

Being Angry with God

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Preacher: Lindsay Wilson

[0 : 0 0] this is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of September 2001 the preacher is Lindsay Wilson his sermon is entitled Being Angry with God and is based on Psalm 13 Lord our God we thank you that your word was written to teach and correct and rebuke and train us for righteousness we thank you for the richness of your word and we pray that we might be rebuked and taught and encouraged and trained now by it for Jesus' sake Amen It's been good to be with you in the last few weeks to share with you from the book of Psalms in a sense we've done the easy Psalms first haven't we we've done a great Psalm of praise to God as King we've done that memorable Psalm of Psalm 23 the Shepherd Psalm as we saw last week a song of trust and confidence but today I want to look with you at a more difficult type of Psalm a lament Psalm a complaint Psalm perhaps the closest equivalent we have to in our world is a whinge a very Australian kind of practice we'll see at the end that it's not quite a whinge but here the Psalm is complaining to God bitterly protesting his lot before God and asking God to change his circumstances it's true as we gather here as God's people many of us will have come with a heart full of joy to God but there will be others as I look around today who come here today with heartache with pain with sadness some may have celebrated great wedding anniversaries in recent times others will be smarting from a recent divorce or the loss of a loved one some will be celebrating on this Father's Day their family relationships for some here I suspect there will be painful memories and hard memories as we look back on the past for living in this fallen world involves not only happiness but also heartache our hopes and desires can vanish so quickly can't they a sudden life-threatening illness the death of someone close to us failure and frustration in our studies or our job conflict and division in our church the devastating reality of divorce even lingering loneliness or depression all of these can shatter our lives and at times like this some of the songs we sing sound a bit hollow a bit glib it's easy for us to be glib in our advice to each other as we seek to care for our Christians sisters and brothers one man tells of a time when his house just north of Adelaide was burnt down destroyed in a bushfire a pastor came up to him and believing that pastors had the job of saying helpful and kind things to him he said

Norm the Lord gives and the Lord takes away blessed be the name of the Lord quoting those great verses from the book of Job Norman Harville himself a Lutheran pastor and in fact the author of the commentary on Job said I felt like hitting him the words were true they were scriptural but they were uncaring inappropriate and blasé in times like that we don't need glib words of comfort but we need words that we can identify with words that echo the heartache we feel inside here I think the lament psalms offer us a valuable yet largely neglected resource I want to turn with you today to Psalm 13 in this psalm the writer is pouring out the depths of his despair to God how long oh Lord will you forget me forever how long will you hide your face from me you can see the feeling involved as he's expressing this how long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long how long shall my enemy be exalted over me very human words words that may echo how we've felt at some time in the past how some will be feeling even now see how he describes his fight forgotten by God utterly forever out of relationship with God

God's hidden his face you can imagine if you were going up to your father and you wanted to speak on something that's very important and he turned aside and turned his back on you you'd feel hurt and rejected this psalmist feels like there is nothing there God's hidden his face a relationship that seems to be broken but certainly not face to face as pain and hurt within how long must I bear pain in my soul he says grief and sorrow and loss grief without any relief no end in sight he's hurt he's angry he's in despair and all of these made worse because the enemy of God and the writer seems to be in the right because God isn't there God is seemingly absent silent silent apparently unconcerned but what's present pain and grief and their presence and God's absence are reinforced by the haunting presence of the enemies and so he turns to protest to God to harass

God to take God to task consider and answer me oh Lord my God or even better look answer me give light to my eyes or I'll sleep the sleep of death and my enemy will say I've prevailed my foes will rejoice because I am shaken this is not a cold dispassionate request for God just to consider his plight but it's a call from the very depths of his being look answer me now God we see indignation and anger a feeling of being unfairly done by bubbling over here and yet did you notice that he feels that if anything is to be done about his situation who has to do it well only God is able to do it although he calls on God to answer he says oh Lord my God my God it's his big view of God that causes him problems if he didn't believe that God was in absolute control he could at least understand why he was suffering if he thought that God only controlled 70% of the world well then maybe his present suffering is due to the other 30% that God doesn't control but the psalmist rightly understands that

God's in control of all things and it's this big view of God that causes his problem because he can't understand why if God is in control why he is suffering as he is but he refuses to trim God down even if that would make life easier even if that would answer some of his questions he sticks with a God sized view of God but he comes before him with a desperate petition it's now or never God give light to my eyes or I'll sleep the sleep of death come to my aid deliver me before I die it's that desperate God and again it's the presence of those enemies that rub salt into the wound the enemy here may be death personified it may have been the actual enemies of the writer may have been both but their role is clear this time it's filled out by the content of their taunting where they boast I've prevailed I've beaten you you're done for your

