

Title: A Time to Mourn
Text: 2 Samuel 1.17-27
Theme: Lamenting loss
Series: 2 Samuel #2
Prop Stmtnt: Grief is a gift to help us long for the day when death is no more.

I've read the statements of soldiers about to enter battle. "They haven't made the bullet that has my name on it." I am unfazed. Death does not intimidate me. It sounds tough. But the image of a rough and hardened warrior unfazed by disaster and calamities around him does not fit David. No, David displays a full range of manliness. He is a rugged warrior and a sensitive musician. He is a powerful king and a thoughtful poet. He leads, administrates, inspires and conquers plus, he feels, composes, shepherds and cries. No one would ever accuse David of not being in touch with his emotions. When governed by God, this aspect of David is a wonderful corrective to yesterday's shrunken image of a man portrayed by a Clint Eastwood or today's shrunken manliness imaged in hip-hop who lives only for the moment and would never sacrifice for another, much less cry. For men, for all of us, there is a time to mourn.

Read Text:

We are often unprepared for death. I mean that on two levels. 1) We are often unprepared for all of the decisions we have to make when someone dies. Too many times I am with you at the hospital in the little room where the body of your family member is and we are grieving our loss, but I know what is coming. It feels so rude to say it, but the hospital will want to know what to do with the body. That means, in many cases, what funeral home are you going to choose? And that starts a chain-reaction of decisions that take up so much time that by the time the dust settles from the actual funeral, the entire thing seems like a blur. 2) We are often unprepared for death itself. We try not to give much thought to it as if ignoring it will keep it from happening to us. So, when it does, we are not ready for the deep sense of loss that comes. It is no secret that many people just drink their way through it, or load up on meds that numb them to what is actually happening.

We are not very good at grief and lament. In fact, since so many people are not willing to face their own death, they are very uncomfortable with death and are therefore very unprepared for it. So, when someone reacts to death, for what it is, we act like, what is wrong with them? Shouldn't they be over it by now? Either our expectations, or perceived expectations are not good. Death is not our friend. Even for the believer, who knows that their loved one is in a better place, we are still separated. There are certain things that only certain people can bring out in you and when they are gone, that part of your life is gone. Every person that we lose means, in a sense, that there is a little less of us. That is why grieving over death is actually part of what it means to be human. The person who does not grieve is not healthy. Even if you can stuff your grief into a drawer and push it shut for a while, it will come out, somehow, someday. The truth is, we grieve in proportion to how deep we love. Now, we certainly do not all grieve the same way. Some people have a much wider range of emotional expression than others. Some are way more communal in their grief while others more private, but experiencing grief is

not a weakness. It is a God-given response to the fundamental fact that life has meaning and purpose. Seriously, if evolution were true, if our actual source of origin was matter, if we are all competing for limited space and limited resources and only the fittest survive, we would not grieve. Grief is a dead give-away that no one really believes in evolution. We grieve because we are human and we are human because we have been made in the image of God. We may not be united in height, weight, age, gender, race, education, food preferences, or college football team affections, but we are most certainly united in grief.

1. **Godly grief takes time in our lives and space in our hearts.** (17-18)

David wrote a lament. This was a poem and most likely was set to music. This took time for David to compose and if you have ever composed a poem or music, you know that in order for it to be done well, you have to pour over it. Good poetry and good music are not rushed. David took time to write this. This is the new king, or the guy who is about to become the new king. There are a lot of loose ends to gather, a lot of details to attend to, a lot of relationships to mend, but David writes a song of lament for Saul and Jonathan. He not only gives space in his life for this, but he gives an order that it should be taught to the people of Judah.

Now, there are two ways we can take this. When David does become king, he is anointed king only of Judah (southern half of Israel). So, it makes sense for David to order this to be taught to Judah because he only has authority over Judah. But I think there is more to this. David was from the tribe of Judah and Judah would naturally be more sympathetic to David than to Saul and may be dismissive of Saul's death as if it is not worth their attention. David wants his people to grieve over Saul and Jonathan. Now, David gives more honor to Jonathan in this lament than he does Saul (rightfully so), but he still takes the time to esteem Saul.

I am consistently encouraged by how well you care for one another in grief. Many of you take time to come to times of visiting and even attend the funeral. There is an entire team of people who will drop what they planned to do in order to go shopping, then set-up the gym, cook food and serve a lot of people a meal after a funeral. You are giving space in your life for the grief of others. What a sweet gift this is. The person who died may not be your spouse, parent or child, but you are letting them know that this grief they experience matters to you, because they matter to you. Giving space in our hearts and in our schedules for our grief and the grief of others is an expression of how we value life. Godly grief is pro-life. Related to that...

