

“Assignment 1 - Sermon”

Kim Poon

DML970.NA

Dr. David Emanuel

March 31, 2023

Psalm 6 - Cry out to God when you are sad

In the summer of 2018, a killer whale mother, Tahlequah, successfully gave birth to a baby killer whale in the northwest of the Pacific Ocean. As this type of killer whale was on the verge of extinction, the birth of this killer whale baby brought new hope to those who want to protect orcas. However, the orca calf died within an hour. In a documentary viewed by people all over the world, the female orca whale could be seen swimming with the body of her dead calf in the vast ocean for 17 days. Finally, the killer whale mother was willing to let go of her dead infant. ¹

When Christians grieve over heartbreaking events in the world or in our own lives, it is absolutely normal and doesn't mean we don't have faith. If you were indifferent to painful things, I would worry about you instead! The Bible records that many people cried out to God in their grief. God is the God of prayer, and we can be sure that God will take care of us and hear our cries when we are sad.

An ancient church father once said that while God speaks to us through Scripture, only the Psalms teach us how to speak to God. Today we will read Psalm 6, this lament, to observe the way the psalmist calls out to God when he is sad, and how the psalmist experiences going from doubt to trust, from arguing with God to praising Him.

Among the 150 psalms, there are three main categories: hymns, psalms of lament, and psalms of thanksgiving. When we think of the Psalms we think of thanksgiving and praise; but the amounts of Psalms of lament are more than the Psalms of thanksgiving and praise, and are placed in the earlier portion. It can be seen that the lament occupies an important position in the whole psalm.

¹ "Tour of grief over" for killer whale no longer carrying dead calf," CNN, accessed March 27th, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/12/us/orca-whale-not-carrying-dead-baby-trnd/index.html>

Most of the personal laments appear in the first (1-41) and second (42-72) volumes of the poetry collection. The psalmists express their sorrow, pain and confusion that they faced as a result of being persecuted or accused. Group laments mainly appear in the second to fifth volumes of poetry collections (42-150) and are often related to ethnic and national situations, such as natural disasters, wars, subjugation, captivity, etc.

Background

Psalm 6 is a personal lament. Some scholars believe that this Psalm belongs to the later works of the Psalms, and that this lament is a prayer of a person who is sick. However, other scholars consider this psalm to be a prophetic psalm; in the early church, Psalm 6 was associated with Psalms 32, 38, 51, 102, 103, and 143 (with Psalm 6 of the same type), which are recited on Ash Wednesday, the forty-sixth day before the Good Friday – the day of the beginning of Lent. The content indicates that because of God's punishment, the psalmist's body is suffering from diseases and gradually weakened. So, he asks God for forgiveness and healing. In his prayer, the psalmist affirms that God hears and answers, so he rises up and sings triumphant songs of victory. There are commentaries which divide this chapter into three sections: With frustration and fear, the psalmist prays to God for healing and salvation (1-4); the psalmist expresses his suffering to God in a tone of despair (5-7); and the psalmist is convinced that God hears prayers and declares victory over the enemy (8-10).

1. Open up your heart to God when you are sad

With frustration and fear, the psalmist prays to God for healing and salvation (1-4).
For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to sheminith. [b] A psalm of David.

1. Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger

or discipline me in your wrath.

2. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint;

heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

3. My soul is in deep anguish.

How long, Lord, how long?

4. Turn, Lord, and deliver me;

save me because of your unfailing love.

The name Jehovah is mentioned eight times in this chapter, and the psalmist prays directly to God, which is based on the covenant relationship between God and the elect. Because of this covenant, the psalmist believes that God will treat him mercifully.

v. 1 The psalmist prays that God will not reproach and punish him, and that He will be merciful to take his anger back. Why does the psalmist feel that God is angry with him? In order to understand this, we need to understand the cultural background of the time. At the time when this was written, the psalmist was sick. In ancient times, the Israelites believed that people would be sick because they sinned and were punished by God, e.g. the reason why Job's three friends attacked him.

v. 2 One must note the content and reason of such supplication. The psalmist prays that God can have mercy on him for his weakness. He is as weak as a withered tree. His bones tremble to describe spiritual and inner wounds.

v. 3. The psalmist's whole person is in a state of extreme pain and panic. The psalmist asks... How long will it take for you to save me? The translation of "How long will you wait before you save me" does not exist in the original text. "How long will it take?" is often found in the laments. They complain to God, asking why he has not acted yet.