[8 : 39] God doesn't care for you they callously react rejoicing at the writer's pain and loss now up to this point of the psalm it's the kind of psalm that we wouldn't normally have in church is it that's a bit dark and despairing and hopeless and we want something other than that when we come to church don't we perhaps the only flicker of hope and it is a faint one almost snuffed out is that the writer is still turning to God in prayer even though there appears to be no answer he is still clinging on to his God although his God seems absent or even worse against him is this a failure of faith part of the Bible that we shouldn't read or is it part of genuine faith faith that has the courage to doubt to complain to protest knowing that God and God alone can meet the psalmist in his darkness certainly not a laid back easy going faith that we find here but it's a desperate struggle of faith trying to make sense of the world around him in the light of what he knows about

God in this situation what alternatives are there if we reflect on it what do we do in the hard times of our life I suspect we often if you're like me react to God in one of two ways we either pretend that all is rosy or we take time out and avoid having to face God the first pretending that life is rosy as we relate to God as we speak to our Christian brothers and sisters as we pray is really living a life of pretense if things aren't rosy to pretend they're not is ultimately dishonest if we feel angry or overwhelmed or confused as we will from time to time in our life and pretend as we pray that all is well we're putting up a front before God our prayers are hollow and we're trying to push God away our faith and our God will become less and less real for you see God prefers to relate to us where we are rather than for us to pretend we're more spiritual than we in fact are taking time out from our relationship with God is no better an option no longer praying or reading

God's word avoiding our Christian friends not coming to church as often because we don't feel as comfortable anymore we waste days weeks months sometimes even years taking time out living as if we're on our own choosing as it were to send ourselves to the sin bin tragically some give up the faith entirely they no longer have anything to do with God and his people and can become bitter and twisted you see the lament psalms offer a different response to either of these two options instead of pretending dishonestly that all is well instead of taking time out from our relationship with God the lament speaks of a faith which is not always quiet submission a faith which knows that its only solution is with God even when God himself seems inactive those who utter laments like Psalm 13 and it's interesting that the lament is the most common kind of psalm that we have in the book of Psalms pour out to

God their honest reaction to whatever has happened to them now of course it's sometimes inappropriate to share our deepest feelings isn't it sometimes inappropriate to share our deepest feelings with one another if someone really annoys you it's not always appropriate to go up and tell them what a pain in the neck they are that's not the most tactful thing to do it's not the way to win friends and influence people we know that at times when we need to put if you like a bit of caution think before we speak rather than just speak everything that's on our mind while it is sometimes inappropriate to share our deepest feelings with everyone it is never never inappropriate to share our deepest feelings feelings and thoughts and fears and pain with God God wants us to tell it like it is now of course that's not all there is to faith it's not as if we simply ought to spend all our Christian life being angry with God pouring out pain and despair and hurt it's not an end in itself but it is so often a helpful and legitimate stage in working towards the goal of trusting God in the midst of our troubles for after all

God knows everything about us anyway what we're trying to hide from God God already knows all that God sees in its place is that we're playing a game of pretense with him and that grieves him I believe that we need to relearn how to lament and to learn from Psalms like this even if you're not going through personal struggles at the moment even if your life is going on well there is still room for lament look around at the world as we see selfishness and pride have become a national way of life when we see the wicked prosper when Christians in the world are persecuted when in our own churches spiritual coldness and division is rampant when people around us harden their hearts to the message of God's love as they ridicule the gospel and mock the name of Christ in such a world we too need to cry out and lament and express the pain and despair and ask how long oh God will you put up with this in your world why do you allow it and in our personal life we'll go through from time to time struggles that will cause us to despair and ask hard questions we or those close to us will face difficulties and we wonder what on earth

[14 : 46] God is doing in running his world and at times like that we need to cry out to God honestly and pour out our pain before him and so these writers do not stop speaking to God they do not censor their words before God but they pour out their hearts hoping against hope that God will hear and answer the question that you and I have to ask is whether we have this same kind of bold faith that's what I think it is a faith that includes the courage to be genuine and not phony before God a God who can't be fooled by the fronts we put up before others a God who knows the very worst thing that we've done or thought or said and yet loves us all the same a God who is strong enough to take our protests and our questions the open pouring out of our feelings our hurt our loss out of fear how do you respond when God appears in your life or in the world to be gagged or handcuffed is it with a false piety or do you break off diplomatic relations with God or do you persist in the face of grief and pain in wrestling with God for an authentic faith the psalmist writes look answer me oh Lord my God but do you notice there's a change in this psalm that accounts for the first four verses but if you look at the last two verses there's a completely different tone something's happened but I trusted in your steadfast love my heart shall rejoice in your salvation

