

“The Necessity of Lament” Psalm 22

Little by little, Spring is coming! However, the winter was long. It was cold, and for various reasons, it felt like a dark time. It felt like the morning would never come. We cried out to the Lord, "How long?"

We experience dryness in the winter. Our lips feel dry and rough. Our hands feel dry. When the air gets dry, it's easy for bad viruses to be prevalent. So we use room humidifiers.

It's not only our physical bodies that experience dryness. Our hearts do too. We can't see our hearts, but we can experience dryness there. Our souls are dry. This can happen anytime, not just in the winter. It may happen because of something bad we've done or maybe not, but our hearts have sort of an empty and barren feeling.

At the beginning of this year, I experienced dryness in my devotions. I knew that the Bible is God's Living Word, but it just started to feel like words on a page. Have you ever experienced this?

I couldn't just ignore that so I decided to read the Psalms for a while. The writers of the psalms are honest, and they are not afraid to express or questions. They lament. In fact, there are many psalms of lament. Through reading psalms we learn the necessity of lament, and how to lament. Lament is okay.

What is lament? Mark Vroegop, in his book "Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy" defines lament like this: "It is the honest cry of a hurting heart." He continues, "Lament is prayer in pain that leads to trust."

I want us to look at Psalm 22, and see the necessity of lament. We will look at it in four sections and I want to say four things about lament.

Section #1: Verses 1-8

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?"

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him; for he delights in him!"

First of all, lament cries out the present situation. The writer of this psalm, David, laments his present state. He would become king of Israel, but he was still running from King Saul and hiding in a cave.

Jesus would be the Savior of the world, because he was hanging on a cross, suffering and dying.

We want to fill Tokyo with the gospel, but we need leaders and staff to carry out that vision. We are in great need.

We cry out to the Lord. We cry out to our Father God, "My God! My God! Help me! Don't leave me! I trust you, but I am lonely. I only sense problems, not your presence.

We lament our present condition.

Let's go to the next section, verses 9-18.

"Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

On you was I cast from birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet--

I can count all my bones--they stare and gloat over me;

they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

We lament our suffering. We pour out our hearts in lament. We express our feelings. We complain to God.

David did this. He said, "From my birth, I have been yours, but you won't help me."

Jesus said from the cross, "I am being poured out like water." "My heart is like wax that is melted within me." "My enemies surround me."

How about your feelings right now? Try telling them to God. You don't have to say it out loud, but you can. "I'm tired." "I'm lonely." Include the reason for your feelings. "People are being killed in the war. Please help them. I trust you." "Relationships with people are broken. We are quarreling. My head hurts. Please Father, don't leave me." Express it all to your Father God. Lay it on Jesus. He can handle it.

It is also necessary to lament our tendencies. Lament our sin. When our hearts experience dryness, it doesn't always mean we have sinned, but it was our sin that put Jesus on the cross. Jesus is lamenting our sin on the cross. He had no sin. He takes all of our sin, all of our punishment upon himself. For that reason, he is completely cut off from his Father. He is poured out like water.

Jesus did it so that our greatest need would be met. Our sins are forgiven. Our hearts are made new.

The next section is Psalm 22:19-26.

"But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!

Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!

Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you;

You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him.

The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever!"

Lament changes to praise. A turning point comes. Did you hear it? "Lord, please don't leave me." "Please come quickly to help me." "Please help me!" "Save me!" The next sentence is: "You have answered me." Jesus was still hanging on the cross, but the Lord God became his strength. A turning point had come. We are still facing reality, but God is our strength. We know he has answered us. He makes our heart live forever.

David says, "I will praise you in the great congregation." "Praise him!" "Glorify him!" "Stand in awe of him!" We become able to do that as well. Our praise comes from the Lord.

But, my brothers and sisters, remember that the lament is necessary. David's time in the cave, the cross of Jesus and our lament is necessary. Why? Because without it, there is no cry of dependence on our Father God. We wouldn't have this psalm. We are not saved.

Let's listen to verses 27-31.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive.

Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;

they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

Lament (a dry, barren heart is watered) turns to praise. The reason: Jesus has accomplished our salvation. He has done it. Nations will turn to him. They will worship before the Lord. The people of Tokyo will worship before you. The Lord is king. He rules. All will bow down before him. Those who are not yet born will believe him.

Is your heart experiencing dryness today? If so, lament that. Grieve that. Cry out to God in that. Are you anxious about the present state of your life, of the church, of the world? Lament that. Cry out to God in that. But then rejoice in the fact that Jesus has already met our greatest need. He will turn our lament into praise. This is all because on the cross he has already accomplished our salvation. Amen! Amen! Amen!

Prayer

"Father God, thank you. Through this psalm, I have returned to the cross and met your Son Jesus again. My heart lives again! Oh Lord, I want to be watered by your grace. Lord, make these hearts live! Enable us to lament, to cry out to you and to praise you.

Blessing

"On the last day of the feast, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."' May this be so Lord! Upon each one, give your love, your patience, an awareness of my tendencies, your grace and the fellowship and community of the Holy Spirit. Amen.