The Lonely Lament of a Suffering Servant

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Preacher: Philip Copeland

[0:00] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles. Phil Copeland began last week a study in the book of Job.! And you'll find that in the Old Testament just before the big book of Psalms.

Job. If you don't have a Bible, if you need a Bible, there's visitors' Bibles at the back and at the sides. The stewards will be glad to give you one. I think it's page 415 if you pick up one of those Bibles.
And we're going to read today from the middle of Job chapter 2, chapter 2 verse 11, and through to the end of chapter 3, which is a very moving and fulsome lament from Job. Last week we read about how Job was suddenly struck in a most terrible way, losing all his possessions, losing all his family, and then after that losing his own health and being left in a terrible state of anguish.
And we begin at verse 11 of chapter 2, which tells us of Job's friends. Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came, each from their own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Nemethite.
They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. And when they saw him from a distance, they didn't recognize him.
[1:41] And they raised their voices and wept. They tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads towards heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights.

And no one spoke a word to him. They saw that his suffering was very great. After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.
And Job said, Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said a man is conceived. Let that day be darkness. May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it.
Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it. Let the blackness of the day terrify it. That night, let the thick darkness seize it.
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year. Let it not come into the number of the months. Behold, let that night be barren. Let no joyful cry enter it.
[2:50] Let those curse it who curse the day. Who are ready to raise up Leviathan. Let the stars of its dawn be dark.

Let it hope for light, but have none. Nor see the eyelids of the morning. Because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb. Nor hide trouble from my eyes.
Why did I not die at birth? Come out from the womb and expire. Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts that I should nurse?
But then I would have been laid down and been quiet. I would have slept. Then I would have been at rest. With kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves.
Or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not hidden as a hidden stillborn child. As infants who never see the light.
[3:53] There the wicked cease from troubling. And there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together. They hear not the voice of the taskmaster.

The small and the great are there. And the slave is free from his master. Why is light given to him who is in misery.
And life to the bitter in soul. Who long for death but it comes not. And dig for it more than hidden treasures. Who rejoice greatly and are glad when they find a grave.
Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden. From God has hedged in. For my sighing comes instead of my bread.
And my groanings are poured out like water. For the thing that I fear comes upon me. And what I dread befalls me.
[4:53] I am not at ease. Nor am I quiet. I have no rest. But trouble comes. Amen.

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May God bless to us his word. Well, good evening and please have your Bibles open again at Job chapters 2 and 3.
That will be most helpful. When we Christians find ourselves going through a time of darkness and despair.
How are we to respond? Well, we know I'm sure that we are called to endure. And remain faithful to the Lord Jesus to the end. No matter what happens.
But what will that look like and sound like practically in our lives? Does it mean that we simply try to pull ourselves together and plow on acting unfazed as though nothing's really happened to us?
[6:05] And should we feel guilty for any feelings of grief and agony that might be piercing through our hearts? Should we ever feel guilty about asking why?

Why is the Lord doing this to me? And if we have such agonized questions bubbling up within us, can we speak about them? Or should we remain tight-lipped and bury it all away inside us?
This section of Job will help us greatly. Last Sunday evening we left poor Job sitting in ashes. All alone, having faced appalling suffering.
He was once the greatest man of the East. Healthy, wealthy, prosperous. Ten precious and stunning children. But it was all taken away from him.
And it's a shock for us to read of this because, as you'll remember, Job, we're told, three times over chapters 1 and 2, was blameless. An upright.
[7:10] A man who feared God and turned away from evil. In other words, he was a true believer. A servant and a friend of the living God.

He wasn't sinless, but he was steadfast in his trust in the Lord. And yet he was blasted by the most appalling suffering. And as Job sits there on the ash heap, he has no idea as to why any of this has happened to him.
But of course, remember, we the readers know because we've heard the conversations that took place in the heavenly realms. The unseen reality between the Lord and his submissive opponent, Satan.
To sum it up quickly, the Lord sovereignly gave Satan a terrible permission to sift Job like wheat. In order to prove that Job was someone who loved God simply because he is God.
And not because of all of the good stuff God had given him. Not of all of the good prosperity. And so Satan hit Job twice. The first thing, he sees to it that Job's property is stolen.
[8:22] And his servants are all killed by what we would think of today as acts of terrorism. And Satan also saw to it that Job's precious children are all killed by what we would call today a natural disaster.

