

But You, O Lord

Opening Prayer:

Dearest Lord and Savior, with grateful hearts full of Your love we gather this morning to celebrate Your goodness in the land of the living. Please bless this precious time we now set aside to fix our eyes on Jesus as He authors and perfects our faith. For it is in His life giving name that we pray. Amen

Please open your Bibles to Psalm 3. We'll be looking at several Psalms this morning.

A. This morning I'd like us to think about LAMENT.

1. **One-third** of the Psalms are Lament Psalms, that's **one-third** of the Church's prayer and songbook. I feel like that should catch our attention and get us to thinking more about what biblical lament is.

(Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142)*

2. The word itself means to wail or mourn. But in trying to define what that looks like in practice, I express it this way – it is a God-ward emotional outcry that begins with our distress loudly at the forefront.
3. In expressing a true lament, there is most often a beginning, a middle, and an end. There's a complete movement, so to speak. In true lament that's because we're *moving* towards something, or more accurately, towards Someone.
4. And that God-ward movement allows expectancy to enter in – to trust the One who He hears us, knows our weakness, and who will restore us.

Psalm 103:13-14 *As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

5. HOWEVER, and this is important, the reasons a lament is different from a tirade are:
 - a. One, because before it's done, before it has played itself out, it has turned God-ward. It's *not* just a verbal temper tantrum with no point of reference.
 - b. And two, because in the midst of it, it is God-conscious. In voicing our distress, we intentionally remember to WHOM we are speaking. So, there's respect, honor, and a remembrance that because of Who He is – His arm is not too short to save.
6. All of which means, lament is not a failure of faith, but an act of faith. In crying out to God we're demonstrating that we trust He's near, we trust that He inclines His ear to us, and we trust that He is for us.

7. It's faith approaching and inviting the God who is, to shape our mind, or our hearts if you will, and reorient our spiritual sight.
8. I said that there is usually a beginning, middle, and an end to the lament Psalms, and I'd like to clarify that a little to say that there are at least three parts that show up, and sometimes they're in different orders.
9. If you'll look at **Psalm 3 (A Psalm of David)** with me (Read aloud)...
*(1) O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; (2) many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. Selah. (3) **But you, O LORD,** are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. (4) I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah. (5) I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. (6) I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. (7) Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. (8) Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!*

10. Here are the three parts:

- a.V 1-3: what the Psalmist is seeing and experiencing
- b.V 3-6: what he believes, or what I describe as **confident declarations of faith**
- c.V 7-8: what he prays for

B. This is how we know that the Lament psalms are not simply complaints: Because after the psalmist has poured out his heart, his distress, and weariness...he turns his heart upward so that his mouth proclaims something along the lines of:

1. But You, O Lord...

- a. And that "But You, O Lord" is the pivotal moment of faith overtaking fear, unbelief, and folly. In declaring what is true about God, both from redemptive history and his own personal experience, the psalmist, in this case David, reminds himself that despite what he sees, the story never ends with despair.
- b. This is how we, too, move from honest lament, to – ultimately – a song of HOPE, rooted in God's power and goodness.
- c. If you read the Psalms with an eye towards this pattern, you will be delighted to see how many times the writer moves from lament to some form of, "*But you, O LORD...*"

2. Let's look also at Psalm 31:9-18

- a.V 9-13: what he is seeing and experiencing
- b.V 14-15: confident declaration of faith
- c.V 16-18: what he prays for

3. and Psalm 86:14-17

- a.V 14: what he is seeing and experiencing
 - b.V 15: confident declaration of faith
 - c.V 16-17: what he prays for
4. We're not going to read much of the next Psalm, which Psalm 109
- a. But I will recap it by saying that in this Psalm of David he begins with what he is experiencing and then pronounces no less than 20 imprecations, or curses. It's actually a really hard Psalm to read because it *is* so relentless. I mean, for 26 verses David lays out about every curse imaginable.

Psalms 109:1-26 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.*

Be not silent, O God of my praise! (2) For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues. (3) They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. (4) In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. (5) So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love. (6) Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. (7) When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! (8) May his days be few; may another take his office! (9) May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! (10) May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! (11) May the creditor seize all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil! (12) Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children! (13) May his posterity be cut off; may his name be blotted out in the second generation! (14) May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out! (15) Let them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth! (16) For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death. (17) He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him! (18) He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones! (19) May it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he puts on every day! (20) May this be the reward of my accusers from the LORD, of those who speak evil against my life!

- b. **And then comes verse 21.** Anyone want to guess what it says?

(21) But you, O GOD my Lord,
deal on my behalf for your name's sake; because your steadfast love is good, deliver me! (22) *For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me. (23) I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust. (24) My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat. (25) I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads. (26) Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love!*

5. You see, *biblical* lamentation that *begins* with our trial squarely at the center of everything **will** end up re-orienting us, provided we keep going until we get to... *"But you, O Lord."*

6. Until we reach that place where Someone else moves in to center stage. When, somewhere in the middle, the story becomes about God and He takes His rightful place as the sovereign, but loving, ruler of all things.

