



Part 1: Waiting, Lamenting & Hoping

Lamentations 3:19-26

Hope-filled waiting includes lament.

I. A Waiting People

God's people are a waiting people...

In the Bible's Story of reality, it doesn't take long for things to go off the rails and for humanity to find themselves in need of a Savior. The very first promise of the Gospel shows up 3 chapters into the Story.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will crush your head, and you shall strike his heel." Genesis 3:15

This promise encapsulated every promise in the Old Testament, and as such, God's people have been a waiting people. From the beginning of history, God has called His people to be a people waiting for the coming of His promised Son.

"In both dispensations of redemptive history, the people of God are defined by waiting. In the Old Testament, believers wait for Jesus' first coming; in the New Testament, believers wait for his second coming. In both cases, God's people live in light of Christ's advent." – Jonathan Gibson, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel – A Liturgy for Daily Worship from Advent to Epiphany*

Note the relationship of faith, waiting and hope:

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us that only together with us would they be made perfect." Hebrews 11:1-2, 39-40

“...while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:13-14

II. Suffering and Groaning as We Wait

Waiting can be very hard, and it's easy to lose hope while we're waiting. The Bible is honest about life ... it's a mixture of joy and sorrow, disappointment and successes, sickness and death, bondage, and breakthrough. The Bible describes this life like a woman in child labor waiting for waiting for her child to be born.

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present moment.” Romans 8:22

There's a lot of groaning in this life ... unmet longings for a child or a spouse, disappointing or broken relationships, loss of jobs or career, sickness, disability, death, prejudice, injustice etc.

Waiting for the Lord to come through in these hard places is a challenge; not losing hope in the Lord's goodness can be a real fight of faith.

“To wait on the Lord means to place your hope in him – to trust that God is the One who can deliver you. Your entire confidence rests on Him. We wait upon the Lord because He is God, and we are not...waiting is one of the greatest applications of the Christian faith. You are putting your trust in God, placing your hope in Him, and expressing confidence that He is in control.” – Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*

III. The Gift of Lament

The Bible gives voice to our pain, sorrow, and groaning. God's Word gives us the prayer of lament to express our groaning honestly and hopefully. The Christian's response to disappointment and sorrow is the prayer of lament.

“Christians affirm that the world is broken, God is powerful, and He will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian.” – Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*

A. Jeremiah's Lament: The Book of Lamentations

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.”

Lamentations 3:19-20

Historical Context: Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah to reflect upon the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC by the Babylonians. After ignoring the Lord's repeated warnings to turn from their idolatry, injustice, sexual immorality, and corruption, the Lord sent the Babylonians as the rod of his punishment.

“How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who was once great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.” Lamentations 1:1

In the original Hebrew, “how?” is the title of the book. It reflects the struggle of Jeremiah’s lament: How could this happen? How could God allow this? How can we survive this?

Lamentations is a book of raw and honest emotion about the groaning that happens in this life as we wait for King Jesus to return. The Holy Spirit put it in the Bible to teach us what lament looks like.

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.” Lamentations 3:19-20

There is a noticeable progression in the book as we hear Jeremiah move from a place of darkness and hopelessness to an emerging level of trust and hope.

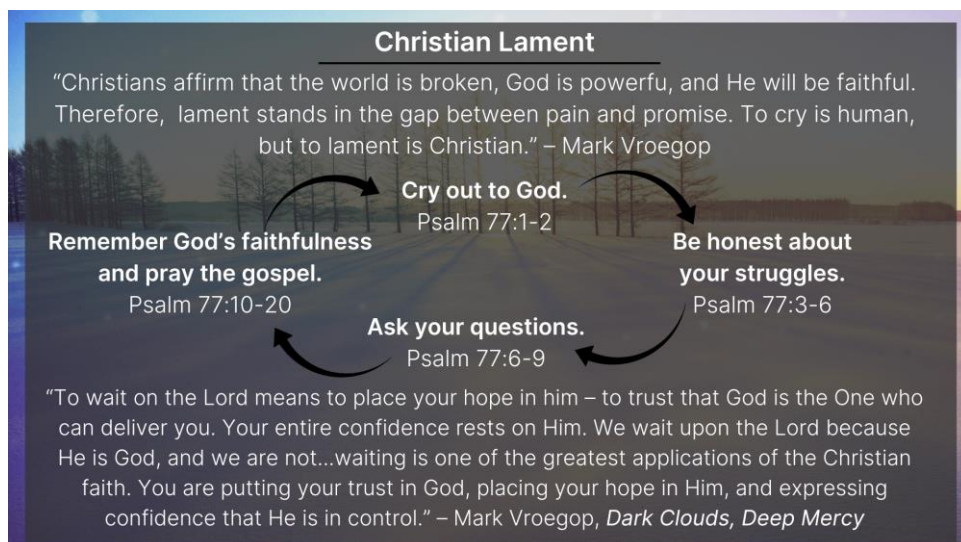
“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.’ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” Lamentations 3:21-27

We see a general pattern to lament in Lamentations that is expressed in many of the Psalms.

B. Psalms of Lament

About 1/3 of the Psalms are laments. It is the largest category in the book of Psalms meaning that 1/3 of Israel’s prayer book wrestles with pain.

Eventually we will all ask those questions.



IV. The Hope of the Incarnation of the Son of God (John 1:1-3)

Q: How can we have hope amid our groaning? Is there a Reality that we can cling to like a life raft while we're waiting for the Lord to come through?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning...The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father full of grace and truth."
John 1:1-2, 14

The hope of Christmas is grounded in the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God (John 1). God has come to us and for us. He has entered the sewage of our sin and brokenness to lift us out and make us clean and whole. This is why we can have real hope!

"Therefore, since we have such a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16

We can dare to lament because we have a compassionate Savior in Jesus.

"'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Revelation 22:20

Recommended resources:

1. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* by Mark Vroegop
2. *A Grace Disguised* by Jerry Sittser

Discussion Questions:

1. Were you ever taught the example of Biblical lament? How was it taught?
2. What has been your experience waiting and groaning for the Lord to breakthrough in a situation?
3. Did you experience anything helpful from your Christian community while you were waiting and groaning? Anything unhelpful or hurtful?
4. Have you ever expressed a prayer of lament to the Lord? What has been your experience with the prayer of lament?
5. Doug offered the counsel that we can suspend our faith rather than reject it when we are tempted to lose heart and hope. He said we can borrow the faith of our Christian community. Have you ever done this? What do you think of this suggestion?
6. What difference does the incarnation of the Son of God make to you as you wrestle with groaning and sorrow and waiting?