And then on a second occasion, Satan destroys Job's health. Painful sores broke out all over his body.
And after all of that, did Job curse God? No. He shows real faith. He humbly submits to the Lord's painful and perplexing providence.
He does not charge God with any wrong, nor does he sin against God with his lips. Instead, he shows that he really does love God simply because he is God, our maker.
And in a way, we would love it if it all stopped there, with Job's trials over. But it doesn't. Satanic oppression is going to carry on for the Lord's servant.
[9:29] In chapter 2, verse 11, we are introduced to Job's three friends. Eliphaz, the Temanite, Bildad, the Shuite, and Zophar, the Namathite.

And it seems that these men, as they draw near to Job's location, they're going to bring hope. They are described in very strong ways in the Hebrew. They're described as proper friends. Not the way we use the word friends today to mean the people we've added on Facebook.
But actual, proper, covenant-loyal friends. And they seem to come with good intentions. We're told they came to sympathize and comfort Job.
Comfort being that immensely practical practice in the Bible of speaking the truth to a sufferer to change their heart and mind. So that they see their suffering in the right way.
And so as they approach, we're desperate for them to be as they're described here. But in actual fact, they end up tormenting this poor man even more.
[10:29] By speaking all sorts of false things about him and false things about the Lord. And in our passage tonight, they actually make a hash of things before they've even opened their mouths.

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And that brings me to my first point this evening. Chapter 2, verse 11 to 13. Let's notice the loneliness of God's suffering servant. The loneliness of God's suffering servant.
Job is so alone here. And sadly, his friends seem to make him feel more alone. In verse 11, it is implied that actually a fair bit of time has passed since Job first sat himself down on the ash heap. It would have taken a decent amount of time for the news about him to spread around. To spread to his three friends. Remember back in those days, there was no WhatsApp chats.
No texts. No calls. No emails. And these friends, they lived in three different countries. So it would have taken time for them not only to hear the news about their friend Job.
[11:40] It would have also taken time for them to correspond with each other. And to arrange the date and time where they would all go and see Job together. And also, there were no flights, no cars, no trains.

It would have taken time to travel to Job once all the arrangements were in place. So in actual fact, friends, Job could have been sitting alone on that rubbish heap for weeks.
Maybe even months. Chapter 7 verse 3, Job speaks about having been allotted months of emptiness. Months of emptiness.
His lament in chapter 30 seems to speak about the same thing. His only companion for all that time was the shard of broken pottery that he used to scrape his sores.
To give himself some temporary relief. And so again, in verse 11, it's a joy to see these friends turn up. But in 12 to 13, they do things that at first reading might seem sympathetic.
[12:47] But actually, the more you probe into them, they're actually deeply unhelpful. Please look at verse 12. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him.

Now, the Hebrew there is actually, they did not acknowledge him. So they might not have recognized him. I take it there was a fair change in Job's appearance. But the Hebrew word is stronger. It's more a case of when they saw him, they didn't even greet him and acknowledge that this was their friend Job.
They are so taken aback by what they see. They do not acknowledge him. And it goes on. They raised their voices and wept.
They tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads towards heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. The tearing of robes, the sprinkling of dust, sitting for seven days and seven nights were all rituals that you find scattered throughout the Old Testament. And you carried them out when someone had died. You carried these out when you were in the presence of a corpse. Now, just think about the impact that must have had upon Job. He's in deep darkness and distress, suffering all alone.
[14:02] And now his friends are treating him as though he is already dead. A man with no hope. One commentator puts it like this. It is as if they call for the hearse and sit by Job with the coffin open and ready for him.

