

Psalm 61:1-8 The Lament of The Caregiver, #7 Dis. Falls Church AM 6/12/22  
Disabilities are part of our suffering as Christians.

Caregiving is also a part of our suffering as Christians.

So, we need to have a right understanding of Christian view of suffering.

In this life as a Christian, we stand amazed at two things 1) all that is expected of us, 2) all that is provided for us. In other words, we stand surprised at 1) the load that is put upon us by God and 2) all that is given to us by Christ.

As we see demonstrated in the book *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which our students will study at Vacation Bible School, and which I recommend to all of us to study this Summer – as we see demonstrated in that book, the Christian's life is filled with sorrows. It is pictured in the story as the burden that is upon Christian's back. For Christian, the burden is his sins. But a lot of times, our sins arise as a result of our sufferings. How can we face our sufferings without sinning? We need a place to lay down our burden about our sins, but then going forward, we need a way to properly deal with our difficulties. Part of the answer is a Christian's lament. And in the case of our sermon series, part of the answer is the lament of the Christian caregiver.

Let's face the situation of our sufferings. There are times when there is no human person to whom we can turn for understanding, comfort and help. Here are some examples: some people spend most of their lives alone. Others have a family, but it is not much better than being alone, because the family is not sympathetic or nurturing. Some have a spouse, but the spouse does not love Christ, so they have a perpetual ache of loneliness. Some Christians are resented by people at the workplace. Some Christians feel the discomfort of neighbors who live near them, neighbors who are filled with hate. Some Christians have grown old, and their relatives and friends are dead and dying. Many people know the sorrow of having no human person to whom they can turn for understanding.

Today we turn to the words of God through King David. We remember the suffering in the life of King David. Even after he became the mighty King David with wives and children, generals, and counselors, soldiers and servants, David had times when he looked around at his life, and he had to admit that he felt alone.

**Christ hears the lament of the caregiver, and responds with sympathy; the church patterns herself after Christ.**

**1. Christ hears and understands the lament; so does the church. (v.1-2)**

Verse 1 – Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer. That is exactly what Christ does. He hears our cries. He hears our laments. He listens to our explanations of what it is like to suffer as we currently are suffering, and Christ understands with compassion. Christians do what Christ does. The church does what her groom does. We follow Christ and we hear the laments of others. We seek to understand each other, and we seek to have genuine Christ-like compassion

for each other. We point people to the one place they can always turn. The same place that David turned. To God alone. David learned to turn to God from wherever he was. Verse 2, says David had learned to call to God from the end of the earth! David had learned to call to God when David's heart was faint and weak. What else did David learn? David learned that he should ask God to lead David to the one place that was helpful, the one person who would provide the safety and help that David needed. David learned that God would lead David to the Rock!

Verse 2 - A rock. God is our rock. This is a common picture in the Psalm. More than 20 times in the Psalms, God is a rock. David had used the rocks of the wilderness as places of refuge and protection. It was a great image for David. A number of different times in David's life David had to flee to the rocks, and David knew that he was safe in the protection of the rock.

What is unique here? Two things. 1) the rock is described as higher than David. 2) David must be led to this rock.

Same for us, when we take up the lament of Psalm 61 for ourselves, and for the caregivers whom we are supporting. Not only do we need a rock, we need the Spirit of God to lead us to Him.

The setting for Psalm 61 seems to be a time when King David was far from home. Verse 2 tells us that he called to God "*from the end of the earth.*" For David, Jerusalem had become the center of worship and government and life. The ark of God was there. Is this a geographical reference? Was it a time when David was far from Jerusalem? David's heart was growing faint. There is a richness to this word picture, this lament, that applies to our study of caregivers.

This is the experience of David, it is the experience of Christ, it is the experience of everyone who walks with God. It feels like God is distant and neglectful of us, but in reality, God is nearby and is rescuing us.

Consider the perspective of Jesus, coming into this in Mark 14, when Jesus was praying, the disciples were falling asleep, and one of the disciples was emphatically denying Christ 3 times. John 14:34, Jesus Himself began to be deeply distressed and troubled, and said "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.*" Jesus then separated Himself from His disciples, so that He was alone with His Father in prayer, and Jesus fell to the ground, and that is when Jesus asked for the hour of suffering to pass. You know what Jesus prayed next, "*...not what I will, but what You will.*"

So, what happened? What was the will of the Father? We fast forward to Mark 15, where Jesus was on the cross, and those around him mocked Him, and even those on the other two crosses heaped insults on Jesus. And darkness came over the whole land for 3 hours. Jesus cried out, My God, why have You forsaken Me?

Jesus lamented. Jesus was forsaken.

We lament. But we are never forsaken.