v. 4 The statements of crying out to God, turning around, and coming back to save the suffering psalmist shows that he has no sense of where God is. However, he still knows that God is merciful, and that God will save him.²

a. The Lament demonstrates a kind of Parent-Child Love relationship between Man and God

The psalmist brought real sorrow to God, based on the covenant God had made with them. Parents with children have experienced it. When children want to obtain certain rewards such as candies or toys or to go somewhere, and you do not allow them, then they may throw a temper tantrum. They may twist their heads, wail, and shout! Parents may then get very angry when it happens, but it means that the parents are still people who the child can rely on and trust, and that the kids still have someone they can be angry towards. Children do this to elicit a response from their parents. They complain directly to their parents instead of going over to the neighbours or to their friends.

On the contrary, a couple once told me that when they went to an orphanage to adopt a child in another country, the silence in the nursery was astounding. The children who were placed in the cradles never cried, not because they had no need, or that they were not hungry, or that they were not fearful of anything. In fact, they had experienced it all, but they knew it was useless to cry because nobody would answer. Only children who know that there is someone to love and take care of them will cry.

For Christians, when we bring our sorrow to the Father, the foundation is the loving relationship that exists between us and him. It implies that deep down in our hearts, we know who provides for us, who heals us, and who we can rely on.

Jesus uttered a lament when he was crucified. When the Lord Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mat. 27:46) Was he looking for an answer? When people

² Peter C, Craigie, Word Biblical Commentary, Psalm 1-50. (Texas: Word Books, 1982), 92.

face suffering, they may ask “why me?” However, Jesus didn’t want to receive an answer. Why? Because the omniscient and almighty God already knew the mission of incarnation, and the “why” he uttered was an emotional outcry of pain and grief!

When He bore the sins of all mankind, the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit was temporarily separated, and the Father hid his face from looking at him. This pain was fully expressed in the outcry of Jesus. Similarly, in the Psalms, the lamenter expresses his struggles, confusion, and pain with pleading tears in prayer!

Psalm 6 shows us that this is a plea for God’s action. Laments are a form of prayer. However, this kind of prayer is not a passive one, as many of them are calls to action. Psalm 6 is a prayer to God for healing and deliverance. Some Old Testament scholars see Laments as "petitions" to God, begging God to hear their appeal. The psalmist specifically prays for God to take action. For example, when someone is about to have radiotherapy or chemotherapy due to cancer, one would not just pray superficially; they would cry out to God authentically with true yearning! “Jesus, please save me, please don't make me hurt so much!” It is a genuine prayer. It is not unspiritual, and it's not that one wants to control God, but it’s that one is asking God to act.

b. Forgive others in God's forgiving grace

Although the psalmist did not clearly explain what sin he had committed, he clearly pointed out that his physical illness was related to his spiritual weakness; thus, his experience of sickness presupposed acts of sin. He prayed that God would not rebuke and discipline him in His divine wrath (v.2) because the psalmist knows that he would not be able to stand it!

When it comes to sin, sometimes we do it willfully, and sometimes we do it inadvertently. God is merciful and gracious. As long as we are willing to repent, He will forgive our sins. We forgive because we are forgiven.

Once, there was an elderly lady who went on a shopping trip. Upon returning to her car, she found four men in the act of stealing her vehicle. She dropped her shopping bags and drew her handgun, proceeding to scream at the top of her lungs, “Get away from my car!” The four men immediately stepped away and ran off. The lady, somewhat shaken, then proceeded to load her shopping bags into the back of the car and got into the driver’s seat. She was so shaken that she could not get her key into the ignition. After multiple tries, she finally realised why. It was for the same reason she had wondered why there was a football, a frisbee and two 12-packs of beer in the front seat. A few minutes later, she found her own car parked four or five spaces along. She loaded her bags into the car and drove to the police station to report her mistake. The sergeant to whom she told the story couldn’t stop laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four pale men had just reported a carjacking by a mad, elderly woman with a large handgun. No charges were filed. The lady was having a “senior moment”, so it was an unintentional mistake.³

2. Refuse to be a victim and look to God, the creator and finisher

First of all, the Psalmist uses semantic parallelism in Verse 5.

v. 5 No one remembers you when he is dead.
Who praises you from the grave?

