Addresses God, describes the suffering, discovers hope, and encounters the Lord Jesus.

That's where we're going. First, lament addresses God. Look at verses one and two with me. Now it says in your Bibles, hear my prayer, O Lord.

The ordering of this verse could be switched. It could be, O Lord, hear my prayer. And this is not an insignificant detail. The very first word of this psalm is the name of God.

O Lord. This is the personal name of God. This is the God of Israel. The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph.

This is a personal God. that's where the psalmist begins. O Lord. The psalmist comes to do business with God.

[7 : 18] He gets in the face of God. He cries out to God and says, God, would you look upon my pain? And he cries out to God and he says, God, would you hear my cries to you and would you answer me?

O Lord, hear my prayer. Let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me and answer me speedily in the day when I call.

Brothers and sisters, when we suffer affliction, I think our natural inclination is to go everywhere else for refuge and safety other than God. But here, the psalmist goes to God.

God's people go to God when they suffer. God's people go to the personal God when they are in affliction. And God's people go to God when the darkness overwhelms them.

That's the first point. Is that lament addresses the living God. Point number two. Lament describes the suffering.

[8 : 34] It describes the suffering. Lament does not shy away from telling God about the details of your personal pain and situation. It actually does exactly the opposite.

It describes to God how deep your pain actually is. Look at verses three and through eleven with me. The psalmist in the midst of his desperation, he does not turn to cool, calm, collected prose, words, but he turns to intense, emotional, heart-wrenching poetry.

He turns to poetry and he pushes language almost to the breaking point in order to describe his personal plight and his personal situation to God.

He wants God to see just how bad it is to be him right now. verse three is a picture of the brevity of human life.

Just how short it is. For my days pass away like smoke and my bones like a furnace. Verse four is a picture of destitution, of spiritual and physical barrenness.

[9 : 44] My heart is struck down like grass and has withered, literally dried up. I forget to eat my bread. Verse five is a picture of exhaustion, of life-draining agony.

Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh. Verses six and seven are a picture of loneliness and isolation, of abandonment and despair.

I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places. I lie awake. I am like a sparrow on the housetop. As if loneliness and isolation wasn't bad enough.

Verse eight is a picture of being mocked and ridiculed by people in the midst of your isolation. All the day my enemies taunt me. Those who dried me use my name for a curse.

And then verse nine, I think the most vivid for me, is a picture of mourning and grief. It's literally a picture of a feast. There's bread and there's drink, but the psalmist's feast is a feast of sorrow.

[10 : 59] For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears like my drink, with my drink. And then in verse ten, the psalmist feels acutely that his situation is not merely his own fault, but that somehow God has to do with this.

Somehow God is responsible for this. And he feels the pain of that. Look at verse ten. Because of your indignation and anger, for you have taken me up and you've thrown me down. And then in verse eleven, the psalmist finally reaches the point of absolute despair. Death is knocking at the door. His days are drying to a close. My days are like an evening shadow, says the psalmist.

I wither away, like grass. In these nine verses, there is not one ounce of light.

There is no hope. The psalmist paints a picture of utter darkness. It's bleak. It's intense.

[12:08] the psalmist wants to paint a picture so that God will see how painful his situation is. And so that God will hear his cries for help.

And friends, some of you who are here tonight need to know that it's okay to talk to God like this. It's in our scriptures. others. Some of you here tonight need to know that God wants you to get this honest with him.

He wants us to get this raw and get this direct with him. He wants us to engage him in our pain. And some of you need to know that that's okay.

And some of you who come here tonight I'm sure are lamenting over things but also there are those of us who have places in our hearts where we have not grieved or lamented things that have happened to us or things, situations we've been in from the past.

And maybe God is calling us tonight to actually bring that out and bring it to him and lament and describe it to him and let him know what it feels like.

[13:24] This is what a part of what the church is called to do to cry out. Point number three lament discovers hope.

Yes there is utter despair in this picture but somehow hope breaks in. Lament discovers hope in verses through 13 through 28 hope is found in who God is.

Hope is found in who God has promised and what God has promised to do. Lament discovers hope. I remember discovering hope about four years ago.

I think it was one of the first times I actually truly experienced it. I just moved to Canada and I've been here about five months or so and I was studying at Regent College.

I was in my second semester at Regent College. I'd just broken up with a girl who I'd been dating for over a year and I was certain I was going to marry her. And so I was absolutely broken hearted.

[14:35] And I came to the school Regent College expecting it to be this grand experience, very excited about studying, which I was, still am, but I found myself alone on weekends and not many friends.

You know it's pretty bad when you're studying Hebrew on Friday nights. It's just not good. Some of you are probably looking at me like it's your own fault you were alone, but it's okay. It's probably true.

But the other thing is that I was experiencing sin in my life at this time that was absolutely crushing me. I mean I felt like I was in chains and there was no way I was going to break free.

It was, I was experiencing some depression with all these things kind of combining together. And there was a turning point for me one Monday morning though. And it happened in a conversation with a dear man.

He was about 60 years old. I shared some of my experience with him and he didn't say much, but he dared to tell me that there was hope.

