

Feeling the Weight of Grief

2Samuel 1:17-27

I have definitely become more of a crier as I have gotten older.

Sure I remember crying as a boy if I got hurt, picked on, or disciplined, but as I got older I learned to take the pain of injury, not show as much weakness to bullies, and take punishment better.

In my late teens and through my early twenties I can't really recall ever getting choked up or shedding tears even when there was good reason to do so.

I've changed.

Put on the right song or have an emotional scene in a TV show or moving and I get all choked up and I can feel the tears wanting to come.

It is to the point now where if I am watching a TV show, movie, listening to a song, or an audio book with my family and we get to an emotional part everybody will glance over at me to see if I am tearing up.

More often than not I am, which often receives an, "Aww dad is crying!"

Of course it's more than fictional songs and stories that get to me.

There is plenty of real life events whether it be on the news or situations that I am personally familiar with that can get me choked up.

It has been that way for a while and I am fairly certain it happens more often than it used to, but I still find it a bit odd.

I find myself thinking, "Mike what in the world is wrong with you it's a car commercial for crying out loud."

Anybody see that Chevy commercial where a granddaughter takes her grandmother who has Alzheimer's for a ride in a classic truck and it jogs her memory so when she gets home she recognizes her husband and family?

Talk about a tear jerker! I found it on YouTube so I would get the details right and sure enough I teared up.

While I am not at all ashamed to admit that, I also confess that I feel kind of weird when I cry.

There is a part of me that doesn't like that feeling of weakness that comes with tears and there is a part of me that just wants to ignore sad things.

There is a part of me that just wants to jump to the end of the story where God will do away with sin and He will wipe away every tear.

How many are with me on that? I think it is good to long for that day, but I also know that as long as we are living in this present age we need to think through what grief for the Christian ought to look like.

[The Bible has a fair bit to say about grief and there are a number of examples of expressions of grief. Our text for this morning **2Samuel 1:17-27** is one such example. These verses record for us what the Bible calls a ‘lament’. A lament a pouring out of grief or sorrow in poetic form. It is intended not just for the writer but also for the reader so that the people of God would be able to feel the weight of grief that the brokenness of this present age can bring about. We are making a mistake if we think that being a Christian means glossing over sorrow. Instead the bible paints a picture of godly people feeling the weight of grief while their Father in heaven keeps them through it. This text gives us at least four lessons regarding this. The first is this...]

Point #1 – Feeling the weight of godly grief is right. (Verses 17-19)

For a variety of reasons it is possible to try to avoid the pain of death and tragedy, but if we believe the scriptures we should fight against such temptations.

Look with me at verse 17.

This verse tells us who is doing the lamenting, it is a man named David.

He is the one who has been chosen by God to become king of Israel.

It also tells us who David is lamenting over, King Saul (Israel’s first king) and his son Jonathan.

Jonathan was David’s best friend and as we will see they meant a great deal to each other.

Saul on the other hand had wanted David dead for a long period of time, he had made at least three significant attempts on his life, and forced him into exile.

Because that is the case it is interesting that David not only laments Saul but that the writer puts his name first which often indicates a priority of place.

I agree with commentators who believe that David’s lament for Saul is real, just as his sorrow for his best friend is real.

Saul was the King of Israel, chosen by God to lead his people and because David trusts in the Lord he is feeling grief over the death of the king because it is the right thing to feel.

I like the way commentator Carl Keil puts it.

He says this lament, “...is one of the finest odes of the Old testament; full of lofty sentiment, and springing from deep and sanctified emotion, in which, without the slightest allusion to his own relation to the fallen king, David

celebrates without envy the bravery and virtues of Saul and his son Jonathan, and bitterly laments their loss.”

He is saying that David is feeling sorrow over the death of the king and his son because it is a right and godly grief which surpasses any worldly calculation of how he had been treated by Saul.

That, I believe, is confirmed by the content of the lament and what it says in **verse 18-19**.

This lament was written down, meaning David wanted it to remain in the minds of people.

While it no doubt became known to the nation of Israel, it is the tribe of Judah that is particularly mentioned here.

That is the tribe David belonged to. These were people who were already wanting David as king.

Many of them might have been tempted to rejoice that Saul had died and the way was open for the man from their tribe to take the thrown.

David wants to make sure they know that the right thing to do here is to lament rather than rejoice.

He calls Saul and Jonathan the “glory” of “Israel.” Remember Saul was very tall, started out well as king, and demonstrated strength and courage in battle.

His drift away from the Lord and eventual destruction is something to be mourned.

There seems to be no political gain here, simply genuine sorrow because it is right and he wants his people to grief over the loss because it is right.

[Do you remember the sisters of Lazarus named Mary and Martha? On one occasion Martha busied herself with doing things to be a good hostess and Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to him. Martha got upset at being left to do all the work and wanted Jesus to tell Mary to get busy, but Jesus says instead that Mary had chosen what was better.]

We can do something very similar with grief.

