

Time to Lament

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[0 : 00] Well, if you'd like to follow along, it would be helpful to open your Bibles to Samuel on page 254-255.

And as you do that, Dan, I wanted to ask you, did you notice that as you turn clear around for repentance, there was a wonderful illustration going on behind you. There was a little girl going like this.

Which feels more like my repentance, actually. I've covered everything. My wife, Bron, and I have begun looking at houses and condos.

And it is very, very interesting in Vancouver what people regard as important in their houses. Just a couple of little things.

They do not build houses for books anymore. There's no space for books. No wall space for bookshelves. And there's very little room for having groups to come in and visit.

[1 : 10] Instead, the biggest room in the house is the room built for entertainment. And above the fireplace is a great big television screen. Please, if you've done this, don't worry.

And the other big space is bathrooms. Bathrooms are acres now. They're huge with all sorts of things. It's just very interesting to see what's important in different households and to build it.

And what's true for our houses is true for the house of God as well. Because what's important in the household of God is not always what we think is important.

And what's unimportant is not always what we think is unimportant. Jesus said it this way. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[2 : 11] Just different things are important in the household of God. And at the centre of God's household, the most important thing is the Son of God. God's Messiah, the one God anointed to be the King, the Christ.

And in a way, the story of the Bible is the story of God creating and making a household, a family, a home, a community.

So that he might come and dwell with us and share himself with us. That's the story of the Bible.

And the way he does that is by giving to his people a Messiah and giving to the Messiah his people. It's very important for today's passage. You can't separate Messiah from God's people. You can't separate God from his household. Last week we finished 1 Samuel.

Today we begin the second book. And we've got to be careful of taking the celebrity approach. The stories, they're just so fantastic, aren't they? Last week, the Witch of Endor. But we've got to avoid the celebrity approach, you know, where the heroes are David and Saul and miss what's really going on.

[3 : 22] The thing we've got to keep in mind is that both Saul and David were God's messiahs. The Hebrew word for anointing is Messiah, Christ's.

And whereas Saul was the people's choice, outwardly impressive, inwardly empty, now the promises of God rests on David.

And as you could see and as you heard Nathan read, the book of 2 Samuel begins in a minor key, verse 1. David hears about the death of Saul.

And you might expect David to grab a hold of the reins of power, but he does not. Because there's something much bigger going on. Bigger than a political stoush.

Bigger than the conflict between two kings. These early chapters, in fact, all the way up to chapter 7, are about the house of God, the house of Israel, the house of Judah.

[4 : 19] And God is building his house. And what this passage today shows us is what's important in the house. Big bathroom or not? Big bathroom or not?

Lot's pitiful. Words of death. Incils for life. Big bathroom.

And Sid is the human. He says, they've stolen past you. And David's looked at them both. And David's eyes focus a little and they say, and he says how do you know they're dead and what follows in verses 6 to 10 is a cynical manipulation of the truth by the runner for his own personal and political gain you see we know don't well if you were here last week we know from the last chapter of 1 Samuel what happened we know that Saul killed himself that's what the narrator told him even his body guard refused to kill him and so the runner comes he's got a little bit of truth in his story but he twists it for his own advantage and he's about to find out what's important in the house of house of God and lying is not one of those things and it backfires very badly so let me give you a David short translation of verses 6 to 10 the man says look I just happened to be on Mount Gilboa and just by accident I happened to be near King Saul and he was badly injured and he called me over and he asked me to finish him off and I did what any compassionate caring considerate person would do