How has the cross and the empty tomb changed our lament. What does it feel like to experience loss? The patient lost something. But caregiver also has lost something. Lost flexibility. Lost free time. Lost freedom. Lost fellowship. And much more.

Often the caregiver did not have any advanced warning before these losses. It could have happened suddenly or gradually.

Who understands these losses? Christ. Lament is Christ's invitation to pour your heart out to God. Be honest. What does it feel like?

We are talking about facts of real losses, but we are also talking about emotions – there are a lot of emotions tied to caregiving.

For all of it, Christ welcomes our lament.

False teachers say – God owes us a healthy happy life.

True teacher say – God gives us suffering to endure, but invites our lament, and hears us with compassion, and provides strength and comfort for us.

If we caregivers and we the supporters of caregivers remain miserable, how could we sing Psalms such as Psalm 61? Does God expect us to each week as we worship to put on a happy face, when inside we are miserable? What if we are broken today? Burdened? Overwhelmed? Discouraged. What if the person that I love is broken and struggling? How are we supposed to appear before God, and answer His call to worship Him, when we are a mess?

We learn from Psalm 61, that we cry out to God from the end of the earth, we cry out to God from anywhere, and in any condition. Come just as you are.

The normal Christian life is familiar with pain and suffering.

One third of the Psalms are lament. We sing laments.

Lament must be in your repertoire.

Matthew 11:28, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

## **2. Christ moves toward the caregiver; so does the church. (v.3-4)**

There are four metaphors that become increasingly warm and intimate.

We already had the picture of God as our rock.

Now there are four more word pictures.

Verse 3, Refuge, strong tower verse 4 tent and shelter of wings.

Refuge is similar to the previous metaphor of rock. It calls to mind a wilderness retreat location where David would go to remain safe, when running from Absalom.

Strong tower is different, because it is not in the wilderness, but rather is in a city, and is part of a fortified wall around an ancient city. City walls had towers build into them. Here the idea is more warm – instead of David on the run, this

word picture is of David defending himself from his own home city. This is not a situation in which David was alone. David would enter the strong tower as a defense against the foe, and David would have fellow companions to help him.

Tent is a scene of even more domestic nature, as opposed to a military scene. This is getting warmer and more friendly. The word 'tent' is also translated 'tabernacle' and is the place where the ark of God was kept. David was asking to dwell where God dwells. We have moved from the wilderness to the fortified city of Jerusalem, and now we have moved to the tabernacle of God, which means we are no longer distant from God, but rather we are getting ever closer and closer to God.

Until we reach the fourth word picture here, which is the wings of a sheltering mother bird (v.4b). This is the last and most friendly image of the four images in this list. David wrote of dwelling under the protection or under the shelter of the wings of God Himself! This is the wings of God! This is a lot closer to God! A young bird who is under the wings of the mother bird, is touching the body of the mother bird, and is nestled in there, and all around the young bird is the strong wing of the mother bird. In verse 2, David felt distant from God. Here in verse 4, David was so close to God, that we sense David was enjoying a holy and spiritual snuggling with God. David did not fear or hesitate to use language of visceral comfort, as David drew near to God. And this Psalm is addressed to the choirmaster, which means it is the whole choir singing to the whole congregation about how we all can draw near to God.

God listens. God heals. God restores.

A lament is vertical. From me to God. Lord, how long? Is a Lament.

Lord, how can there again be joy in my lament, joy in my heart and life and joy in my service?

A lament is more than complaining, and more than venting. A lament to God is an expression of faith in God, which results in us drawing very close to God.

In a lament, we are crying out to God. A lament is raw and real. David did not clean up this lament of for publication in the Bible, before David cried it out. David did not clean up this lament before he taught it to the choirmaster for public singing. David's approach to God was real, and honest and forthright before the elders and before the gathered congregation.

David was crying out God where are you? I used to feel You as closeby, but now, where are you?

I cannot sleep! There is emotional weariness of being mocked.

Physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, relationally, socially.

Did you ever just lie down and weep and weep?

Not a self-pitying kind of weeping. Not a complaining type of weeping.

But a broken type of weeping that is bringing raw, unfiltered, unprocessed, emotions to God.

Our laments need to be brought to God. If we don't, we either deny that the pain is real, or we become cynical that God can do anything for us.

In a lament, we are asking God for help. We express confidence in the character of God. Based on the kind of God You are, and what You have done in the past, now here in this present moment, will You please rescue me? Just like You rescued me in the past, please do it again. Be a God to me! Help me!

Pain and faith can co-exist in the same lament, because pain and faith coexist in the same heart.

God does not ignore the cries of those who suffer.