There is no point talking to a corpse. One just weeps by it. To them, Job is no longer a living person. Now, just note the detail in verse 13 there.
It says, Now, what are we to make of this silence? Because I think it is ambiguous at best. Preachers will often say that this is the best thing that the friends did for Job. And certainly when they do start opening their mouths, they make a real hash of things even more. But while their silence may have been appropriate initially, to go on for seven days and seven nights saying absolutely nothing, I don't think it's helpful at all.
Friends, there is a good type of silence, isn't there? That should take place when you are comforting a suffering believer. It's what Bob File calls a sympathetic silence.
[15:22] Where we sit with a person and if appropriate hold their hand and weep with them so that they know how much we feel for them and how much we love them.

That is not what we find in verse 13. Bob calls this the continuous silence of the friends a bankrupt silence. They have nothing to say to Job because they think he's beyond help.
They don't comfort Job because it seems to them too late for that. And if you doubt that that's what's going through their minds, wait until you hear what they say to him in the rest of the book. That's exactly what they think of Job here. Notice what verse 13 actually says. It says, no one said a word to him, to Job. So that doesn't rule out the possibility that during those seven days and seven nights, these friends could have sat there and spoken to each other and completely ignored Job.

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But we can't be certain about that. But what is clear is that their presence in bankrupt silence, I think, only serves to heighten Job's loneliness. And the fruit of that, the proof of that is chapter 3. [16:33] It's what eventually comes bursting out of his mouth. And we'll think about that in a moment. But let me just say some things that we learn here from Job's loneliness. Two things that will help us, the church, especially the next time we find ourselves going to comfort a suffering friend.

Firstly, let's remember that people who suffer do so alone. People who suffer do so alone, even if they're in the company of others.
For suffering always brings some sort of loneliness into the heart of the sufferer. Christopher Ash says this, Even a non-serious illness cuts us off from others.
We have to miss out on a family outing, a party, or a gathering. And if even a trivial suffering begins to isolate the sufferer, heavy suffering isolates acutely.
Even shared loss is experienced uniquely by each bereft person. When a child dies, the father alone knows what it is to be the father of this dead child.
[17:49] Only the mother enters the unique depths of loss as the mother of this son or daughter who has died. However much they share, at the deepest level, they suffer alone.

So friends, brothers and sisters, let's remember this sobering lesson. Whenever we are trying to comfort those in pain, they will most definitely be suffering in a way that is unique to them.
Like Job, they will be alone, even if they're in the company of others. Let's be sensitive to that. The second thing from this scene is to remember that when we comfort people, we are to give them sympathetic silence, not bankrupt silence.
Let's not make them feel even more alone by following the example of Job's three friends. Good comforters will silently weep with those who weep, but they will also exercise wisdom and discernment to know when is the right time to speak, and to speak words of real comfort at the right time.
And one last thing about Job's awesome loneliness, and again, I'm greatly indebted to Christopher Ash on this. And that's the fact that Job's awesome loneliness here foreshadows another believer, an even greater man who centuries later endured an even deeper suffering.
[19:21] This believer, this believer too, was with his friends. He told them to sit and wait while he prayed. He took with him his three closest friends, and he began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

And he said to them, My soul is sorrowful, even to the point of death. Remain here and watch. He went on a little farther, and fell to the ground on the dust like Job, and prayed with loud cries and tears.
But when he came back, he found them sleeping. Could you not watch one hour? He asked sadly.
And the next day he suffered, stripped of his robes, robbed of his friends, with even his mother having to keep her distance from the cross.
And in the intensity of his suffering, he cried out in anguish, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? As the old hymn puts it, he bore the burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone.
Friends, today for us, as Christians, should we ever find ourselves in such despair and loneliness, you and I must remember that we have a great high priest who loves us, and who knows exactly what it is to suffer alone as a believer.
[20:51] In fact, however deep into darkness and despair you may have feel that you've sunk, you have a high priest who has been deeper. And so therefore, he can sympathize with us fully in our weakness and in our tears.