I put him out of his misery there was no chance he wasn't going to survive long he'd signed his DNR I was only motivated by what was best for him it wasn't really a mercy killing it wasn't even euthanasia I helped him die with dignity by the way have you noticed how the language of killing people at the beginning and at the end of life moves from being negative to neutral to being positive death with dignity and then the runner says oh I almost forgot I brought these symbols of royal office that I pilfered from Saul's body this crown and the royal arm band and I brought them straight to you David because I know you're the real messiah and you know if I give these to you I'm going to help make you the legitimate king he's had such a difficult time of it here here in my hand is the solution to all your difficulties just take them and the nation will be yours and he thinks that he's putting the messiah in his debt he's looking to earn his way into the favor of God's house to use God's house he's looking for a government job for a plum position but he could not be more mistaken he expects David and his merry men to suddenly burst into cheers but look at verse 11 David took hold of his clothes and he tore them and so did all the men who were with him a sign of grief and they mourned and they wept and they fasted until evening for Saul and Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel because they had fallen by the sword it's a terrible miscalculation by the runner he's failed to reckon with the fact that he's not dealing with politics he's not dealing with ordinary kingship he's dealing with the kingdom of God the house of the living God God's people and his messiah and David and his men weep openly and they mourn with deep sorrow David's not glad that Saul's dead far less Jonathan David's not going to look at this from the point of view his own political advantage because David is God's messiah he loves the household of God he's not going to happily take this crown and wipe off the blood from this self-serving scavenger and put it on his head you see that the household of God is not the place for posturing or manipulation it's the place of genuine honor it's the place of sorrow and in his grief David questions the man further verse 13 and the runner admits that he's a landed immigrant in Israel that he knows the laws and he lives by the jurisdiction of the house of Israel and so David says to him verse 14 how is it then you are not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed verse 16 after giving the order to kill him he says your blood be on your head for your own mouth has testified against you saying I have killed killed the Lord's anointed this is the heart of the runner's lie he thought the Lord's anointed was just any other man to be disposed of at his own decision but he could not be more wrong and what is it that makes the messiah different from every other human it is the divine apostrophe he is the Lord's anointed Lord's apostrophe he does not belong to a political party he doesn't belong to a movement he belongs to God he's God's own person elevated from the rest of humanity to represent

[10 : 12] God and it is no man's place to lift their hand against him to kill the Lord's anointed is not so different from trying to kill God and so the runner's reward is death and I just draw your attention to this because this is a very common mistake to look at the church the household of God and think this is an ordinary human volunteer institution that it's there to meet my needs God is intensely concerned about the health of his people of his household he could say he's jealously concerned the foundation of our life is the person of Jesus Christ and any true spiritual transformation any growth any life that we have comes from him and the way we enter into the household of God of course is by placing Jesus Christ at the center of our lives and beginning to build our lives on him

but here is the first thing this passage teaches us that the thing of highest import in God's house is God's messiah he is central the messiah of God the Lord's messiah secondly the household of God has a messiah who is a man of sorrows and in this section the second section is the lament from verses 17 to 27 do you find it interesting that the first thing David does when he hears of Saul's death is not to put on the crown and armlet you know he doesn't get doesn't build a throne and say to the blokes carry me back into Israel he doesn't powwow with the chiefs to find his most savvy move what he does is he creates a vehicle so that his people may grieve and he writes a public lament which may be taught to the people to sing it's this is not the spontaneous outburst of grief of weeping in verses 11 and 12 this is a form of words that are both restrained and passionate and they are a container which give the people of God a way of speaking their grief I know it's hard for us to see this but David is not venting he is lamenting and they are very very different venting is about me and my feelings lamenting is about something bigger venting is about catharsis and therapy and closure lamenting is about meaning and significance and truth and it's acknowledging evil is real and it matters and it affects us and learning to lament is very important in the household of God because the house is built on the Messiah who is a man of sorrows and I've been listening recently to

