

With Loud Cries and Tears
Heb 4:4-5:10

I. Intro

- A. Sometimes when you are reading a non-fiction book the author will insert a section and label it Excursus. We might call it a rabbit trail. It means that we are going to chase a rabbit – a topic - down and get a few more details on it.
1. Last week we looked at those times in our life when God does not seem to listen to us and answer our prayers. He seems far away and does not seem to be acting in accord with his character. He lets us suffer for what seems to us for no apparent or just reason.
 2. Our natural heart and soul felt response to that is confusion. We don't understand why God is acting this way.
 3. Our natural response to this is to try and find an answer. Why is God so far away and not paying attention? There is no simple answer to that. And when we try to give a pat theological answer – we often look foolish and really don't minister to those who are suffering. Simple pat answers ring hollow.
 4. I made reference to a NY Times editorial in which the writer says that there are times when we need to return to the biblical tradition of the lament. A lament is when we go to the Lord and pour ourselves out and even challenge God because we are suffering when we have not done anything to deserve it (Ps 44:17).
 - a. In the Psalms of lament the Psalmist does just that. And in the end he does not really get an answer to his “why God” or “how long God” questions. That is not really the purpose of the lament. Instead, the lament is a means of bringing his suffering before the Lord where the “why” questions become “what” questions. What Lord do I do in light of all of my suffering?
 - b. The lament drives us to get beyond the why to the next step we need to take. It is not just a means of venting to the Lord, though that is a part of it. It does not leave us there. It frames the issue we have and directs us to move forward.

II. The Excursus – or Rabbit Trail - Laments

- A. There are a couple of different kinds of laments in Scripture. One of those is a dirge. A dirge is a lament for a person who has died.
1. 2 Sam 1:19-27 is a dirge. Jonathan was killed by the Philistines and Saul was wounded in battle and fell on his sword and took his own life instead of allowing the Philistines to take him alive and make sport of him.
 2. After the battle David laments the death of Saul and Jonathan through this dirge we find in 2 Samuel. If you read it you will notice that there is nothing spiritual about it. There is the well-known line where David speaks of his friendship with Jonathan. But God is not referenced. The dirge was a secular memorial.
 3. Elton John's tribute to Princess Diana – Candle in the Wind – is a dirge. It has a phrase in it “now you belong to heaven”, but I don't think he has anything about the Lord or salvation in mind. It is just where “everybody goes when they die”. A polite thing to say. Diana was a charitable lady. A notable individual. A Spencer. But “A Candle in the Wind” is nothing more than a dirge with nice moving music.
 4. I don't know anything about Diana's faith or whether she knew the Lord or not. But if you don't know the Lord, then a dirge is all that can be said. “The deceased

- was a nice person and did some commendable things. We will miss them.” That is about it.
- B. When a Christian dies we have a funeral service and lament, but our lament is not a dirge. We believe that “right now counts forever”, as RC Sproul used to say. Our lives may look like a candle in the wind, but there is a sovereign Lord behind everything in our life guiding and directing us through life. And he sent his Son so that when we leave this world what we have done here matters for eternity.
 - C. Now here is the issue for us Christians. At times it does not seem that there is a sovereign God behind everything. The suffering in our life is indistinguishable from that of an unbeliever.
- III. Our text this morning talks about how Jesus during his life offered up prayers with loud cries and tears. It is talking primarily about the night in the Garden of Gethsemane and his time upon the cross.
- A. Hebrews has already told us that Jesus “was made like his brethren in every way” (2:17). He is fully God and fully man. He faced every temptation we face, yet he did so without sin. And in the Garden and on the cross those temptations were tremendous.
 1. We read in the Gospels that when Jesus was in the Garden he prayed asking the Father if it were possible that this cup he was about to drink could be removed. Luke records it as “if you (God) are willing” (Mt 27:39; Mk 14:35; Lk 22:42). Three of the gospels record this request of Jesus to the Father. Jesus knew what was coming his way on the cross and how great his suffering would be.
 2. Jesus’ whole life from the time of his baptism until that night in the Garden was one that led him to this evening and moment. He turned his face to Jerusalem in order to go to the cross in Luke 9:51. Yet on this night, he asks God if this cup might pass from him.
 3. Matthew tells us that his soul was “very sorrowful, even to death” (26:38). There was a heaviness upon him as he was in the Garden considering how he was going to suffer and die the next day. Luke 22:44 says that Jesus was in such agony as he prayed that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. The Father did not remove this cup from His Son.
 4. He was mocked and beaten during his trial. He was heckled upon the cross. When he was thirsty they gave him vinegar. And some in the crowd challenged him to prove who he was by coming down from the cross.
 5. And when he needed his disciples most – they abandoned him and denied him. He went through this suffering all alone. And when the suffering reached it most intense moment he cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” He was not simply quoting scripture. He cried out just like we do when we suffer and seem to be abandoned by the Lord. It was real.
 6. And here is a glimpse of the depth of his suffering – **At that moment there was no way to tell the difference between the will of God and the will of Satan.** Jesus had been handed over into the hands of sinners. Satan was having his way putting him on the cross (I Cor 2:8). And we know too that the cross was also God’s plan. (Acts 2:23). But in that moment, **the two wills seemed to be indistinguishable.** And so, he cried out asking the Father why he abandoned him.