I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me we're not quite sure what's happened perhaps his circumstances have changed perhaps there's a change within him perhaps someone has given him a word of encouragement or an oracle a word of promise but something has changed to bring the writer of this psalm to a new understanding of what God is doing something at least has brought him to a stage where he can say now that God cares he's God he's there and he is for him rather than against him and so he rejoices in the deliverance that either has happened or has been promised he's seen God's committed unfailing steadfast love in the context of his pain he's experienced God's faithfulness to him the very thing he questioned whether God cared for him he now sees for what was at stake in the very first part of this psalm was that the writer didn't feel cared for by

God he felt cut off from God and his love he felt that God had turned his back on him and now responds in singing praise to God for his steadfast love and for his saving actions you need to remember that the psalmist in writing this down has written all this after the event and did you notice that even after God had changed his mind he doesn't just write a psalm consisting of the last two verses he still thinks it's important enough for us to know the pain and the grief and the questioning that he went through of course it's important for him to come to an understanding of God's love and faithfulness but he wants us to know too that it wasn't always like that that there are times of deep personal questioning of asking hard questions of complaining to God of protesting to God of harassing God of whinging to God and that's

I think the beauty of the lament it ends with a reminder of God's faithfulness and deliverance but it doesn't seek to deny how hard those hard times were it deals fairly with both the harshness of God not seeming to care and the joy of finally coming to see his faithfulness and that phase of lamenting of complaining of crying out in pain to God is not for most of us one through which we will pass quickly particularly if the deep or if the hurt or the pain is very very deep it often lingers as it did with people like Job and Jeremiah for many years and it could be that today you may need to work at this part of your struggle for faith and work at being open and honest before God we need to see that the lament proper the complaint is never an end in itself at some stage we need to move on and that's why in the end a lament is never simply just a whinge it's never just an excuse to let off steam to God and to complain to God the goal of doing that of being honest before God is ultimately to come to see his faithfulness and his care afresh this movement within the lament from complaint to a new understanding of God and praise to God is thus of absolute significance the lament moves through this crisis of faith to a newer fresher understanding of God's love and his goodness so that rather than being an embarrassment to faith the kind of psalm that we shouldn't read publicly because it's not very polite or proper the laments of the Old Testament are a rich resource they're a challenge to genuine faith in the midst of trouble a faith which knows that even when God appears to be silent help can come from no one else except

God what I think we need to recover in our church is that sense of bold honest faith that moves from the questioning of God's ways through to a settled and deep conviction that God is a God who is for us but you might say does that only apply to people in the Old Testament surely in the light of the coming of Christ we ought to be lamenting but we ought to be rejoicing as God's New Testament people and yet God still calls on us to have a genuine open honest relationship with God not a life of pretense not taking time off from our relationship with God so when hard times come or maybe for you they're present right now don't be tempted to put up a front before God you can see through it don't take time off from your relationship with God you're only exacerbating the problem tell it like it is tell it like it is God's big enough to take it

[21 : 30] I've entitled this psalm being angry with God but you can see it's a little bit more than that really isn't it it's not so much about being angry and if we are honest with God there will be times when we need to pour out our anger and hurt and pain before God indeed the writer of this psalm comes to understand that God cares and we have an even deeper knowledge of God's care we can see in the rest of scripture how God kept on working his promises out how he showed his faithfulness in sending his only son Jesus to die in our place yes God does care and yet we see even Jesus in Gethsemane say to his disciples my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death Luke describes it this way and being in anguish Jesus prayed more earnestly and his sweat were like drops of blood falling to the ground not an easy going faith there and so

Jesus hanging in physical agony on the cross feeling in his genuine humanness the awfulness of the sin of the world separating him from the father turns to what a lament psalm psalm 22 and utters those famous words my God my God why have you forsaken me and we need to move on from there as Jesus himself does to see God's faithfulness afresh but we will not do so if we bottle up our hurts and our anger or pretend they do not exist we need to hear that for ourselves and we need to reflect that in the counsel we give to others among whom we minister God invites us to be honest not phony in our relationship with him and we need to lay out our inner sufferings before the one who alleviates suffering who heals wounds and who dries tears and as we do so we can move through to a deeper growing trust in God though we often we will not understand all that God does in his world we will come to see that honesty with God even honesty about our anger and pain will lead to a deeper truer trust in the living

God we may not be comfortable with our anger but our God is big enough to take it and taking it to keep on loving us let's pray our Lord and God we thank you that your word is indeed useful in teaching and training and shaping us and we thank you that you've seen fit to include these words in scripture hard words painful words words that cause us to confront parts of our life that we tend to ignore dear Lord give us the courage to be utterly honest before you in good times and in bad times help us to be genuine people of integrity who seek to tell it like it is and thank you dear God that you care for us more deeply than we can ever know Amen