

THE LAMENT OF DAVID

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Scripture: 2 Samuel 1:17-27

Every now and then, when I'm not doing a study from one of the books of the Bible, or not doing a topical study for my sermons, I go back to the lectionary. The lectionary is a selection of readings that is given to the church for reading through, and responsive readings, and for sermon prep for pastors to go through the entire Bible within three years. There's a section A, B, and C, and if you follow through with it, then you complete the Bible if you've been preaching through it. And I've found that every now and then it's nice to just go back to the lectionary to see what it throws up. Today's passage is actually from there.

This passage comes to us from 2 Samuel 1:17-27 and we will see that it is David's lament for Saul and Jonathan. David's dirge or lament for Saul and Jonathan.

¹⁷ Then David chanted with this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son, ¹⁸ and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar.

¹⁹ "Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places!

How have the mighty fallen!

²⁰ Tell it not in Gath,

Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,

Or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,

The daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.

²¹ O mountains of Gilboa,

Let not dew or rain be on you, nor fields of offerings;

For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,

The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

²² From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,

The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,

And the sword of Saul did not return empty.

²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life,

And in their death, they were not parted;

They were swifter than eagles,

They were stronger than lions.

²⁴ O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,

Who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet,

Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

²⁵ How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan is slain on your high places.

²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;

You have been very pleasant to me.

Your love to me was more wonderful

Than the love of women.

²⁷ How have the mighty fallen,

And the weapons of war perished!"

If we are to understand this lament, before we delve into it, we need to first look at its historical and its relational context. Both are important for our understanding of all that David is trying to bring out in this dirge.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Saul and Jonathan have just been killed in a battle with the Philistines. David, who had been anointed by God to be the next king, is deeply affected by their deaths. This happens immediately after the killing of Saul and Jonathan.

THE RELATIONAL ASPECT:

Saul

The relational dynamics are even more complex because David's relationship with Saul was very, very intriguing. Saul saw David as a threat and sought to kill him. Yet David always respected Saul as the Lord's anointed. In fact, the Bible records that Saul tried to kill David at least ten times.

The 10 attempts on David's life by Saul:

- i. The spear incident in 1 Samuel 18. An evil spirit came forcefully upon Saul while David was playing the harp. Saul, in a fit of rage, threw his spear at David, intending to pin him to the wall; and David eluded him twice.
- ii. In 1 Samuel 18, when Saul offers his daughter Merab to David, hoping that David would be killed by the Philistines in battle, basically sending him out to all the battles that they were fighting, hoping that he would die in one of them.
- iii. When Saul offered Michal to David as his wife, but the bride prize that Saul wanted was for him to go and collect 100 foreskins of the Philistines. Saul thought that in so doing, David would die.
- iv. Another spear attempt after David's marriage to Michal. Saul once again tried to pin David to the wall while David was playing the harp. David loved to play the harp for Saul because Saul was somebody who was embroiled in a lot of ups and downs. He was a volatile kind of a person, and David's harp-playing soothed him. But every now and then, he would get into a rage and try and kill David.
- v. When Saul sent messengers to David's house to kill him. But his wife, Michal, helped him to escape by getting him out of the window and then putting some kind of idol on the bed, covering it with goat skin and making it look like David was still there.
- vi. When he pursued David at Naioth. David fled to Samuel at Naioth in Ramah. Saul sent messengers to capture David, but they were overcome by the Spirit of God and began to prophesy. And when Saul lands up there, he also starts to prophesy.
- vii. The feast of the new moon in 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan, David's friend and Saul's son, attempted to mediate, but Saul's anger flared and he threw his spear at Jonathan revealing his intent to kill David.
- viii. In the wilderness pursuit, but even here David managed to come into the place where Saul was sleeping and cut off the edge of his robe to show him that he was there, but he wouldn't touch God's anointed.
- ix. That happened again at Maon, when Saul pursued David.
- x. At En Gedi, Saul pursued David, but David took from Saul his spear and his water jug, and then confronted Saul and asked him why he wanted to kill him.

Through all these 10 instances, we see how clearly Saul wanted to get rid of David. And yet, we see that David's unwavering faith and respect for Saul, as the Lord's anointed, prevented him from ever trying to get back at Saul.

Jonathan

Jonathan and David had one of the deepest bonds that are recorded in scripture. Jonathan loved David as himself, and even protected him from Saul's wrath. In fact, three times Jonathan warned David that Saul was coming against him.

- i. In 1 Samuel 19, Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning. go into hiding and stay there."
- ii. In 1 Samuel 20, we see the covenant that Jonathan and David had. When David told Jonathan that his father was trying to kill him, and how Jonathan said, "I'll give you a sign. and if it truly is the case that my father is trying to kill you, you will know." And he did. And David went away from that danger.
- iii. In 1 Samuel 23, we see Jonathan's secret meeting with David. Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." Only the first part of what he said came true. the second didn't happen because Jonathan was killed.

So that's the historical and relational background that we have to understand as we look at this lament itself.

THE LAMENT

Now let's break down this lament and see what we can find that we can then turn it to ourselves and ask the question: How can this teach us something?

Verses 17 and 18

These verses are all about David's mourning and instruction.

"Then David sang this song of mourning over Saul and his son Jonathan, and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the mourning song of the bow. It is written in the book of Jasher."

The book of Jasher was a book that had all the heroics of the Israelites. It's a lost book. There's nothing that we have today that points back to it except the writings from scripture that point to this particular book. But David tells the people that you have to know this song so that you can lament over Saul and Jonathan.