### **3. Christ takes loving actions and provides genuinely helpful support; so does the church. (v.5-8)**

v. 5 – David expresses here two beautiful gifts that Christians have – the truth that God hears our prayers, and the gift of our heritage. As those who fear God's name, our cries are heard by God, and we are supported the same way that God in history has always supported His people. Heritage means that we are part of the same story of God redeeming His people and God upholding His people!

v. 6 – David wrote about himself as king. Here is David's poetic artistry of suddenly switching to talk about himself as "the king" while he is the king. But it is also pointing beyond David to the future person sitting on the throne of God. The request to God in verse 6 is also that the sons of David could have a dynasty. Of course, when we say son of David, we think of Christ Jesus, the son of David.

Sure enough, when we get to verse 7, we realize that this prayer can only be fulfilled in the future Messiah to sit on David's throne. Verse 7 David prayed, "May He be enthroned forever before God (in God's presence); appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over Him! WHO IS ENTHRONED FOREVER IN GOD'S PRESENCE? Of course this prayer was answered in Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and exaltation as God's King forever.

David was praying that God's vision of the heritage of David would be fulfilled. The thing that drew David out of his previous feeling of being distant from God was the promise of God. David recalled the Words of God through the prophet of God in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish His Kingdom. He is the One who will build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever."

Verse 8 – David's response is praise. David is singing his Psalm again! David is fulfilling David's vows, because God is fulfilling God's promises. David loved God, because God first loved David. David praised, because David had God as his rock.

## **Conclude:**

### 1. Bring your lament to God.

Are things hard for you? Do you feel things are dark right now? One way to sum up this Psalm and a lament is this, “*Those who know the path to God, can find it in the dark.*”

Our cries are heard by God.

Uniquely Jesus modeled how we should lament, who lived a perfect life of obedience, and He poured out His heart to God the Father, and He was rejected and treated as if He had no right to come into the presence of God. Because of that, we know that we have the ear of God to our cries, our pain, our raw emotion. We have access to God. God will never turn away from us, because Jesus took our forsakenness.

God the Father welcomes our laments.

This gives us space to grieve. It is really hard for caregivers to keep going to a church that only emphasizes jolly victory and a triumphal King. We lament and we praise. We can train the church to take our grief to God in a vibrant and living faith.

2) Hear and understand the lament of the caregiver. This is our message to caregivers. Christ hears you. We hear you. I hear you. I lament alongside of you. There is no such thing as a lament-free life.

To love is to lament. Let your heart be broken by something. In a lament, we avoid two ditches 1) God, you owe me. 2) God, it's over. God you owe me is the sin of the pride of entitlement. God, it's over, is the sin of despair. We avoid all of these in lament.

Furthermore, lament teaches us to enjoy honesty rather than the facade of forced cheerfulness.

It is okay to come to God in pain. It is okay to come to church worship in pain. It is okay to open up in a Bible study or small group or on a phone call from an elder or a Christian sister about how hard today is as a caregiver.

When sorrows like sea billows roll.

Why don't we have more hymns like that? What about when sorrows roll?

There is deep mercy when we are deeply honest.

Lament teaches us to look to a better horizon.

3) Take Christ-like action to support caregivers in a way that is genuinely helpful.

In lament, we find hope and power for worship and service (either caregiving or supporting caregivers).

In what do we hope? At the end of the day, when we can unplug? We need a better horizon. Look at verse 8, there are two permanent things in our lives – worship and service. a) worship. We need to be part of global worship of the

Creator God who redeems His people. b) Service. We need to serve one another. We need to do our duty, to do our part, to fulfill our vows, to serve our brothers and sisters.

Lament was never meant to be hijacked and become all about you. The attention is not on us. The attention is on God, who upholds and carries broken people. God can cultivate a garden of praise to God. In lamenting, we remember the gospel, and get the focus off of ourselves. Even our laments are all about God. We honor His power and His kingdom world-wide.

God put Psalm 61 into to your prayer repertoire. Use it.

We know this God even more closely than David knew Him.

An elderly woman attending a Bible conference fell and broke her leg. She said to her pastor I know the Lord led me to the Bible conference, but I don't see why I had to break my leg. I don't see any good coming from that. The pastor told her, "The Lord did not say we SEE all things working together for good. Romans 8:28 says we KNOW that all things work together for our good. We don't see it with our eyes, and understand the connections with our minds, but we KNOW that it is working out for the best this way.

Sometimes, the gift from God is to feel our need of Him, and then to re-discover just how wonderful Christ Jesus is. Sometimes, it is the sorrows that drive us back to Christ.

Augustine said, "They that are godly are oppressed and vexed in the church... for this purpose: that when they are pressed, they should cry; and when they cry, that they should be heard; and when they are heard, that they should...praise God."