

Introducing Lament in Psalm 13

by Michael Flowers

Michael Flowers introduces the concept of lament in Psalm 13, emphasizing its importance in expressing grief and finding hope in God.

Duration: 27:21

Scripture: Psalm 13:1

Topics: "Lament", "Hope in Suffering"

Description

Michael Flowers introduces the concept of lament as expressed in Psalm 13, emphasizing its significance in the Psalter as a heartfelt response to grief and sorrow. He explains that lament is not mere grumbling but a covenantal communication with God, allowing believers to express their pain while ultimately finding hope and trust in God's steadfast love. Flowers highlights the structure of lament, which includes an expression of pain, a petition for help, and a movement towards thanksgiving and reorientation in faith. He encourages the congregation to embrace lament as a vital part of their spiritual journey, reminding them that even in despair, there is a pathway to joy through faith in God. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize the importance of lament in worship and personal prayer.

Transcript

Everybody having a good summer? Uh-huh. It's gonna be a hot one today. I mean my message.

No, okay. Therefore, pray for me. Too many Jalapenos.

It's gonna be a scorcher. Yeah, that's it. Feeling a little ornery though, so I'll pray for you.

All right. For the summer, we are working through parts of the Psalter to utilize and embody the many ways God's people have expressed themselves to God in prayer and song. The Psalter actually is a book of songs.

It's the hymnal of the people of God. And it could be considered really the heart of the scriptures. The Psalter is the heart of the scriptures.

Unlike the book of Romans, you know, high doctrine and very systematic, the Psalter is just the heart pumping God's heart into us as we connect with all of the emotions therein in the Psalter. It's beautiful. And I've included an aid in the back of your bulletin showing how we might classify the Psalms.

I'm sorry that our copier went kaplunk. That's a Yiddish word, right? Kaplunk. Sounds like it.

Who knows? Well, it went kaplunk and so we're sharing. But in the back, there's some notes and there are supplementary notes that will help you understand the grid of how the Psalms have been classified. Today, we're going to introduce the Psalms of lament.

The largest genre in the Psalter, actually, lament, and they tend to populate the first half of the Psalter out of the hundred and fifty Psalms. They're front loaded for us, as it were. How do we define lament? Let's think about that.

Simply, lament could be a passionate or an emotional expression of grief. Pain. Sorrow.

And all those subcategories underneath those words, you know, there's just a wide range. Jesus referred to it today in that gospel. I just heard it.

You know, we played a song, you wouldn't dance, and we wailed. That's a lament. The grid I've provided in the back of your building will show you the different forms of laments because there's more than one type.

And those can be subdivided into laments for the community to pray. It's a corporate lament of God's people. Today's psalm and the vast majority are individual laments.

How long, oh, Lord, will you forget me forever? And then there's penitential laments, psalms of repentance, of asking God for his mercy and forgiveness and cleansing. And we're going to look at one of each of these throughout the summer. Then there's this and these are the ones that we tend to get really confused with, the imprecatory psalms, which is those that involve judgment, calamity or curses, invoking judgment, calamity and curses upon one's enemies and those perceived to be God's enemies.

Those are the hard ones for us. I'm not going to deal with that today, so don't worry. And so there's a total of some 68 different laments in the psalter.

Given the bulk of the psalter, these songs of anguish tell us something about their importance and yet such neglect in corporate worship. Unfortunately, they are largely ignored in the majority of Christian worship. Partly out of ignorance and partly out of a culture of triumphalism.

Where life is viewed as sort of polished and the church is viewed, Christians are viewed as polished, especially after conversion. Everything changes. We're told all suffering is gone, all trials are gone.

And that's why I think for many there is a disconnect. There's a disconnect with the bulk of contemporary worship culture. But all of life is not there in the heights of the heavens, right? It's not there.

That's where we're going. And between the first advent and the second advent, whoa, there's a lot of there's a lot of space here that's being dealt with. And every enemy is being dealt with and he will rule and reign until every enemy is under his feet.