B. Jesus is able to identify with us in every way. He has been tempted as we are. He knows what it is to be human (Heb 5:1-2). And he knows what it is to feel like the Father has abandoned him when he needed him most – when his trials were at their most severe point.

1. Some of us may have had moments when we felt abandoned by the Father.

Moments when we looked at where we were and did not know if it was God's will running things or Satan's. The two seemed indistinguishable.

2. There was a time in my life when I was right there. I did not know which way my life would go. And I did not know if the Lord was with me or not.

IV. Here is where the lament plays a role.

A. Jesus' cry from the cross – "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" was a lament. And God did not answer him at that moment.

1. That night Jesus asked the Father to let this cup of his death pass from him.

2. He was enduring the most severe of all of the temptations in his life. Lk 4:13 tells us that after the temptation in the wilderness that Satan left Jesus "until an opportune time." We don't read where Satan ever came to tempt Jesus again in the gospels. Others tempted him. But we don't read where Satan did.

a. But if Lk 4:13 is true, and it is, it is most likely at this precise moment in Jesus' life, when he is upon the cross and bearing the full brunt of the Father's wrath and abandonment. It is then that Satan can find that opportune time and tempt him to call for the angels to come and save him or do as the people gathered around the cross taunted him – "Come down and prove you are the Messiah".

3. But Jesus did not step down from the cross.

4. It may be that the lament he cried helped him through the suffering to accomplish God's will and drink the cup. The Bible tells us that no one took Jesus' life. He gave it up. After Jesus lamented God's forsaking him, he cried again in a loud voice, "Into Thy Hands I commit my spirit." (Lk 24:46). Jesus may have found the help and strength he needed through the lament to hold onto his trust of the Father and take the next step into death.

B. Our text tells us that Jesus' prayer with the loud cries and tears in the Garden and on the cross was heard. God did not answer the prayers to remove the cup or answer his "why" question when he was on the cross. Here is where and how the Father answered Jesus' prayer: He answered factually and undeniably 3 days later when he raised him from the dead. While Jesus was on the cross it may not have been clear whose will was being carried forth – Satan's or God's. But that was cleared up when Jesus was raised. On the cross – in the midst of the suffering – it was hard to tell. But 3 days later there was no doubt.

V. Laments and the next step

A. Laments are going to be a part of our life. There are going to be times when we don't understand why we are going through particular trials. And there are going to be times when we pray and it seems God is absent or not listening or answering our prayers.

B. During those times we can go to the Lord and cry out just as Jesus did. We can ask him why he is not listening. We can accuse him of neglecting us.

1. Look at Ps 80. The Psalmist asks God how long he is going to be angry at the prayers of the people (80:4). God is not answering their prayer. He has fed them the bread of tears. Their neighbors and enemies laugh at them.
2. He tells God to “Turn and see” what is happening. (vs 14). Israel’s enemies have broken and burned down the city.
3. Then at the end (18-19) they ask that God would put his hand on their leader. And he says, “We will never turn from thee”.
4. **In the midst of the trial it is hard to tell if God is actually with us or not.** And as we lament we tell him. And that helps us take the next step – in the case of this Psalmist – the next step was to renew his commitment to the Lord. With everything going on he says, “We will never turn from thee”.
5. Now what?
6. God may not answer us in the midst of the trial. But very often, like he did with Jesus on the cross, in time we see him work in a way that it is clear he is present and heard our prayers.
 - a. I know that is the case with me. At my lowest I prayed and did not know if God heard or he had left me. But I prayed. That was all I could do.
 - b. And for me, in a few days, God acted in a definitive and concrete way. Undeniable. It is why I am here now. And many of you can tell the same kind of story.
- C. Every lament and re-affirmation of faith does not end this way. But I think a lot more do than don’t. God never leaves or abandons any of us. This is his world and in spite of what we might think or how things might appear, he is sovereignly ruling over it. The victory belongs to him and to Jesus. And he is there to help us in our time of need.
- D. Even if through the trial or suffering we end up dying, we die differently and we lament differently than those who don’t know the Lord. Our funeral service will not be a dirge where the only thing we have is people saying nice things about us. If that is what we are reduced to then it might be useful to have some friends with selective memories who can tell persuasive lies. We’ve all been to those services.
 1. But that is not ours. After the lament and after it leads us to the next step – we have hope in the resurrected Jesus Christ. When we stand at the casket of a believer and commit their body to the ground and their soul to the Lord, we do so with the certainty that as Jesus committed himself to the Lord’s hands upon the cross and was raised, so too will we.
 2. What we have done right now counts forever.
 3. A Candle in the Wind is a nice tribute. It was originally done for Marilyn Monroe. I wonder how many people under 50 know who that is. 100 years from now, I wonder how many will know who Diana is. Maybe some family members. Maybe some historians.
 4. Belonging to Jesus, in spite of what it might look like at times, we know this: God never leaves us or forsakes us. And he has made a place for us in Christ Jesus for all eternity. Lament before the Lord when we need to. And let it have its effect and lead us to the next step. There is hope in the Lord.