2. **Godly grief is personal and congregational.** (17-18)

David lamented with this lamentation. This was obviously personal but it was not private. David wanted the people of God to share in this grief. This lament was recorded in the Book of Jasher, which sadly, has been lost. But, this was intended to be part of the nation's experience. This is very instructive and helpful for us. We are the New Covenant people of God and we stand on the shoulders of the Old Covenant people of God. There are many things that we need to learn from them and this is one of them. We grieve together. However, many believers do not know how to grieve because the church they are part of does not make room for grief. We want our

“worship” services to be upbeat and happy, happy, happy. We like loud, noisy, busy, and distracting kind of settings. We don’t like anything negative or depressing. So, we don’t confess sin, we don’t do contemplative stuff, we don’t talk about problems and we don’t like to say anything that would be considered to be a downer. Where does that come from? It comes from Disneyland. Seriously. This is what happens when the church takes its cues from Disneyland instead of from the Bible. But life is filled with tragedy and you do not have to live very long to experience it. This is a tragedy. “How the mighty have fallen!” This is repeated 3x in this short lament. Saul and Jonathan were mighty and they have fallen. We need to stop and feel the true weight of loss and it is good to do this with others because our lives are connected to one another. David taught others so that they could share in this together and learn from each other. What we give time to as a congregation is what we value.

3. **Godly grief is not a show for others, but a reset for our souls.** (20-21)

When we hear tragic news, we instinctively respond with a heart-felt denial, like NO! That is the sentiment of verses 20-21. David is commanding something he has no authority over. He can’t make the news reports in Gath and Ashkelon not gloat over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. He can’t make it not rain on Mt. Gilboa so this landmark is cursed by desolation. These verses capture the grief in our guts. This is agonizing, deep, guttural, and reactionary. This is in the Bible. The Spirit of God directed this to be part of His Word to us and for us. Grief is not a sign of unbelief. Neither does our trust in the sovereignty of God eliminate our capacity for sorrow. Our trust in God provides safeguards for our sorrow, but it does not eliminate it. We are right to feel our loss and we are right to express it. Grief is a reminder to us of the value of life and the treasure that good relationships can be. Grief helps us reset our value system on what matters.

Every culture has customs for death and those customs can become distractions instead of aids. This was the case in the days of Christ. One of the customs was to hire mourners. The more mourners you had, the more important the person appeared to have been. So, wealthy people could hire mourners to support the image of their importance. That turns mourning into a game. And we can fall into that as well. When you are making funeral arrangements, it is easy to wonder, “what will others think if I do this or that?” Should I wear all black? Godly grief frees you from that. Godly grief is not something that we pretend to have. Godly grief is grief that is felt and expressed from a godly perspective. It does not pretend; it is honest and heartfelt. In some cases, this (see #1) takes time. But it is a gift to us because it will serve as a reset for our own souls. Life is not a series of perfect pictures; it is a journey through the shadowlands.

4. **Godly grief is not ignorant of failures, but chooses not to focus on them.** (22-23)

David, of all people knew Saul’s weaknesses and colossal failures, but David also knew that those failures were not the entire story. In Saul’s younger years, he was a great help to Israel. It is why his demise is such a heartache. He did some great things and could have done so much more. Why is it, that people are so quick to heap abuse upon a public person who, even after years of effectiveness, makes a mistake or fails? We see it in the world of sports. A Tom Brady or Aaron Rodgers or Miguel Cabrera can be really good for a longtime, and maybe they stay

around a bit too long, but wow, people can be so quick to diss them and mock them. The same thing happens when a prominent religious leader fails, as some do and the onslaught of “I told you so’s” comes as a wave. He chose to focus on what Saul did well probably as an aid for his own heart to guard against pride, self-pity and bitterness and as a way to honor Saul’s family (and the tribe of Benjamin) who did not need to have Saul’s failures rubbed in their face.

Past generations did not talk much about problems. If someone was an alcoholic, they didn’t talk about it. If someone was unfaithful, they didn’t talk about it. If someone was sexually abused, they didn’t talk about it. And it wasn’t that they didn’t just talk about the bad stuff, they didn’t talk about a lot of things. Now, in many cases, the pendulum has swung to the other side. It’s as if the only thing that people talk about is how life is so unfair, how their parents were so terrible, how every authority figure failed to make them special, etc. It is very tempting for people now to only see the worst and nothing else. Your parents are not perfect, but in many cases, they were conduits of God’s grace to you. Your spouse is not perfect, but she or he is not Satan in the flesh. But, when you focus so exclusively on their failures, you become a victim, and your heart shrivels up and refuses to give any space to grace for them. Saul broke promise after promise after promise to David. David made some bad decisions, but some of those bad decisions were in response to bad things that Saul did. David had plenty of opportunity to be resentful and now, of all times, could have finally let everyone know what he knew from what Jonathan had said, what Michel said, what the palace guard had said, what David witnessed. Now, with the death of the reigning monarch, he could have written a kiss-n-tell that was a shameless, imbecile, spoiled-rotten, whiney, money-grab attempt about growing up in Buckingham Palace, I mean, the Mahanaim palace, right? He could have done that. There was and always will be an audience who want to feel better about themselves because at least they aren’t as awful as these disgusting leaders. David did not do that. Why did David choose to focus on this? Was this a shrewd and calculated political move designed to placate the northern tribes more loyal to Saul? I don’t think so. You can calculate your response to some things, but instinctive reactions reveal your heart. David’s instinctive reaction to the news of Saul’s death was heart-felt grief. This song was not a political performance, it was an expression of the heart. He reacted this way, because it was apparent that in his own heart he chose, for the most part to focus on what was good about Saul and that was how he wanted to remember him and wanted others to do the same.