And he has promised to always be with us, even when we don't feel like that is the case. So remember the Lord Jesus. Well, after seven days and seven nights of no one talking to Job, the loneliness and the pain in his heart, it finally erupts and bursts out.
And that brings us to our second point this evening. The lament of God's suffering servant. And that's what we're going to look at over the whole of chapter three. The lament of God's suffering servant.
When a real believer suffers, they will humbly submit to the Lord's providence. Even though it may be perplexing and painful, the real believer will stay faithful to the Lord through all.
And we know from elsewhere in the Bible that he will help us to remain faithful to him throughout it all, of course. But that does not mean that a real believer won't feel absolutely miserable.

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[22:13] Isn't that shocking? You can be a real believer, faithful to the Lord, and yet still be absolutely miserable at times. Times when sorrow and despair flood your heart so immensely.

All you can do is burst out and lament. And a real believer will not be afraid to do that. Will not be afraid to express the pain and the anguish that they feel in their hearts.
They will protest to the Lord within the boundary of praise. In Psalm 39, King David says these words in Psalm 39.
I was mute and silent. I held my peace to no avail. And my distress grew worse. My heart became hot within me.
As I mused, the fire burned. And then I spoke with my tongue. And in a similar way, Job's inner anguish has been boiling up within him.
[23:17] Most definitely because of his friend's silence. That's not helped. He cannot hold it in any longer. And so he pours out what is probably the darkest bit of this book.

This is a dark book. There will be light. Oh yeah. But this is the darkest moment, I think, of all the dark moments in the book. Before we look at it, let me just say two things.
Firstly, in this lament, Job is going to use some very extreme poetic imagery. In fact, Job is going to say things that may shock us.
Especially if you're new to the Christian faith, you may hear Job say things here that make you doubt that he is a believer. But he is. Just remember, friends, the tsunami of trauma that has swept over this man's life.
Secondly, when we listen to Job say these shocking things, we must remember what the Lord says about Job at both the beginning, and I know I'm jumping on here, but also at the end of the book.
[24:21] The Lord affirms and says, Job is a genuine believer, blameless and upright. He does not curse God with his mouth or speak wrongly of God. He speaks rightly of God, actually.

And remember, God certainly doesn't ever pull him up for what he says here. So that must control how we read even the most shocking things Job is about to say in this dark lament.
This is the voice of a real believer. With that in mind, what I want to do is briefly run through the lament and what Job says so that we're clear on what he's saying, and then we'll think about the implications for our lives later.
So let's look at the lament. It splits into three sections. We've got three sub-points. Firstly, in verses 1 to 10, Job curses his existence.
Job curses his existence. Now we don't have time to run through all of the detail, but essentially what Job cries out in anguish here is this. He says, let the day when I was born be cursed.
[25:32] Let it be engulfed by thick and terrifying supernatural darkness. And the day when I was conceived, let that also be hidden by darkness.

I want that to happen now so that I'll be blotted out of the record of history. I wish more than anything to be uncreated.
That seems to be what Job is crying out for every time he asks for darkness to sweep over him. He wants to be made into a Genesis 1 verse 2 state of existence or state of non-existence.
Remember Genesis 1 verse 2? Before the Lord created light and life, there was just darkness, formlessness, emptiness. And Job longs to be in a Genesis 1 verse 2 state of non-existence.
He begs for this to happen to him. In 1 verse 6, he says, rip out my birthday from the calendar. Blot me out. Life has become so painful that he longs for the very roots of his existence to be pulled out and to be taken captive by death.
[26:49] And verse 8 is actually terrifying. In verse 8, he wishes someone would rouse up Leviathan against him. Back then at that time, Leviathan was a sort of storybook sea monster of chaos.

The great enemy of the creator whose mission it was to undo the order and the beauty made by God. And in verse 8, Job pictures Leviathan as this beast is like having a team of zookeepers or handlers who are also professional curse bringers.
And he says to them, I want you to whistle your creature. I want you to whistle Leviathan. Wake him up. Bring him on and set him on me. Set him on my history. Set him upon the day when I came into existence.
Let Leviathan swallow up my beginnings. Now of course, all that Job is saying here is fanciful.
He knows he cannot effectively curse the past. But remember again, he's speaking in heated hyperbole. He's pouring out the deep pain that has flooded his heart.