We can bury it, we can put on a fake smile, we can think it’s wrong to feel sorrow because we think we are supposed to be happy and strong all the time as believers, we can minimize the sorrow of others with poorly thought out bible references, we can hate the weakness that we feel with tears streaming down our faces, and in many other ways we can try and side step tragedy.

Jesus didn’t do those things. He wept and He lamented over suffering and loss.

Why? Because it is right to lament over lamentable things.

[While it is certainly true that we can have misplaced sorrow, it is also true that we too easily pass over grief. That is a mistake. As people who believe what the bible says about suffering and death, that it is the result of the curse of our rebellion against God we ought to feel the weight of that because it is right to do so. Here is a second lesson from David's lament, that...]

Point #2 – Celebrating what should be lamented adds to godly grief. (Verses 20-21)

Sadly, since many people in this world are opposed to God there will be those who take delight in the tragedies and failings of people who bear the name of Christ. That in and of itself is a reason to feel sorrow.

From the time that humanity rebelled against God until the very end of this present creation, there have been and will be enemies of God's people to varying degrees.

A clear example of this in the Bible is a people group called the Philistines.

They lived right next door to Israel fought many battles with them over a long period of time.

Saul had fought them many times over his years as king and had more often than not been victorious in those battles.

David knows all this, he himself had fought the Philistines in the service of King Saul.

They had mocked the LORD, His people, and the things He had set apart as holy.

David is well aware of how these enemies of God would feel about Saul's death so he writes this in **verse 20**.

John MacArthur's commentary on this verse points out that Gath is one of the eastern most cities in Philistia and Ashkelon is one of the most western cities.

David likely mentions these two places as a way of speaking about their whole land.

He knows when news arrives in these idolatrous places they are going to be thrilled with the news that Saul is dead and Israel has been defeated.

He knows there will be rejoicing at the news, and he wishes that it was not so.

In addition to silencing the celebration of Israel's enemies, he writes this in **verse 21**.

What will happen to the land if there is no dew or rain?

It will dry up into a wasteland.

According to commentator Ronald Youngblood, Gilboa was a fertile place where barely, figs, olives, and wheat would grow.

David's curse over the land echoes what happens in Genesis three.

Because Adam disobeyed the Lord death entered the world and God cursed the land so that things would be hard.

The LORD did that as a constant and lasting reminder that something terrible has happened.

David says here that Saul's "shield has been defiled...not anointed with oil."

If a shield was metal it needed oil to keep it from rusting. If it was wooden and covered with leather it needed oil to keep the leather from drying out and cracking.

The idea here is that Saul's strength failed him, he was left at the mercy of his enemies and perished and that is something that needs a lasting lament, a dry and barren land to remind everyone that something terrible had happened.

The delight of the Philistines only adds to the sorrow.

[Anyone who has ever been embarrassed publically knows this is the case. When I was in school I had an embarrassing moment or two (or ten). What happened more often than not the next day is the other kids would bring up what happened and laugh about it. That only served to make the situation worse.]

I think that is something we should increasingly expect to experience.

Christian morality is more frequently finding itself in the cross hairs of what they call cancel culture these days.

Standing for a biblical view of family has meant arson and protests outside of churches, bakeries, fast food restaurants, and other businesses; and if people of such courage have to close their doors there is celebration among the godless.

When a celebrity pastor crashes and burns, the godless rejoice.

When our schools and other public institutions push God and His word out the door, unbelievers are delighted.

When believers are caught in hypocrisy and self-destruct there are those who jump for joy.

When those sort of things happen, the celebration of the ungodly only serves to highlight how sorrowful such things are.

[While these things certainly give us cause to grieve, we should never despair. The celebrations of the godless will not last. Saul ended up where he did because he turned from the LORD, but God's plans didn't come to an end with the tragedy of the king's death. So it is today. There may be many failures and defeats that we should lament, but as we rightly feel the weight of grief over such things we need to keep in mind that Jesus will have the final word over all things and that He never fails. David knows that, but he also knows that life brings real sorrow that needs to be felt. He shows us in the next few verses something else that feeling the weight of grief does for us. That is the third lesson of our text this morning, that...]

Point #3 – Feeling the weight of grief appreciates what has been lost. (Verses 22-24)

Sorrow has a way of making clear the value of people and things that are taken away.

Look with me at verse 22.

Commentators point out here that the words “blood” and “fat” are words connected to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament.

The king and his son were doing more than just going out to battle, they were fighting the LORD's battles.

Remember when Jonathan climbed the cliff to take on a bunch of Philistines with only his armor bearer by his side? He won that victory by faith.

How about when the Ammonites attacked the city of Jabesh-gilead and the news came to Saul?

The Bible says, the “Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words” and he went and rescued the city.

Did he mess up? Yes, big time. He also, did some great things and David is feeling that loss.

He goes on in **verse 23** to say this...

Despite his failings David could still see reason to have a tender hearted affection for the king and he never had reason to waiver from his devotion to Jonathan.