The psalmist feels sick to the point of death. Because he feels so close to death, the psalmist prays for deliverance from the ultimate enemy, death itself. The original meaning of “from the grave” is “In Sheol”. In Sheol, persons are believed to exist in a form of semi-life; at rest, yet not in joy because it is a place where men are completely separated from God. The psalmist feared death, for in Sheol there would be neither memory of God, nor the praise and

³ “Daily Joke: an elderly woman caught a group of men stealing her car,” Startsat60, accessed March 27, 2023. <https://startsat60.com/media/lifestyle/jokes>.

many times in your heart (v.22). This is the sinful nature of man: whether it is done intentionally or unintentionally, everyone has the opportunity to say something bad about the other person. We have all tried to belittle and slander others regardless of what intentions went behind it. Who has never said something to offend someone? If someone says something that hurts you, think about it in another perspective: to pity them, because that person does not know God's love. You may ask God to fill that person with His love. The other person's words can't degrade your value in God because you are redeemed by Jesus Christ with His blood!

b. Refuse to become a victim

The past three years have been a difficult time. We have just gone through a global pandemic. Before, we could happily plan our trips for the holidays. However, now there are so many restrictions on travelling. Brothers and sisters who used to go on short-term missions every year are no longer able to do so. People have also been isolated for a long time, causing many to have fallen into depression and their relationship with God to fall into a low ebb. How should we respond in such times of adversity?

Now, here is a story about Hudson Taylor.

In 1865, he established a missionary organization in China because God called him to go to Mainland China for a mission. His second son, Frederick Howard Taylor, wrote down his childhood memories of his father's life stories, as well as the conversations he had with other people. In 1900, China was under the attack of the Eight-Nation Alliance and the Boxer Rebellion. The Boxer Rebellion was anti-Christian and xenophobic, and the main victims were the missionaries and Christians. The China Inland Mission (CIM) established by Hudson Taylor was located in different areas across the country. At that time, The CIM lost more members than any other agency. Fifty-eight adults and twenty-one children were killed. When Hudson Taylor learned

of the tragic news, his heart fell into complete darkness. Frederick recorded his father's words: "I can't read, I can't think, I can't even pray... But I trust God!" Hudson Taylor lost all strength during that time. Everything he said was negative. However, he could still trust God.

The next year, when the allied nations were demanding compensation from the Chinese government, Taylor refused to accept payment for loss of property or life. Taylor's aim was to win the Chinese, not to demand justice. ⁵ There is a famous quote from Hudson Taylor, "If I had a thousand pounds China should have it – if I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China, but Christ. Can we do too much for Him? Can we do enough for such a precious Saviour?" ⁶

The British government also put enormous pressure on him. The government newspaper said that Hudson Taylor was a terrible person. They said that he wanted to establish his own kingdom at the expense of their people's lives. Facing internal accusations and external attacks, Hudson Taylor entered the darkest period of his life. However, even in his darkest times, he said, "I know I can still trust my God." ⁷

When you face suffering in your life, there may be no one who can fully understand your situation nor give you any comfort and solution. But, brothers and sisters, don't forget that we still have a God we can trust!

Today, it seems that spiritual sages like Hudson Taylor are no longer with us. However, they have testified for us like a cloud! Their experiences may be way more difficult than yours and mine, but they did not give up, for they all had a God they could trust. He is the source of our strength!

⁵ "This day is the history. The death of Hudson Taylor," Crossway, accessed March 30th, 2023. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/this-day-in-history-the-death-of-hudson-taylor/>

⁶ "Taylor's passion for China - 1860," Christian History Institute, accessed March 27, 2023. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/dailyquote/2/14>

⁷ "Death to the foreigner!" OMF, accessed March 27, 2023. <https://omf.org/us/death-to-the-foreigner/>

3. From mourning to joy, proclaiming victory (8-10)

6 I am worn out from my groaning.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.

7 My eyes grow weak with sorrow;

they fail because of all my foes.

8 Away from me, all you who do evil,

for the Lord has heard my weeping.

The psalmist's cry of pain suddenly turns into a declaration of victory here, which presents a stark contrast to the tone of the previous pleading. In verse 8, the subject of the text changes from "I" to "you". The psalmist is referring to David's enemies, all evildoers. This radical change in the tone and atmosphere of the psalm depicts the psalmist's sudden awakening, and his reorientation before God with a firm sense of conviction.