Christians debate Christopher Hitchens the late Christopher Hitchens who defined himself in the last debate I listened to not as an atheist but as an anti-theist and the Hitchens view which is very common is that Christians we Christians are dangerously deluded and we follow a cult which glorifies a criminal executed on a cross who taught dangerous fairy tales and when we gather together in groups like this we turn a blind eye to evidence and we turned a blind eye to reality and we just we just do this to make ourselves feel better and to be fair I have been to some Christian gatherings that would give you that impression but from this we learn the biblical worship is facing all of reality and seeking to respond with all of who we are do you know by far the largest proportion of psalms are laments they're not happy joyful I mean the psalm we read this morning is a massive lament because you see life in the community in the household of God is not cut off from reality and what lamenting does is it gives liturgical shape to our grief our life is not just joy joy joy there is joy it's not just trying to get into the mood we're building on a Messiah who says blessed are those who mourn they should be comforted but you see you can't do this if you're just rushing off to the next thing if your mind is already occupied by what's going on this afternoon I think true lament is a little like the weekly practice of Sabbath for a moment I stop and I remember I am not the one in complete control and that if I give up my control for just a moment for just a day the sun will still rise and the planets will stay in the orbit and so I'm able to put things down and rest on God this is a practice Christians do each week

I think lament is doing the same thing it's shifting the locus of control from me to God it's putting down my agenda it's relinquishing my busy plans it's acting as though God's the one who's powerful and it's placing the burden on his shoulders he's the powerful one you see I think that's why the key refrain which comes three times in the lament is how the mighty are fallen 19 25 27 the focus is our powerlessness our lack of control what we've lost and at the heart of the lament is not just David's personal loss it's what it means for the house of Israel look at verse 19 the first kind of heading of the lament your glory oh Israel is slain on your high places how the mighty have fallen you see Saul wasn't just another man Saul was the Lord's Messiah the first one of God's representatives his death is not just a political tragedy it's not it's not about politics or personality or popularity it's about the household the family of God the glory of God and Saul's death means that something precious and irreplaceable has been lost it's a loss for the house of Israel that's why in verse 20 he immediately goes on to address the Philistines tell it not in

Gath publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice the daughters of the uncircumcised exult David laments that so what Saul's death is going to mean for the people of God the death of the Lord's anointed is going to bring the people of God into shame because shame and dishonor that's directed to the Messiah will always reflect on the people of God and shame and dishonor directed on the people of God will always reflect on the Messiah we're together and do you remember last week this is exactly what happened the Philistines after the defeat sent they circulated a new gospel around the land of Philistine singing the Lord of Israel is dead glory to Ash-Tah David's saying what is truly lamentable is that the glory of God is being pilfered it's being stolen given to given to idols that's why when David comes to Saul and Jonathan in verse 23 he says in death they were not divided that's the thing

I mean do you remember Jonathan Jonathan was the crown prince he stood to be the next the next king but he let go of his right because he believed the word of God and he said to David I will serve you and yet even even though he was loyal to David he remained loyal to Saul proof is he died at his side in the battlefield I think it's a stunning thing for Jonathan to do he embodies what it is to live out to live out the faith when there's no playbook because he made his decision based on what was best for the house of Israel and I think this also explains the personal reference in verse 26 which lots of people struggle over just look down at verse 26 I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan very pleasant have you been to me your love to me was extraordinary surpassing the love of women you may not know this and you may not care to know this but it's become trendy among some commentators to claim this demonstrates that David and Jonathan had a sexual relationship that when it says his love your love surpassed the love of women that they are involved sexually which just goes to prove that nothing nothing remains untouched by our desire to over sexualize everything and so you may not care to know this either but the conservative commentaries go to go hard to work and they prove that the word love here is never used for sexual relationships it's used for covenant partners business countries and that sort of thing my own view is that that whole debate misses the point that the friendship between Jonathan and David was about much more than just the two of them it was about the house of Israel and God's purposes and although it's important although it's very difficult for some commentators to imagine there is something more important than sexual expression