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[28:02] This is how he honestly feels. He curses his own existence. And in the next section of the lament, in verse 11 to 19, Job longs for rest.

He longs for rest. And again, out of this whole dark chapter, which I think is the darkest chapter in the book, we have the darkest verses.
Let me just read to you verse 11 to 19 again. And I want you to hear and hopefully even feel this man's pain. Let me read to you.
He says, Why did I not die at birth? Come out from the womb and expire. Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts that I should nurse?
For then I would have lain down and been quiet. I would have slept. Then I would have been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves.
[29:04] Or with princes who had gold who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not as a hidden, stillborn child, as infants who never see the light?

There the wicked cease from troubling. And there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together. They hear not the voice of the taskmaster.
The small and the great are there. And the slave is free from his master. So Job is really saying, I would be so much better in the place of the dead, beyond in the grave, rather than in the land of the living.
The Hebrew word for the place beyond the grave mentioned here is Sheol. Sheol. And Job is absolutely desperate to go there. Why?
What is it about Sheol? Well, Job claims that in Sheol the dead have rest. The dead are no longer in a place where they can face the sort of horrible anguish that he is currently in.
[30:13] Just look again at verse 17. Verse 17, he says that there, in Sheol, the wicked cease from troubling others. That is, in Sheol, there won't be any terrorists like the ones mentioned in chapter 1, the Chaldeans and the Sabaeans sweeping out of nowhere to rob you of your cattle and kill your servants.

In Sheol, you'll never have to bury your children who've died. In Sheol, all people, kings, politicians, prisoners, the great and the small of society, they cease to face the harsh realities of life in this present world.
They have all laid down and are at peace. They all have the rest that I so desperately want, says Job. Now again, remember this is heated, poetic hyperbole.
Later on in the book, it is clear that Job doesn't actually believe any of this. Okay? Later on in the book, Job says that Sheol is a place where people do not find rest.
chapter 17, he says it's really a place of the pit and of the worm. It is a God-forsaken place where people are imprisoned and held captive.
[31:29] So again, Job doesn't believe any of this stuff that he says, but this is the stuff that he feels at the moment. What he's going through has been so traumatic for him, it feels like the grave is a better option.

He is desperate for rest. And in the final section of the lament, in verse 20 onwards, Job asks an agonized question.
Verse 20, please look at verse 20. He says, Why? Why is light given to him who is in misery and life to the bitter in soul who long for death but it comes not and dig for it more than for hidden treasures who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave?
Job's agonized question seems to be, Why is it that life keeps on being given to people like me? People who are so desperate for life to be taken away from them.
Now the Lord is not mentioned explicitly here in this heated moment but the verb used in verse 20, given, that implies that this is whom Job is really addressing with this agonized question.
[32:51] He's protesting, asking, Why is the Lord keeping me alive when he can see that I am in such torment and pain? Why is the Lord, in other words, doing this to me?

How does the Lord do this for people who are so keen to find death that they would search for it as a miner searches out precious gems down a mine shaft? And he repeats this question in slightly different words in verse 23.
He says, Why is like given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has noticed hedged in? If you were here last Sunday, you would remember that in chapter 1, Satan said that the only reason Job loved the Lord was because the Lord had hedged him in.

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Same words, with comfort and prosperity. Well, now in chapter 3, Job claims that the Lord has hedged him in with deep trouble and misery.
And Job cannot understand why. Why? And this why question, the why question, is a question that we will hear Job raising again and again and again throughout the rest of this book.
[34:10] Yes, Job humbly submits to the Lord's painful providence. He doesn't curse God. He doesn't go away and grumble behind God's back. He will speak rightly of God.