C. To make this point, what if Psalm 109 had ended at verse 20?

1. Had this “prayer” ended there, it would’ve just been a catalog of curses, and there would’ve been no comfort.
2. It’s in verse 21 that David surrenders to God and turns from cursing his enemies to acknowledging God’s **steadfast love** and asking Him to help **as He sees fit**.

D. You see, reacting to our experiences from our own understanding can lead to Desolation, which is void of hope.

1. But responding to our experiences by lamenting to God and *eventually* asking Him to show us His good care for us,...that leads to Consolation.
2. Consolation rests confidently in the Lord’s promise of steadfast love
3. How do you know the difference between the two?
 - a. Are you isolated and defeated? Talking, but not listening?
“This hurts. I can’t stand it. I don’t know what to do.”
 - b. Or, are you comforted? Speaking and listening to Someone respond. So that the 2-way conversation sounds something like this:
“O God this hurts!”
“*I’ve got you*”
“I don’t know if I can handle this.”
“*But I know.*”
“How long?”
“*How long? I’ll never let you go, and I will quiet your weary heart.*”
“That’s not what I meant.”
“*I know. But it’s what you need to remember.*”
“Do You promise to see me through this?”
“*I promise.*”
“O God, I believe You.”
“*Good. Believe Me that I love you no matter what, and that I love you no matter how this turns out. Remember that the cross of Calvary is the proof of My love for you, believe Me to be with you, believe Me to be for you, believe me to help you through this, and that My strength is made perfect in your weakness. Believe that nothing can separate you from My love.*”

4. That's what **Psalm 94:17-19** expresses: *If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. When I thought, "My foot slips," your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.*
 - a. David Powlison says, "Consolation comes from a faith that is comforted because it listens well, then speaks and lives what it hears back to God...if you will listen, you will endure. If you listen, you will fight the good fight in the most terrible of struggles. If you listen, you will become fearless. If you listen, you will know that you need to be rescued. You will know that you need to be carried into the battle, and carried through the battle, and finally carried from the battlefield. If you listen, you will live." (Powlison, *God's Grace and Your Suffering*, 168-169)

5. So, we cry out to God, knowing He hears our voice.

Psalms 55:17 *Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.*

 - a. We tell Him honestly how we're feeling. How's **Psalm 77:1-4** for honesty:
 - a. *When I remember God, I moan;*
 - b. *When I meditate, my spirit faints.*
 - c. *You hold my eyelids open;*
 - d. *I am so troubled that I cannot speak*
 - e. We get to be THAT honest.
 - b. We ask God to act.
 - a. *Psalm 109:21-16* ~ Deal on my behalf, deliver me, help me...
 - c. We ask God the questions that are burning inside of us? (David Powlison, *JBC Vol 16 #3 Spring 1998*)
 - a. Why?
 - b. Where are YOU?
 - c. And as we ask these questions, we notice if they are coming from a heart that looks IN, or UP to God for consolation.
 - d. What the Psalms show us is that it's as we lament TO God, as we process through your experiences WITH him, that He will meet us and bring us to the place of faith-filled declaration that says, "But You, O Lord!"

E. Before we close, let me share with you a portion of the classic story:

Pilgrim's Progress

In this story by John Bunyan, Christian is travelling to the Celestial City, called Zion. Along the way he encounters all kinds of experiences and trials. On one stretch of his journey, he is accompanied by a companion named Hopeful. At this point in the story, Christian and Hopeful have wandered off the King's Highway

looking for an easier path through a meadow. That night they take shelter on the grounds of Doubting Castle, but in the morning they are surprised and seized by the owner of that meadow for trespassing. The owner of the meadow is named Giant Despair. Charging them with the crime, he drags them to his stronghold, Doubting Castle, and throws them into a "nasty and stinking" dungeon. The Giant Despair, who, with the encouragement of his wife, imprisons and tortures Christian and Hopeful. They spend days in prison contemplating their apparent doom. On Saturday about midnight they began to pray, and continued in prayer till almost break of day. Then, a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, broke out in passionate speech: What a fool I am, he says, thus to lie in a stinking Dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty. I have a Key in my bosom called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any Lock in Doubting Castle. Then said Hopeful, That is good news; good Brother pluck it out of thy bosom and try. Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the Dungeon door, whose bolt (as he turned the Key) gave way, and the door flew open with ease, and Christian and Hopeful both came out. Then he went to the outward door that leads into the Castle-yard, and with his Key opened that door also. After he went to the Iron Gate, for that must be opened too, but that Lock went terribly hard, yet the Key did open it. Then they thrust open the Gate to make their escape with speed; but that Gate as it opened made such a creaking, that it waked Giant Despair, who hastily rising to pursue his Prisoners, felt that his limbs had failed, for his Fits took him again and he was disabled, so that he could by no means go after them. Then they went on, and came to the King's High-way again, and so were safe, because they were out of Giant Despair's jurisdiction.

F. The key?

1. Might you sit in the dungeon of Giant Despair? Yes, there are times you will. And that is the time to lament, to start crying out. And *continuing* to lament TO the Lord until He brings you to the Key. What is the Key? All the promises of God that are for you, and **YES** in Christ! (2 Cor 1:20)
2. So bring your laments to the Lord, and *keep going* until you get to that moment where you pull out the key and it unlocks the dungeon door as you proclaim: "*But you, O Lord...*"
3. Amen.