The last enemy being death, which permeates everything in this world. Death has been injected through sin. The wages of sin is death and death has been injected into every living molecule.

It will die without Christ. The way, the truth and the life. Death is inevitable.

Now, through Christ, of course, we know that death has been made a servant and a doorway into that life. And oh, how it grieves at the death of all the saints, because death knows where the saints are going. To know that Jesus is the conqueror of death and that in him he's bringing that to us.

But we don't see everything in subjection yet, Paul tells us in Corinthians. And so we wrestle with principalities and powers in heavenly places, Ephesians 6. We are tempted. We still have this flesh, this fallen thing in us, this thing that's been affected by that death and it's being redeemed from the inside out.

As we gaze upon the Lord, as we behold him, we are changed from glory to glory into his likeness, into the likeness of Jesus Christ, a process of conversion, conversion from beginning to end, from alpha to omega. We are being changed into his likeness. And one of the tools that we've been given, apart from the very life of God and the Holy Spirit living within us, which are not tools, the tools that we've been given to help interface with that life and get in touch with the mind and the heart of God is the Psalter, is the scriptures, really.

But today we're going to focus on the Psalter. The Psalter has had such an impact in my life because I came in to the kingdom as a musician, traveling on the road. And as I came to Christ, I so connected with the Psalms.

I mean, the Psalms are just like daily food for me. And in the Anglican tradition, they still are. If you're following the daily office in the Anglican tradition, you'll read anywhere from one to three Psalms a day in order to get through the Psalter three to four times a year.

So the Psalter is central to Anglican morning prayer and evening prayer as well. And so the overarching structure of laments, there's a more extended structure in the back there. But I'm going to boil that down to three components of a lament.

And that would be number one, there is an expressed lament, a statement of pain or disorientation to God. How long, oh Lord, will you forget me forever? And then number two, a petition. And so you've got an expressed lament.

And then number two, a petition to alleviate the condition inwardly or externally. And then all laments end up in this beautiful place of hope, trust and reorientation in the Lord in the midst of disorientation. Reorientation by faith in the character and the nature of God himself.

Now, the prophet Isaiah describing the life of Jesus says in Isaiah fifty three three that he was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, familiar with pain, acquainted with grief. Our Lord Jesus Christ was a man of suffering and familiar with pain, acquainted with grief. Hebrews five seven opens up the prayer life of Jesus, a little opening into how he prayed.

Hebrews five seven during the days of Jesus life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. And so this tells us that Jesus passionately prayed. Laments.

With loud crying in tear, lamenting before his father and ending up in that place of hope, as all the Psalms do for laments. And yet the psalmist also tells us Psalm forty five, six and nine, and it's repeated by the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews one nine. Speaking of Christ, you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore, God, your God has set you about your companions or above as another translation has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. Loud crying and tears, but anointed with the oil of joy, Jesus never hopeless. I'm so glad he's anointed with the oil of joy because he pours that out on all of us to the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Amen. So three parts lament petition thanksgiving. You see, this pattern distinguishes a lament from mere grumbling.

Don't mistake laments for grumbling. Go back to the children of Israel in the wilderness. They got in a lot of trouble, not for lamenting, which ends up in hope that they got in a lot of trouble accusing God.

Why have you let us out here? You don't care for us. We're going to starve. And so there's something different about grumbling and lamenting.

It's really important for us to get this really important. And so what is a lament then? And we'll talk about that in terms of grumbling. A lament is a means of keeping covenant with God, the God of the covenant.

So when you're lamenting, you're going to the one that, you know, keeps covenant. He's a covenant keeping God and he is faithful. Now, it doesn't always feel like he's there.

Right. How long will you forget? Seems like you're not around the omni absence of God. No longer omnipresent, but omniabsent.