[19 : 35] I think their friendship demonstrates there's something more important than marriage and sexuality it's the house of God so here in this lament I want you just to notice those of you who attend funerals this is not a celebration of life it is not an individualistic psychology of grief it is a communal articulation of the truth of evil in the face of God its purpose is not grief management or closure as Christians we're not interested in closure death is not lovely it's not beautiful however you mask it our Messiah is a man of sorrows who's tasted death for us in the household of God we know that all our wounds can never be healed short of resurrection which is why we look to a Messiah who can show us the other side of death life beyond the tomb however here we are in the household of God and this is the household of God and the first thing the passage teaches us is that the household at the centre is Jesus Christ and the second thing is that this man David who is the Messiah here who later dances naked happy before the Lord he is a man of sorrows acquainted with grief and he's showing us the way of the cross as well so thirdly chapter 2 1 to 11 the house of God has a Messiah who loves unity this is a beautiful little section until verse 8 and from verse 8 for the next few weeks we're heading to civil war but David does all he can to unify the people of God again now the public lament is over what's the first thing he does he doesn't put out a public survey he doesn't you know get the strategy session going he goes to God directly to God and he says what should I do and the Lord says go back to Judah and when he does in verse 4 the men of Judah anoint him king you might say hang on wasn't he anointed 16 chapters ago by Samuel well yes he was but that was a private anointing and now the men of Judah publicly proclaim what God had intended and he is made king of Judah now I need to just push the pause button and give a little geography are you okay with this geography in church very important there is a north Israel and there is a south Israel and sometimes the word Israel refers to the whole nation both north and south usually Israel refers to the north of Israel confusingly and the south is referred to as Judah okay north Israel Israel south Israel Judah and Saul came from the north from the tribe of Benjamin and David came from the south from Bethlehem in Judah and Saul when he was king had made all his relatives in Benjamin very wealthy through nepotism but David's first act as king is to reach out to a city in the north and to honour them for what they had done and the city is the city of Jabesh Gilead and there is a little back story to this early on in 1 Samuel when Saul was first king

Saul saved the people of Jabesh Gilead from death and from being maimed and they never forgot it if you have your bible open turn back one page to the last verses of 1 Samuel 31 please and you remember the gruesome ending of 1 Samuel 31 after the Philistines killed Saul and his sons they took their bodies and nailed them up on the city walls of Bethshan verse 11 but when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan and they came to Jabesh and burned them there and took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days it's a very interesting little action isn't it drawn attention to that's how the book finishes 1 Samuel doesn't change anything it doesn't bring Saul or

his sons back to us again but a great personal cost risk they cross enemy lines at night and they take the bodies of Saul and his sons and they honour them with burial this is still the way in Judaism there is a holy society of volunteers within Judaism called the Shevra Kaddish and they prepare the bodies of the dead for burial and this is what happens when they come into the presence of the dead body they address the body by their Hebrew name asking forgiveness for any indignity that they might have to visit upon them as they work and then they wash the body twice the first time covering every part of the body that's not being washed and then after the second washing they clothe the body in the garments of the priests from a temple and place in a simple coffin and during the first coffin sorry the first washing those who are performing this ceremony sing and they sing some words from the Song of Songs his head is the finest gold his locks are wavy black as raven his eyes are like doves beside streams of waters etc etc his lips are lilies his arms are rods of gold his body is polished ivory his mouth is most sweet he is altogether desirable this is my beloved this is my friend

O daughters of Jerusalem I think it's an amazing way of honouring the dead but in chapter 2 verse 5 verse 5 when David hears what the men of Jabesh have done they've not just disposed of the body honourably they've shown loyalty to the Messiah who saved them their action is one of care to the Messiah you see verse 5 David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh and said to them may you be blessed by the Lord because you showed loyalty to Saul your Lord and buried him and now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness etc this is the opposite of manipulation and exploitation because David knows and loves the unity of the household of God he speaks as the Lord's anointed and he holds out the blessing of God and the goodness of God to these people in the north because he knows that the way God's blessing is going to come to them is through the Lord's anointed it's an olive branch to a group of people in the north it's winsome and it's winning and it's the first act of David's kingship it's an act of friendship but the loveliness is disrupted by a blast of realpolitik from verse 8 onwards we plunge back into the backroom power wars which leads to civil war and we'll pick that up next week but let me just conclude what we've seen this week I started by talking about what's important in different houses and this is what's important in God's house God is building on his Messiah and the Messiah is at the centre and heart of what God's doing God gives himself to us as he gives the Messiah and you know in the New Testament Jesus shouts out look he says to the world me and the children God has given me I am proud to call them brothers and sisters and here's how you can tell that you're part of the house of God Jesus is at the centre for you too and there's a growing love and a growing devotion and a serving of him and of the household of those who belong to him there's a growing sense I think that the issues to do with the household of God are supremely important that it's not just a great privilege to belong it's a privilege to serve and to build and I'm going to make life decisions based on what's best for the household of God and since the Messiah is the centre you can't put him in your debt you can't earn favour with him that's not what he's for he's a man of sorrows and he tasted death for us and he continues to hold out the goodness of God and the grace of God and draws us into what he is doing building God's house where you and I are living stones built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and in the end the New Testament tells us when the building is finished

