

In the Day of My Trouble I Call to You – From Lament to Hope

Thomas Robinson, *Journeys Toward God in the Psalms 2*, August 24, 2014

Psalm 142

A Maskil of/to David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.

I pour out my suffering to God who knows my life.

¹ With my voice I cry out to the LORD (*Yahweh*);
with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD (*Yahweh*).

² I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.

³ When my spirit faints within me,
you know my way!
In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.

No one else cares for me. God alone is my refuge.

⁴ Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;

no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.

⁵ I cry to you, O LORD (*Yahweh*);
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."

Save me from strong enemies. I will give thanks.

⁶ Attend to my cry,
for I am brought very low!
Deliver me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me!

⁷ Bring me out of prison,
that I may give thanks to your name!
The righteous will surround me,
for you will deal bountifully with me.

Psalm 74 A Lament by the Community

A Maskil of/to Asaph.

God, why are you so angry with us?

¹ O God, why do you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smoke
against the sheep of your pasture?

² Remember your congregation,
which you have purchased of old,
which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage!
Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.

³ Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins;
the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary!

Your enemies have destroyed your sanctuaries.

⁴ Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place;
they set up their own signs for signs.

⁵ They were like those who swing axes
in a forest of trees.

⁶ And all its carved wood
they broke down with hatchets and hammers.

⁷ They set your sanctuary on fire;
they profaned the dwelling place of your name,
bringing it down to the ground.

⁸ They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them";
they burned all the meeting places of God in the land.

We have no prophetic signs to direct us.

⁹ We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is none among us who knows how long,

¹⁰ How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

¹¹ Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?
Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!

But we know God is creator of the whole earth.

¹² Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.

¹³ You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.

¹⁴ You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

¹⁵ You split open springs and brooks;
you dried up ever-flowing streams.

¹⁶ Yours is the day, yours also the night;
you have established the heavenly lights and the sun.

¹⁷ You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth;
you have made summer and winter.

Remember your covenant Lord, and act!

¹⁸ Remember this, O LORD (*Yahweh*), how the enemy scoffs,
and a foolish people reviles your name.

¹⁹ Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts;
do not forget the life of your poor forever.

²⁰ Have regard for the covenant,
for the dark places of the land
are full of the habitations of violence.

²¹ Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame;
let the poor and needy praise your name.

²² Arise, O God, defend your cause;
remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day!
²³ Do not forget the clamor of your foes,

the uproar of those who rise against you,
which goes up continually!

Bringing Our Darkness to God

The five books of Psalms, Israel's book of worship, come from many periods, many situations, many attitudes. They have power to touch us and give language to our experiences in all kinds of situations. They include traditions that point all the way back to Moses and use David as a principal model. As a book the Psalms were gathered in the time of exile and after (mid 6th cent. 400 years after David). It was a time of soul-searching for Israel after total disaster. A time when the people struggled for a new identity, a renewed relationship with God

About a third of the Psalms are characterized as "Laments," individual and community. But these show a great variety of attitudes, and many other Psalms have elements of lament within. It was fundamental to Israel (wrestler with God) to bring all sides of life before God, both the darkness and the light, suffering/anger/doubt as well as praise and thanks. Authentic worship.

Songs from a World that's Not Working Right – Disorientation

Lament/complaint/crying out to God was not limited to the Psalms but was a manifestation of the experience of Israel (the human experience) in relation to God, and an expression of faith.

God had started this: calling and promising Abram, delivering his people, making a covenant, giving them his grace. We trusted God. Then why don't things always go well? Why is God hidden? Why not always answer my need? Without the experience and expectation of God's grace, there's no lament! But Naomi and Hannah lament bitterly. There was a powerful tradition that you suffer only because you've done something wrong; it's punishment. Then a drama like Job or Jeremiah's lament challenged that. Suffering, evil, disaster are complex, and God is no automaton.

Most Lament Psalms speak with the voice of a righteous sufferer, one who trusts God but voices deep pain. How long? Why? Where is God? It is important that these questions are voiced in worship. Sometimes with answers, sometimes none. In some Psalms the pain is surrounded by hope and confidence. Some are near despair (Ps 88). No psalm is the final experience with God.

The Psalmists hope for God's intervention. Some look for the glory of God to fill the earth. Some for God's destructive vengeance on their enemies (Ps 109). Both are submitted to God.

Songs of a Community between "Already" and "Not Yet"

Like personal Laments, community Laments (like Lamentations) meditate on the disasters that have happened to Judah and Jerusalem. Numerous prophetic voices shaped the reflections (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, also Daniel, et al.). In the light of Judah's renewal after the exile, why is it still oppressed by pagan powers? How long before deliverance? Before God's kingdom, God's universal rule as creator is manifested over all nations? Before enemies are punished?

The psalmists vigorously challenge God to remember the covenants, the ways he delivered his people in the past. Act now! They have a strong sense of living in a gap, a time of God's hiddenness, waiting and anticipating a future as yet to be defined and shaped by God.

Jesus steps into this complex world of broken yet living hopes, an anticipated a future whose shape was fiercely debated. He lived within these Psalms with their varied aspirations and expressed his own suffering with their words. But he also challenged them. "You have heard it said...but I say to you." Jesus calls us to use the Psalms profoundly, but also to see them in his light.