Where did he go? He's disappeared. For those of us charismatics, he's not touching me anymore. You know, I'm speaking personally because I'm an emotionally wired person and I have gone through these times of feeling so desolate from the Lord because I like feelings and I love it when my skin tingles in the presence of the Lord.

Anybody relate to that? Have you ever had tingling skin? But yeah, there's been those moments where the presence of the Lord was interacting with my physical body in such a way that I felt something, but I can't live off that. And so a lament is a means of keeping covenant with the God of the covenant, letting him know your pain. He wants you to tell him.

He wants you to tell him and he wants you to get in touch with that pain, letting him know your disappointment. You're a sense of disillusionment, dejection. But it's along with a foundation of hope in the midst of that the lamenting Psalms are, that's for sure.

Grumbling against God accuses him and ends not in thanksgiving and hope, but with just accusation, period. So help me lament, Lord, and not grumble would be my prayer today. Even though there's no answer to that prayer in sight.

There's still hope. Hope does not disappoint. Paul says in Romans five, the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That's why we can lament with hope. And hope doesn't disappoint, even though lament, lament, lament, just do it.

But lament with hope, lament with hope. I'm preaching to myself this morning, too, right? Always preaching to myself. And so in today's psalm, how long? How long, O Lord? How does that feel? Do you connect to that? Just how long, O Lord? Question mark.

How long, O Lord? Have you ever been on the stretcher with God? Now, it's funny because how long is a common question, not only in our disorientation, but often with God. There are several times where, like in Numbers 14, 11 through 12, the Lord asks this question, the Lord says or asks, the Lord is saying, how long will this people despise me? You see, so he is able to sympathize with our how longs because he asked the same question, how long, Michael, dot, dot, dot. Now, that's not all, but the souls of the martyrs under the altar in Revelation six are asking the same question.

And I got to tell you, that's in heaven, in heaven. They're asking how long when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They cried out with a loud voice, how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood.

That is an imprecatory lament. There it is, how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood. They were each given a white robe and they were told to wait a little longer.

They're in the eternal realm and there is no time, but you don't wait a little longer. You mean I'm in the eternal now? Wait a little longer. We've all heard that.

We've all felt that, right? I'm feeling it now. Wait a little longer until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been. The Lord is saying, wait a little longer because I've got more coming.

And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. And they loved not their lives unto death. Revelation 12, wait a little longer.

And the thing is, is that God's not put off by that question in heaven. He answers them. He answers them and says, hey, I have more coming.

Psalms 13, how long, oh Lord, will you forget me forever? You put a comma in it, forget me, comma, forever. Woody Allen, you know, forever. How long will you hide your face from me? This is parallelism.

Now, if you start reading the Psalms, he repeated the first line in a different phrase. How long will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? Same thing. How long must I take counsel in my soul? Been there, right? Where all you're hearing is just this negative self-talk and where you're in that place where you need someone else.

With the coming of Titus, like Paul said, he encouraged me because Paul fears within. This morning in that reading in Second Corinthians, I mean, Second Corinthians is the book for the internal mechanisms of Paul and his team. We felt the sentence of death.

So if we take counsel in our soul. That's the place that's been affected most by the fall, by sin, I want, I think, I feel, mind, will and emotions. That soul is being converted and so we have to command it.

Soul, bless the Lord, bless the Lord, oh my soul, because it never will unless you tell it to. Because that is the independent factor in us. It's not the spirit, it's the soul.

Mind, will and emotions. I want, I think, I feel is how the soul is divided up in the New Testament. Mind, will and emotions.

That's what has to come into spiritual formation along with our bodies. Body, soul has to come into spiritual formation. And one of the ways is prayer.

Meditation, silence, scripture, opening to God, confession of sin. Community, all these things build into our lives what it means to walk and live in Jesus fully alive. To be a church after God's own heart, that's what we want to be, right? A church after God's own heart, that's what David was, a man after God's own heart.