God the Father will come and he will dwell bodily with us forever and until then we love Christ and share Christ and build the body of Christ and join God in what he is doing so let's kneel and pray thanks man Father Father we are here this morning we are thankful to be alive we are thankful to be able to worship you in freedom and in this season of Lent as we look forward to the great celebration that is Easter may we realize the importance of this time of year as we focus on what you gave up for us and become aware of our shortcomings help us to confess them to you and to seek your will for our lives that we may be better witnesses for you help us to obtain a real sense of sorrow for our sins for the things we have done that we ought not to have done

[30 : 44] Lord in your mercy hear our prayer as we think of our place in the world we pray for our leaders civic and spiritual we pray for our queen for our prime minister premier the politicians that govern us govern us locally we ask for direction for them and for our church leaders we pray for each of them we ask the direction of your Holy Spirit in all that they do may your spirit guide direct and bless in all aspects of our church life that we as a local congregation and others as part of the church worldwide may continue to grow in the knowledge of Christ and rest in the assurance that we are God's children redeemed by the blood of Christ and we pray for our

Antic parishes specifically this week for the church of the resurrection in Nova Scotia and Celebration Church in Barrie, Ontario give their ministries or ministers the grace they need to help their congregations and lead them in a loving way that will bring them to a fuller life in Christ and help the congregations to minister to their friends and neighbors in a way that will lead both to a fuller knowledge of you Lord in your mercy hear our prayer we pray for Susan Norman in her inter-varsity ministry for Josh Stranghold we pray for the guidance of your spirit as he seeks to minister in an unsettled part of the world and help him to see the ways in which he can minister to Arabs with a gospel that is anathema to some which also means the possibility of death for those who accept

Christ as their savior give the hearers the wisdom and encouragement to accept the gospel for what it is life in Christ and give Susan and Joss the comfort of your spirit as they face obstacles to the spread of the gospel and for the wisdom to deal with the daily events that come up that draw them away from their ministry focus and help them and us to pray for strength and guidance Lord in your mercy hear our prayer we pray for our world as well there's so many areas that are in crisis at one time or another seems so difficult for us to know how to pray especially for Syria at this moment the political and civil unrest there elections it just seems like an interminable fight give us your church to know how to deal with these things for those in our church who are sick we pray specifically we think of

Derek Rowena Merv Susan Chris and Brian we also pray for the ministry of living waters their officers were destroyed by fire this last week and help those who are trying to put the pieces back together to know where to turn and what to ask you to help for those also who are recovering we pray too often we pray at the specific time and then forget about things but there's a lot of rebuilding sometimes that needs to be prayed for and in the same way for those who are bereaved we ask for strength it's not easy to adjust even after months and so we ask you to make us continually aware of those who have needs in our church and at the same time

Lord we thank you for those who meet regularly to pray for our church and its ministries we thank you for those who have a ministry of caring for those who are sick and hurting and above all we thank you for answered prayers Lord in your mercy hear a prayer and finally as the apostle Paul wrote now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever Amen thank you for are fucking.

[36 : 10] you you you you you you you you you you