



### **Day thirty-nine**

For the next 40 days we are offering us all a challenge to consider 40 things that are sucking the life out of us. The challenge is to examine these and through confronting God's word, his Spirit, and his community of faith as we seek to be filled with his life and his love again. At the conclusion of each challenge there will be an opportunity to engage about this with another person and/or the larger community.

Today the thing we are asking us to explore giving up is:

## **SORROW.**

### **Confronting the text**

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him,' (Lamentations 3:22-23).*

### **Confronting myself with God**

The hope of this penultimate post is not to see sorrow as sin, but to boundary it, and begin to see how we can move on with life. Or, to give a pattern to sorrow so that we may recognize the way out.

This is the theme of the book of Lamentations. A lament is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Aptly named, the book it is an honest record of our faith-grandparents grief at the terrible events of the Babylonian captivity of 587 BC.

For five chapters, 154 verses, the author, probably Jeremiah, laments the present circumstances of his people and nation.

But, and this is important, it is a lament leaning into hope; recognizing while the present situation is due to sin, it is God's nature to forgive and heal.

The sin of our faith grandparents made it impossible for them to live in covenant relationship with God. It took intervention. That's why God through the prophet Habakkuk said . . . *I am rousing the Babylonians.*

Why did this period of intense and complex suffering go on in Israel for seventy years?

Why was there so much lost, carnage, cannibalism, and sacrilege?

Why did our faith-grandparents abandon their respect for human life and the will of God by sacrificing their innocent children and murdering their priests?

The Bible is clear: God gave them over to their fate. Lamentations 3:38 owns this . . . *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?"*

It is difficult / impossible to stop the cycling rotating to this. It isn't like we can just turn it off or shove it down.

If we didn't have parents, or a community who lovingly, but forcefully said "No," we will continue this cycle.

We need to listen to the inner work of God's Spirit and avail ourselves of his means of grace through which we seek to be self-aware.

We need to read Lamentations which expresses both anger at the situation of pain . . . and ownership.

We may not like the word sin; but like it or not it's real.

When we sin, we miss the mark of a joy-filled life that God has established for us and we have to deal with sin's natural consequences:

- the pain of a burned hand,
- obesity,
- the breaking down of our body,
- lack of energy to do what we were made to do,
- heart attack,
- serial monogamy,
- and on and on and on.

But here's the good news.

First, the ultimate penalty for sin has *already* been absorbed by Christ on the cross.

That's a done deal.

When Jesus says "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,*" (Lk. 23:46) we are given the potential to step into him in whom the power of sin was destroyed.

But secondly, the biblical view of why we have to grapple with suffering is that suffering becomes a sort of irresistible grace directing our despair toward God.

Now don't get me wrong, suffering in itself doesn't lead us *into* a deeper relationship with God. It's just as liable to do the opposite; just as liable to dehumanize and embitter us. All too often we will mistakenly interpret suffering as God's rejection concluding that because God hates sin, he also hates the sinner.

But suffering viewed through the lens of the cross is a corrective to this self-defeated view.

The cross is proof of God's restorative wounding love.

We know how far we can fall.

The cross is God's answer to our lament.

Lamentations 3:19-24 says . . .

*The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!*

*My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:*

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'*

We all want to live a life completely avoiding the human realities of guilt or denying the consequences of our life's choices.

But that's not real.

An orthodox faith takes seriously both God's judgment *and* God's mercy.

It stands upon this incredible truth: judgment and mercy are not opposites, they are compliments. Throughout the Bible we see this tension spanned in the love of God who loves us so much that his judgment leads to compassion. In the transformative work of Christ within our lives, pain gives way to God's kindness.

As we read our faith-grandparents lamentations firmly grounded in the cross of Christ we see the landscape of the love of God as a passenger in an airplane suddenly sees the land from 30,000 feet: fully and without obstruction. The God who wounds is also the God who binds up, God is the God of the cross *and* the resurrection.

### **Listening to God's people**

What are you sorrowful about?

Have you shared that with someone else?

What is holding you back?