Think about the people in your life who are your primary sources of irritation and angst. Who are those whom you consider to be your enemy? Have you allowed your frustration with them to blind you to anything good they are and do? Do you know what that is? That is bitterness. I’ve told you before that bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping that it will kill your enemy. Think about this. If David was full of bitterness toward Saul and Saul died, what kind of a king would David have been? He would have been just like Saul. A bitter king is a terrifying prospect. They have an angry heart that cannot be calmed and they have unlimited power. David’s bitterness would have been unleashed in ungodly ways. His godly grief was a gift to the nation that he would rule over. Related to that...

5. **Godly grief mourns the loss of what was good and what could have been.** (23-24)

Jonathan fought well with his father and died fighting with his father. Both of them died seeking to defend Israel. Saul, particularly for a season brought a measure of relief and protection to Israel and obviously if he had not disobeyed the Lord and become so obsessed with David, his exploits would have been legendary. What Saul did for the people of Jabesh-Gilead could have been repeated over and over. Saul could have gone down as one of Israel's mighty warriors without an asterisk next to his name. But even though he died in a measure of disgrace, David is right to lead the people in mourning the loss of what was good. There is a lesson here. The grief over Saul is not a clean grief. The grief is fueled in part by the knowledge that this is not how his life had to turn out. Saul had so much potential and had such a wonderful God-given opportunity. David is grieving the loss of that. When you grieve the loss of what could have been, it is instructive for your own soul. That is one of the reasons why grief is good for us. It is good for us to consider our own lives and our own choices.

6. **Godly grief steels the soul for good resolve.**

David has no authority over the YouTube videos in Philistia showing the people dancing in the streets in celebration of their victory over Saul. What he orders, he cannot enforce and he knows it. But he can instill this into the soldiers of his force. This lament looks back over what was, but it also has the effect of saying, never again. Let's learn from this. Never again do we want the enemies of God's people praising Dagon because it looks as if he is stronger than Yahweh. What contributed to this defeat? Let's learn from this. Let's not repeat the same

Many of you know the story of Masada, which was a fortress on top of a rock formation in the Judean desert not far from the Dead Sea. In that fortress, the last remnant of Jews held out against the Roman invasion that had destroyed Jerusalem in 70 a.d. Rather than be taken captive, 960 Jews committed mass suicide. In the 1920's a Ukrainian Jewish poet wrote a work about that siege in which was this line, "Never again shall Masada fall." This line was part of the inspiration of the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw ghetto against the Nazi's in 1943. For many years, when a soldier was sworn into the Israeli army, he would make a pre-dawn trek at Masada after which he would take his oath of allegiance. The death of others helped form the resolve to not let their death be in vain but be a motivation. Never again. Never again will Gilboa fall to Philistia. Never again will the girls in Gaza or Ashkelon sing in victory over Israel. Never again. This grief helped steel the soul for good resolve.

7. **Godly grief will be replaced by fullness of joy.**

We live in a world of gain and loss. We hear that this couple is expecting and we rejoice. Then we hear that they lost the child and we grieve. We hear that this couple had a baby and we rejoice. Then we hear that this family experienced a death and we grieve. There is a time to mourn and a time to dance. We have both and part of our experience in life is such that the very people we mourn with are often the people we dance with. But, when you leave these shadowlands and like Pilgrim go home to the Celestial City, you will find only dancing. Here we have addition and subtraction. There, only addition. Joy is only increased. It will only grow. He

will wipe every tear from their eyes and death will be no more. That is a guaranteed reality because Christ defeated death by his death. As John Owen rightfully stated, the death of death is in the death of Christ. The wages of sin is death. Death came by sin. But, Christ died the ultimate death in order to pay the ultimate price to satisfy the ultimate debt and satisfy the ultimate wrath of God against our sin. He paid the price for sin which set into motion the banishment of death. That is the prospect of glory. The land that is fairer than day. One day, there will be no laments, no confession of sin, no loss and no fear. Only joy and a joy that only grows, forever.