Verses 19 and 20

The lament itself – it's about grief and mourning.

"Your beauty, Israel, is slaughtered on your high places. How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath. Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice. The daughters of the uncircumcised will celebrate.

David begins with profound grief, lamenting the loss of both Saul and Jonathan, who are seen as the glory and strength of Israel. But he doesn't want this news to reach the Philistines, knowing that they will celebrate these deaths.

Verses 21 to 23

A tribute to Saul and Jonathan.

"Mountains of Gilboa, may there be no dew nor rain on you or fields of offerings, for there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul not anointed with oil. From the blood of those slaughtered, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return unstained. Saul and Jonathan, beloved and delightful in life, and in their deaths, they were not separated. They were swifter than eagles, they were mightier than lions."

He first curses the place where Saul and Jonathan fell, emphasizing this tragedy. But despite his troubled past with Saul, David speaks of him with respect and honor.

Verses 24 to 27

His personal grief for Jonathan comes out.

“Daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, who put gold jewelry on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle. Jonathan is slaughtered on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. You have been a close friend to me. Your love for me was more wonderful than the love of women. How the mighty have fallen and the weapons of war have perished!”

His lament for Jonathan is so deeply personal. It reflects the close friendship that he had with Jonathan and the loyalty that Jonathan always showed him along with his love.

APPLICATION:

That’s the lament that David was speaking, learn this and be always be able to sing this. In other words, this must always remind you of Saul and Jonathan, and what they did and how they died. But if we were to walk away from this passage and say, What does it mean for us? I think we need to look at three themes that I mentioned in the beginning.

1. The mourning and lamentation and the lament.

David’s lament reaches us the importance of expressing grief. So often, we shy away from showing our vulnerability. We think that we shouldn’t express our feelings to people. We hold it in. even if we are breaking inside, we will not show it to people. And yet, lamenting is such a healthy therapeutic part of healing. The scriptures, the Psalms especially, are filled with examples of heartfelt lament demonstrating that it is really okay to bring our sorrows to the Lord.

Psalms 34:18 “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

I wonder whether there are some of you sitting here who held on to grief for a long period, that today your heart is breaking, and yet you continue to keep it to yourself. Or maybe you’re just, your spirit has been crushed for a long time through situations, circumstances. There’s nobody that you’re able to speak to or talk to, not even the Lord. sometimes, we shut Him out as well.

Lamentations 3:31-32 “For no one, beloved, is cast off by the Lord forever. Though He brings grief, He will show compassion. So great is His unfailing love.”

Do you feel His unfailing love in your lives? Can you say I experience God’s unfailing love, a love that never fails? Or in this situation, do you find yourself being very unloved because you dare not share what’s going on with you to anybody, including God. Grief can come from various quarters. Grief can come from a broken relationship. Grief can come from a lost friendship. Grief can come from the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job, or even a debilitating illness. All of them have the potential to bring grief into our lives.

I wonder beloved, if there’s a lament that rises from you as you go through grief, as you go through the sadness and the sorrow that always accompanies grief. Grief takes a long while to get resolved as well. we know the 5 stages or the 7 stages of grief happens over time. I wonder today whether you’re alone in this place.

2. The honor and respect that David had.

David's respect for Saul came despite their troubled relationship. It highlights a very significant biblical principle that we honor those in authority. David recognized that Saul was God's anointed and treated him with respect, even in death.

Romans 13 says, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

1 Peter 2:17 "Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor." This is a particularly hard one – to give honor to people who don't really share your principles, who don't follow your particular work ethic, who are just not easy to get along with. And yet to recognize that there must be honor that is placed on them. How do you give honor to somebody like that? I think honor comes by recognizing that each one of us is made in the image of God, that we honor the image of God in every person. That's the only way that we can do it, to look beyond things that we cannot get used to, cannot handle and say that person, even though we don't get along, is made in the image of God.

3. Friendship and loyalty.

The bond between David and Jonathan is one of the most beautiful examples of friendship in the Bible. Jonathan's loyalty to David, even at great personal cost, exemplifies the qualities of true friendship.

Proverbs 17:17 "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity."

John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

In our fast-paced lifestyle, we rarely have the time to develop friendships. We have many acquaintances, but there's a huge difference between an acquaintance and a friend. A friend is someone that you can go to for wise counsel when you're caught in the crosshairs of conflict or confusion.

I love this quote by C.S. Lewis. He once remarked, "A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words." Beautiful! But friendships take time to cultivate. That's something that we don't put too much of time into. I believe that as individuals, we lose something relationally when we don't have deep friendships to bank on or to cherish. I wonder where you all are with friends, wonder whether you take the trouble to develop a friendship. Because it takes time and effort to do so. But how important it is to have a friend. You can call, share some of the deepest things that are happening in your life, and know that you will be heard and not judged. And even beyond that, the friends that we have here on earth, the Bible tells us that God is also our friend. Among the many things that He is to us, He's our friend.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege it is to carry
Everything to Him in prayer.

I wonder this morning whether you have that kind of a relationship with people around you and with God above you, someone you can go to and share the deepest things of your heart – to be able to say: I need something. I need a helping hand; I need a kind word. I need to be able to process something rather than holding it all in and being crushed in spirit.

Three things, beloved, we get from this lament of David – to handle grief well, to honor people around us, then to develop deep friendships. And may God help us as we try to see how each of those points can be applied in our own lives.

Amen.