In verse 8b and 9, semantic parallelism is used to emphasize the reason for the change.

How can this firm conviction be regained?

v. 8b For the Lord has heard my weeping

v. 9 The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;

The Lord will accept my prayer.

Here is an important question: why was David so sure that God had accepted his prayer?

v. 10 is grammatically in the future tense, when the shame and demise of the enemy has not yet happened! What is it about David's sudden surge of confidence? It may have been the case that as the psalmist progressed in prayer, he eventually reached a point where faith and confidence outstripped anguish and despair. ⁸As the psalmist brought sorrow and tears to God in prayer, he

⁸ Craigie, Commentary, 94.

recalled the covenant of love from God. He knew that God was merciful and gracious, faithful and covenant-keeping. When he came to God and cried out, God gave him the grace of faith and hope at the same time. God helped him to get back on his feet.

In “A Study of Life in the Personal Lament”,⁹ Ng Chung Chit writes up the distinction between Old Testament elegies and laments:

Elegies	Laments
Looking back all the time, depressed and withdrawn with sorrow and pain	Weeping and crying, but still looking to the future
Mourning the death of a loved one, crying to himself; a profane song, hopeless	In the midst of difficulties and sorrows, the psalmist strives to seek God, hoping to break through the difficulties
A profane song, hopeless	A holy song, striving toward God, ends with praise and thanksgiving

A good example would be the elegy David sang for Saul’s death:

2 Samuel 1:19 “A gazelle[a] lies slain on your heights, Israel.

How the mighty have fallen!

David was looking back on the previous mighty hero, recalling how he fell. The tone is one of grief and hopelessness. Theologians believe that the elegy in the Old Testament goes from glory to despair and shame (tragic reversal). On the contrary, laments go from sorrow to joy; from persecution to salvation (saving reversal), because even though the person who sings the lament is facing great difficulties in front of him, he believes in his heart that God has sovereignty over

⁹ Chung Chit, Ng. A study of life in the personal lament. (Taiwan: Wing Mung Publishing, 1996).

human history and the universe. Not only does he control everything, but he can also turn everything around!

The lamenters in the Psalms only sing laments, not elegies. Elegies are for those who complain about themselves or the environment; they are not singing to God. On the contrary, laments are holy songs, where the psalmists are singing to God. They pour out all the sorrows in their heart to God, affirming that God would listen to their cry! Brothers and sisters, when we face the trials and pains of life today, are we singing a lament or an elegy? When we are sorrowful, we must turn to God and believe that he will listen to our outcry. Then, our elegy will turn into a lament.

In the past, God listened to David's outcry and accepted his prayer. Today, will our Heavenly Father not accept the prayers of those who have been united with His Son, Jesus Christ, by faith?

The laments always end with a voice of thanksgiving and praise, not with mourning. It means that if one has God's presence and help, laments are just a process that will eventually become joy. This kind of joy and praise comes from the bottom of our hearts after going through trials and tribulations.

“It's not what happens to you that determines how far you will go in life; it is how you handle what happens to you.”

—Zig Ziglar

One day a farmer's donkey fell into an abandoned well. Terrified, the animal cried for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided that the donkey was old and that the well was useless already. He realized the well needed to be filled to prevent future losses. So, he invited all his neighbors to help him. They all grabbed shovels and began to throw dirt into the

well. At first, when the donkey realized he was being buried alive, he cried horribly. Then, to everyone's shock, the donkey quieted down. The farmer looked down the well and he was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit the donkey's back, the donkey would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer and his neighbors continued to throw dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take another step up. Finally, everyone was amazed to see the donkey stepping up over the edge of the well and happily trotting off!¹⁰

Life is going to throw dirt your way and attempt to bury you. However, no one ever gets out of life's wells by giving up. Shake the dirt off and take a step up!

Romans 5:4-5: "... perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

In the face of adversity, we may feel uneasy and even painful. But setbacks and difficulties can inspire our fighting spirit and develop our character. Don't forget that we are the children of God – we have his guidance, and we have the privilege to pray. The spirit that raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead also dwells in us and pours God's love into our hearts, enabling us to shout for joy after mourning and weeping, and to proclaim songs of victory.

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¹⁰ "A farmer's donkey," Wisdom Share. Accessed March 27, 2023. <https://wisdomshare.com/stories/farmers-donkey/>

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