

Sunday 24 March 2019
House Group Notes
Lament in Psalm 44

As Christians we are challenged with the difficulty of holding on to hope while also persevering in prayer.

- Have you ever seen any impressive example of persevering in prayer?
- Have you ever seen Christian hope put forward in a way that seemed unkind to people that were suffering?
- How can we hold on to hope while also having proper respect for the pain that people might be in?

Churches seem to tend toward a thin theology of suffering.

- Why do you think this might be?
- Why is the Old Testament theme of lament so foreign to us today?
- Why do you think it is often abandoned?

Lament Defined

- How would you define lament?
- How might it be misunderstood?

(Here are some comments from Sunday if they are helpful)

Whenever lament comes up the conclusion often is just that we should be comfortable shouting our prayers at God. This isn't a proper understanding of lament.

Walter Brueggemann might be helpful in broadening our understanding of lament. In discussing it he refers to "God's infidelity"—we lament at times when God does not come through, or seem to come through, on what he promised, or when God acts in ways that are inconsistent with what we believe (on the basis of what we read in Scripture) God should act like.

Lament doesn't allow for simple answers. Lament is a place of petition... confusion... where we cry out to God because it is the best expression of what we feel. Not because we have forgotten our place in the created order and are just having a rant at God!

Lament in the Bible

In the Psalms - 42 individual laments, 16 corporate laments

Lament is avoided or trivialized today... yet 40% of the Psalms are Psalms of lament, and Eugene Peterson said 70% of the Psalms have lament.

Some moments with Jesus sound like lament if you are looking for it. Such as when Jesus wept before raising Lazarus, or when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, or crying out on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!'

Read Psalm 44:1-8 – Remembering what God has done

- What examples are highlighted about what God has done in the past?
- When have you seen God intervene in a situation you were facing?

Read Psalm 44:9-16 – Forsaken by God

This passage contains many powerful phrases describing how God has turned on Israel.

- Which phrase stands out most to you?
- How can remembering what God has done be both an encouragement and increase one's pain in a time of hardship?

Read Psalm 44:17-22 – Faithful to God (why don't you help us?)

Here the Psalmist is arguing that the reasons that make sense as to why God would retreat don't apply. You can sense his confusion and frustration.

It is easier to have a simplistic theology...

If God is all powerful, and he is a good God that loves us... then surely everything should be perfect!

If God is all knowing and all powerful... then everything should fit his plan.

The logic and answers we put forward are often far simpler than what we find in the Bible.

Read Psalm 44:23-25 – Honesty before God

- What do you find especially difficult to read in these verses?

Brueggemann commented: "Churches should be the most honest place in town"

Read Psalm 44:26 – Trusting in God

Lament Psalms often finish on a high note... reminding us of what we know among our confusion.

- What can we hold on to in times of confusion?

To close the sermon a selected reading from an example of modern lament was used. The parts read on Sunday are in bold. This is included as some groups requested it.

On June 22, 2007, a hit-and-run incident left Daniel McConchie paralyzed from the waist down. Overleaf is a lament Daniel wrote nearly a year after the accident, on April 9, 2008:

**Oh Lord, my God! Why do you wait to show up?
I cried out to you when trouble struck.
I asked for your restoration.
I know that you heard me. I know that you answered.**

**Yet nothing—nothing of meaning happens again today.
Infinitesimal changes dog my days.
I am hounded by the prayers of the fickle
Looking to me to prove their faith.**

Wearily I drag on
Tiring of the waste, hating the horror,
The pain, the suffering, the never-ending trial.
The endless story drags on, and on, and on.

**When will the clouds break?
When will the night cease?
When will the tunnel end?
When will you smile again?**

**What a two-edged sword your voice is!
You speak. And then wait?
You give hope. And then vanish into the mist?
Have you forgotten me? Have more important things arrested your attention?**

**Hope turns black. This evil I have seen.
Nightly my dreams show me restored,
And in the morning, I am broken again
Cursed to relive the horror of suffering's first day.**

Please slay me! Blot my name from the ranks of the living!
For in the grave can I finally rest.
My wife can have her dreams again;
My children a father who can provide as I should.

I wasted my youth. I dismissed the joys I should have embraced.
Now I am a mere spectator
Pretending to be consequential while others take my place.
A position I threw away one fateful day.

**How long? How long must I wait here in the middle?
Between healing and hell,
Between heaven and horror,
I am unable to move ... unable to see ... lost in eternal confusion.**

My demons torment me
Batting me about like a toy, I spin and crash in endless cycle.
I no longer know which way is up,
Which way is right, which way to go?

Which way is the path to life?
Is it up an unclimbable mountain?
Or on a path tread by all but me
And the others who are broken like I?

Surely it is impossible for me alone to find
And impossible for me to transverse.
Alone I am finished,
Dust left for the broom.

Who am I that God should remember me?
My only salvation is that he should not forget his image,
Or let his word be broken.
He is faithful to us because he is faithful to himself.

**There is nothing I can do,
In no way can I help.
I sit in the ruins and wait,
And take comfort in those who lie in the ashes with me.**

**But one day, by his promise, I will stand;
Restored as his message of hope is fulfilled.
The Lord will turn this horror into a fading dream,
And I will honour his name forever.**