Wow. And so I don't want to take counsel in my soul. He's asking, how long am I going to hear these lies? How long am I going to hear the lies about who I am? The brothers and sisters, this has everything to do with what it means to be male and female in our in our day.

It's Descartes, I think, therefore, I am. So if I want to be something else, I can psychologically change my gender. That's the beginning of the end.

How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow, pain is another translation, pain in my heart. That could be gender confusion right there. How long am I going to think these things? How long am I going to feel this, feel the pain of that? That's real.

Those psychological lies are real. And so the way that we are formed by and conditioned by culture, media, school, friends, all of that comes into play where we start thinking that we're something that we're not. It doesn't have to be gender.

It can be so many things. I'm rejected. No one likes me.

I don't have any friends. I'm alone. All of this.

That's taking counsel in our souls. We need something outside of ourselves. If you want to follow me, lay down your sukkah.

Lay down your life. That's the word for soul. Jesus said, you've got to lay that down.

If you want to be a disciple, you've got to lay down your life, which is sukkah for soul, life, soulish life. And it will tell you everything you want to know about yourself from the fallen perspective. And those of us who are more contemplative and introverted know this more than others who are more extroverted.

We know this because we hear that voice a bit louder because we're internalizing everything. And we feel everything. And I have to so guard my heart all the time.

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? OK, that's the first part. That's the lament. The second part, petition, verses three and four.

Asking God to consider. I like that. Consider.

Maker of the universe, creator of heaven and earth, would you consider and answer me? Consider and answer me, oh Lord, my God. Bring light to my eyes. Bring me revelation.

Lest I sleep the sleep of death, which in the Hebrew culture in this time, death was it. That was it. Light up my eyes.

Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him and my foes rejoice because I am shaken. Wow. And then the last part, thanksgiving, hope, reorientation, but.

Oh, the buts are so important. Your but is so important. You know that? You know your but is important? Because if you don't get to the but.

E.T., that is. You will stay in that place of taking counsel in your soul. This is who I am.

Nobody's going to tell me any different, but here's the covenant keeping God with the covenant keeping struggling people of God. Right. But I have trusted in your steadfast love, your Heseed.

That's covenant faithfulness. I feel all of this. I feel I'm in warfare and my enemies coming against me.

But how long do I have to feel this? How long do I have to hear the voices inside me telling me lies? How long I'm going to shift and I'm going to trust. I'm going to get out of my feelings, which is the soul, mind, will and emotions. And I'm going to trust by faith with absolutely no evidence.

But the substance of things hoped for faith is the substance of things hoped for. And we walk by faith, not by sight. We walk by faith and not by feelings.

We walk by faith and not by our soul. We do church in the, you know, in the soulless nature. We don't need the power of God.

We don't need the Holy Spirit. We've got our liturgy. We can get along just fine without God.

No, right, no. I have trusted in your steadfast love, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. Look at that, the movement of the heart now.

It says in verse two, how long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow and pain in my heart? Look where he shifts, but I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice. Oh, six little verses, schizophrenic David, here he is.

Don't you love him? My heart shall rejoice in your salvation, which is the healing of the cosmos. It's the healing of all that's wrong and disoriented in creation. It's not just saving my soul, even though that's a part of the plan.

It's so much bigger and now he's going to do something. He doesn't feel like it. I will sing after all that.

You're going to sing. Yeah, I'm going to sing. I'm going to sing to the Lord in the midst of my pain.

I'm going to sing to the Lord because I have trusted in his steadfast love and my heart will rejoice in his salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. He has been good to me.

That's what that means. Oh, church, that's a lament. Don't you feel exhausted? That's the heart and the body and everything just pouring out to God.

Exchange. There's an exchange taking and it begins with but. Oh, perspective, reality, life.

There's no life down here. It's terminal. Life outside myself coming upon me and coming within me in the Holy Spirit.

I see now the end of the wicked. I see I came into the sanctuary and I discerned their ends. How we need this perspective, you guys.

In the presence of the Lord. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May we stand together.

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