

**Race, Politics, and the Gospel – Lament**

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**Introduction**

- **Fannie Lou Hamer – Suffering and Singing**

- *When you're in a brick cell, locked up, and haven't done anything to anybody but still you're locked up there, well sometimes words just begin to come to you and you begin to sing. (Fannie Lou Hamer)*

- **The Foreign Language of Lament**

**Lament in the Bible**

- *A lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. (Mark Vroegop)*
- **Lamentations**
  - *[1] How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. [2] She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. [3] Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. (Lamentations 1:1-3)*
  - *[19] Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! [20] My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. [21] But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: [22] The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; [23] they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. [24] "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lamentations 3:19-24)*
- **Psalms**
- **General Structure**
  - Turn to God
    - *[1] I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. [2] In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. [3] When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. (Psalm 77:1-3)*
  - Complain
    - *Instead of stuffing our struggles, lament gives us permission to verbalize the tension. (Mark Vroegop)*
    - *[1] How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? [2] How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Psalm 13:1-2)*

- Ask
  - *[3] Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, [4] lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. (Psalm 13:3-4)*
- Trust
  - *Laments help us through suffering by directing our hearts to make the choice—often daily—to trust in God's purposes hidden behind the pain. In this way, a lament is one of the most theologically informed practices of the Christian life. (Mark Vroegop)*
  - *[5] But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. [6] I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13:5-6)*
- *[Lament] supplies a biblical voice that allows us to talk to God and one another about the pain we feel and see. (Mark Vroegop)*

### Lament and Majority Culture Christians

- **Empathy – Weep with those who weep (Ro. 12:15)**
  - *Empathy means that we take the burdens, the sorrows, the concerns of our neighbors upon ourselves to the point of crying tears with them.... We think about their children as if they were our children. We think about their concerns as if they were our personal concerns. (Mika Edmondson)*
  - *[15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)*
  - *[15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. [16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. (Romans 12:15-16)*
  - *My wife has to beg me (a grown 37-year-old man) not to go out to Walmart at night, not because she's afraid of the criminal element, but because she's afraid of the police element. Because she knows that when the police see me, they aren't going to see Mika Edmondson, pastor of New City Fellowship Presbyterian church. When they see me, they aren't going to see Mika Edmondson, PhD in systematic theology. When they see me, all they're going to see is a black man out late at night. And she knows we're getting stopped at 10-times the rate of everybody else, arrested at 26-times the rate of everybody else, and killed at 5-times the rate of everybody else. Black Lives Matter can see the injustice in those statistics? How can Black Lives Matter see the value of a black life better than we can? Why does Black Lives Matter care more about the value of my life than you do? (Mika Edmondson)*

- *When you read this quote, where did your heart first go?... Does our brother's statement cause you to want to understand him and hear why he feels that way? Or do you immediately want to argue with him? While curiosity about statistics may be a habit of thoughtful people, do you find yourself minimizing the concern of the pastor and his wife? Is their concern also your concern for them? Discussions about statistics, social movements like Black Lives Matter, or policing aren't off the table. But part of the problem is that we often come to the topic of race without empathy. And that's not just a racial problem. That's a human problem. (Mark Vroegop)*
- [24] *Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? [25] For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground.* (Psalm 44:25-26)
- **Speak – You have seen, O Lord; be not silent! (Ps. 35:22)**
  - *We have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men and women willing to be co-workers with God.* (Martin Luther King, Jr.)
  - [19] *Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. [20] Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.* (Psalm 25:19-20)
- **Repent – I will confess my transgressions to the Lord (Ps. 32:5)**
  - Lament expresses sorrow over the effects of the past that carry on into the present.
  - Lament expresses corporate repentance when appropriate.
  - Lament expresses personal repentance for our own sins.
    - [1] *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. [2] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!* (Psalm 51:1-2)

### Lament and Minority Culture Christians

- **Protest – All day long an attacker oppresses me (Ps. 56:1)**
  - *Sure, Job initially responds to God with admirable piety: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (1:21) and "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (2:10). This is the most we often hear from Job in the church (when we hear from him at all). But he has more to say. A lot more. And it's not pleasant.... He laments, for example, "What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, that you examine them every morning and test them every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant?" (7:17-19). We like the stoic martyr of faith we encounter in the first couple chapters of the book. But this Job, who rails on chapter after chapter, makes us uncomfortable. His friends feel the same way. They do all they can to encourage him to calm down, speak to God more respectfully, and repent of his sin. But Job refuses. Something is not right in the world, he insists, and God better do something about it. Shockingly, at the end of the*

book, God declares that it is Job, and not the friends, who has spoken what is right about him (42:7)... The heroes of Israelite faith frequently question God's justice in their current experience, not from a lack of trust in God, but precisely because they believe that God is good, powerful, and loving enough to do what is just... This indicates that God's chosen ones may encounter injustice and that they may express their faith through pleading with God to rectify injustice rather than submissively accepting it. (Will Kynes)

- [1] Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; [2] my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly... [5] All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. [6] They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. [7] For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God! [8] You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? [9] Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. [10] In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, [11] in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Psalm 56:1-2, 5-11)
  
- **Hope – The Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted (Ps. 140:12)**
  - We have never and will never exhaust the supply of God's ability to help us.
    - *Persevering with hope in racial reconciliation when you are a minority requires a deep faith in God's ability to give you grace. Whether it is receiving the grace of God's love for you, the grace of covering offenses in love, the grace of honestly sharing your hurts, or the grace of working tirelessly to bring about change, minority Christians need this heart orientation to stay hopeful. (Mark Vroegop)*
  - God uses hardship to transform us and others.
    - *[8] We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:8-10)*
  - God changes hearts.
    - *[16] Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O LORD. (Psalm 83:16)*
  - God will make all things right.
    - *[10] Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. [11] Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. (Psalm 85:10-11)*