The fact that this father and son were “not divided” in life or death is mostly due to the honor and loyalty of Jonathan.

On at least two occasions Saul tried to kill Jonathan because of his friendship with David.

Family dinners must have been pretty awkward at times, but Jonathan continued to serve his father for the good of God's people.

David knows that is a great loss.

To that he adds **verse 24**.

Saul's reign made the day to day life of the Israelites better in many regards.

When he took the throne the people lived under the oppression of the Philistines.

They had next to nothing to defend themselves with besides farming tools and had their labors in the fields and vineyards constantly taken away.

Saul changed that. The 'luxurious scarlet' and 'ornaments of gold' here indicate a time of prosperity for the people and so if they have any appreciation for that they should be mourning the loss of the man who the LORD used to make it happen.

If there is no sorrow there is no appreciation for what has been lost.

[It is sort of like people who collect particular things. Take stamp collectors for example. I did a quick google search and found that a British Guiana 1 cent Magenta stamp which originally sold for the equivalent of a \$1.44 in 1874 sold in 2014 for 9.48 million dollars. If one was right in front of me I'd have no idea what it is, likely stick in on an envelope put it in the mail and never give it a second thought. But someone who knows what it is worth would be quite upset at losing it because he would know what he has lost.]

We need to feel the weight of grief so that we can appreciate what is lost.

I have said this many times and I will say it many more.

We have a glorious hope in Christ in the face of death.

The bible says that if we know Jesus as saviour, then when we die our souls go immediately to be with the LORD.

That is good news, but we are making a mistake if we use that good news to sweep under the rug the sorrow and loss of death.

A person's soul has been removed from their body. That is something to be mourned not celebrated.

There are no more get togethers, no more phone calls, and no more sharing of life together.

[If we brush aside the grief of that then we are failing to appreciate what has been lost. We also are failing to understand what the hope of the gospel is. Jesus died for our sins, but He didn't stay dead. Christ conquered the grave and He will conquer it fully for all those who belong to Him by faith. Is that you this morning? Do you know your need of a saviour? Feeling the weight of grief is something that can show you your need because it shows you what has been lost. That leads us into this final lesson of this text. David feels the weight of grief because it is right, he laments the rejoicing of the godless, and he appreciates what has been lost. That is most vivid in the loss of his friend Jonathan and so he shows us in these next few verses that...]

Point #4 – Losing deep friendship produces heavy grief. (Verses 25-27)

There is an undeniable connection between the degree of love we have for someone and the level of pain we feel at their loss. The more love we have the more sorrow we experience.

In verse 25 David returns to the refrain of His lament with a particular focus on his friend Jonathan. (Verse 25)

No doubt David had been to Mount Gilboa before and no doubt he is here seeing in his mind's eye Jonathan's lifeless body upon that elevated ridge which leads him to this in **verses 26-27.**

The word translated 'distress' here can also mean to bind or to make narrow.

It has the sense of an inescapable feeling of turmoil pressing down upon him at the loss of his friend.

Why such distress? Because he says Jonathan's love for him was "extraordinary", the bond of friendship they had was extremely powerful.

1Samuel gives us a sense of that right after David wins the battle against the champion of the Philistines, a giant of a man named Goliath.

After that battle the bible says that "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

We can see the evidence of that love when Jonathan keeps David safe from his father, we see it again later as he looks forward to David becoming king in the place of Saul and according to 1Samuel 23 was happy to serve him.

By worldly standards you would think Jonathan would expect to be king and have David serve him, but he shows no concern for his own glory and instead delights in God's will and the opportunity to serve alongside his friend.

That kind of love and loyalty is something David found in Jonathan to an uncommon degree which is why he says that the love of his friend had surpassed that of women.

Some modern interpreters want to twist this verse into something that it is not.

Our society has been so influenced by thinkers like Sigmund Freud that people have been obsessed with expressions of physical romance.

We are a culture so obsessed with sexuality that we can hardly conceive of the kind of love that David and Jonathan had for one another.

Our culture wants you to be ruled by feelings and desire which kills our capacity for this kind of friendship, but the Lord wants us to be ruled by holiness and genuine love.

There is nothing romantic in David's statement here, this is a love of covenant loyalty, of selflessness, of trust, and faith in the Lord.

It is an uncommon friendship between men that we would do well to imitate.

I believe David would have gladly laid down his life for his friend, but instead his friend is gone and that weighs heavy upon the new king of Israel.

Feeling that kind of grief doesn't feel good and so I appreciate the temptation to try and avoid it, but the Bible is calling us to feel the weight of grief.

As long as we live in this broken world there will be things to lament over and it is right to do so.

There will be times that godless people will rejoice at our grief which will add to it.

The weight of that grief however teaches us to appreciate what has been lost, one of the greatest things being deep and abiding friendship.

May God be merciful and give us the capacity to think biblically and love one another which such uncommon affection that we would know what it is to feel the weight of grief in the hope of the gospel.