[15:40] He dared to look me straight in the eye and to say, Jordan, God's not done with you. There's hope because you have a God who is gracious.

There's hope because you have a God who promises to redeem. And at that moment it's not like all of my brokenheartedness and all of my isolation and lack of friends and all of my sin just disappeared far from the truth.

faith. But something happened. Light, the light of hope finally broke in. And I could see my situation in a different picture.

In the picture of who God is and what God promises to do. And this is exactly what is happening in this psalm. The psalmist is finally catching a glimpse of who God is and what he has promised to do for his people.

God is the sovereign king who will redeem. Look at verses 12 and 13 with me. But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever.

[16:50] You are remembered throughout all generations. You will arise and have pity on Zion. It is time to favor her. The appointed time has finally come.

Now some of you may be wondering why the heck does the psalmist move from his own situation to talking about Zion? Like what in the world does Zion have to do with the psalmist's situation?

At least that is the first question I asked. To put it simply, the psalmist and Zion are in the exact same situation. Now there is a huge back story here and I am not going to get into it very intensely. But it goes something like this. Zion is Jerusalem. Jerusalem. It is the headquarters of God's people. It is the place where God's temple dwells and where God dwells with his people. But it is in shambles at this point. Jerusalem has recently been sacked by foreign enemies. The people of God have been deported into foreign lands and the house of God, the temple, has been reduced to stones and rubble and dust.

[18:01] We see this in verse 14. For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust. Jerusalem was in a place of utter desperation and the people of God were longing that God would appear in his glory and finally do something to rectify the situation.

They were longing for God to come and bring them out of exile, to bring them back to Jerusalem, to rebuild this temple so that God could dwell there in all of his glory.

And so the psalmist, in his own personal longing for redemption, finds comfort in the fact that God has promised that he will redeem his people, that he will redeem his people who are in shambles. And the psalmist thinks that that means God will redeem his situation too, because he's in shambles. for it is the God of Israel who is the God of the psalmist.

It is the God of this chosen people who is the God of the individual person. So when the psalmist looks for hope, he finds it in that God has promised to be the one who will save his people.

[19:19] Verse 16 says, he's promised to build up Zion, to appear in his glory, to regard the prayer of the destitute, and to not despise their prayer.

And when this happens, the psalmist also says something wonderful is going to happen. There's going to be worship on Mount Zion like there's never been worship before.

And this isn't just going to be the people of God, but all the nations and all the peoples and all the kings are going to flood to Mount Zion, and they're going to sing to the Lord.

Look at verse 15. Nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory. Verse 21, that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together and kingdoms to worship the Lord.

The whole world is going to join in the one chorus. The one worship of the one true God, says the psalmist. And so the psalmist hopes.

[20:32] He laments, but he hopes. He hopes that God will be who he always has been for his people. That he will be the God who redeems and restores.

And the psalmist believes that somehow this means he will be redeemed too. Because it's the God of Israel who is the God of the psalmist. Lament discovers hope, we find.

There is a point, my friends, where in our despair, we somehow learn that in the midst of our tears, God has us in a much larger story.

That our tears are part of God's much larger purposes for the world. That somehow our individual stories of suffering get woven into the fabric of God's story of redemption.

And that's what we're discovering here. And that's what leads us to the last point. that lament encounters Jesus.

[21:49] It encounters Jesus. If you stay with us for the next couple months, which I hope you do, I hope I haven't scared you away quite yet. Just so you know, all the sermons here aren't this intense.

But as we continue in the book of Mark, in the gospel of Mark, it won't be long before we reach a dreadful, dreadful Friday morning outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Where Lord Jesus Christ, hanging on a tree, scorned by the ones he came to save, arms stretched out, lungs gasping for air, will cry out to his heavenly Father, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And in those very words, the lament of the whole world finds its climax. The cries of every person that have ever been uttered throughout all of history reach their climax as the Savior of the world hangs on a cross and cries out, why have you forsaken me?

Brothers and sisters, when you lament, you do not lament alone. God laments with you. The Lord Jesus Christ himself cries out with you, my God, my God, why?

[23 : 20] Our God hears our cries so clearly because our God has experienced our suffering most deeply in the cross. You do not suffer alone.

Jesus suffers with you. But there's more to the story. In our psalm that we see the psalmist not only laments, but he cries out in hope, Lord, would you arise in your glory and save Zion?

And so we see that the cross of Good Friday eventually leads to the empty tomb of Easter Sunday. The Lord comes bursting forth through the grave.

the crucified one is actually alive. And God appears in Zion to save his people. And so we learn that lament is not the final word, but hope is.

Resurrection is. The empty tomb is the final word. And so we can leave today hoping in our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only because he laments with us, which he does, but also because through his resurrection he promises us that there will be an end to our cries of lament.

[24 : 39] That one day there will be no more pain. There will be no more suffering. There will be no more tears. And that the Lord Jesus Christ himself will wipe every tear from our eye and every cry from our lips.

And we long and look forward to that day with great hope. And so you can go today in hope for that reason even in the midst of your pain.

Thanks be to the living God. Amen.