And actually, through all of his speeches, when you read on, he always turns eventually to the Lord because he knows that the Lord is his only hope. But what we'll see is that whilst he accepts the Lord's painful providence, he just wrestles and wrestles and puzzles and puzzles over why the Lord is doing this to him.
It's a mark of real faith when we suffer. Well, our time is gone. Let me finish by saying two things. Two things.
Two implications. Firstly, Job 3 teaches us a very important truth that we need to grasp. It is the truth that a real believer who has not fallen into sin may go through utter dereliction, blank despair and deep depression.
That can happen and yet, at the end, the person who's been through all this will be seen to be a real believer. It's so important that we remember this, friends, that as someone who belongs to Jesus Christ, this could be you.
[35:33] This could be you. And yet, it's not necessarily that you lack faith. It's because you've had faith and that you walk by faith.

But this could be you. It's so important that we know this and remember this for there is a type of Christianity out there that is shallow, trite and superficial.
Bob File calls it a kind of Christianity that would have had Jesus singing a happy, clappy chorus at the grave of Lazarus. Someone else gives it a name?
Easy triumphalism. A type of Christianity that insists upon always singing happy songs in church with words like this, strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord or all our fears are washed away. Really? Not guaranteed. Job 3 has something totally different to say. It's that you can be a real believer waiting for the Lord and strength will not rise.
[36:42] You are so full of pain because of what has happened to you. Job was completely miserable and full of fear and yet he remained a real and blameless believer.

secondly, Job 3 also teaches us that real believers when they are going through the mill they need not be afraid of weeping and pouring out their pain and the anguish of their hearts.
In other words, friends, as the church of Jesus today we can lament when appropriate. I once remember listening to a senior pastor talking to a bunch of us younger men about his experiences of visiting suffering believers and he said that not always, not always, okay, not always but fairly often when he goes to visit a suffering believer they would often start off as pretty guarded.
Most will put on a brave face for him being the senior pastor. Some even smile at him and pretend to be okay despite all the horrible things they faced. But gradually as the chat goes on they will start to open up and share what is really going on in their hearts and they will say things like I know I shouldn't but I can't stop crying.
I've never felt so alone I know I shouldn't or I can't understand why God would allow this to happen but I know I shouldn't really think that. And of course while they say these things it's usually always accompanied with tears and emotion.
[38:26] They say these things in heated tones. But then said the senior pastor having done all that the poor suffering soul will always usually stop and recoil back into themselves and say something like this I'm so sorry for getting emotional pastor and I'm sorry for thinking such things.

I just need to pull myself together. Well my friends the Bible and Job chapter 3 says something refreshingly different. Suffering Christians should not be afraid to weep and pour out their hearts. Yes there's a time and a place to do that and not everyone's really emotional. Others are more emotional than others but just remember that there's room for us to have godly lamenting and heated lamenting.
And suffering Christians belong to a God who is big enough and gracious enough to take our honest cries of pain. Let me say that again.
Our God is a God who is big enough and gracious enough to take our honest cries of lament and pain. Let me close with some words of Carl Truman.

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[39:39] And this is taken from a wonderful essay that I recommend you find and read online. And the essay is entitled What Do Miserable Christians Sing? It's a brilliant essay.

Carl Truman says this, Let us the church all learn once again to lament. Read the Psalms over and over until you have the vocabulary, the grammar, the syntax necessary to lay your heart before God in lamentation.
And if you do this, you will have the resources to cope with your own periods of suffering, despair, and heartbreak and to keep worshipping and trusting through even the bleakest of times.
Remember, we can lament. Amen. Let's turn to the Lord and pray. Let's pray. Our Father, we praise you for the sweet name of Jesus, who is our great high priest, the one who suffered for us on the cross, and the one who was raised in power, and the one who is now our high priest, seated in the heavenly realms and your glory, triumphant over all enemies.
We praise you that he can truly sympathize with us in our weakness and in our tears. Help us to remember him and that in him we stand eternally secure no matter how we feel.
[41:20] And Father, we praise you that in him we can lament, bringing our protests to you within the boundaries of praise, for you are the God who is big enough to take our honest cries.

Father, help us as a church, and help us as a church to be better at comforting one another when we are in pain. Give us the wisdom to know when to be silent and when to speak.
And we pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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