

“Thou Shalt Not Whine”

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First Presbyterian Church Kingwood

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Have you ever been around a whiner? In our family, for a time we had a whining child. She was about 4 years old, and her response to everything was whining. Got to where Sandra and I said to her, you can whine, but not here. Go to your room, and come back when you are thru whining. And she would go, and come back a few minutes later, saying, “I’m done whining” and we would all celebrate. Eventually she grew tired of whining alone, and, to her credit, I have rarely heard her whine in the ensuing 25 years. We started thinking, maybe God left off an important commandment, maybe number 11 should have been **“Thou Shalt Not Whine.”** Imagine my pleasure at finding a plaque a few years later, says **“Thou Shalt Not Whine,”** it has been hanging by our back door for many years.

Psalm 102 is a song about whining, about complaining about our situation. But not complaints about trivial annoyances or irritations, but complaints about profound hurt and pain, real life wounding problems. It is a psalm of lament, of deep, gut wrenching sorrow.

Same kind of Psalm we find in **Psalm 22,** the one we remember from Jesus using it to call out to God from the cross, “My god, my god, why have you forsaken me.” Jesus knew this psalm by heart, and knew that the people knew it as well. Both psalms are psalms of profound pain, of loss, of lament. The psalmists feel far from God and they pour out their words of complaint.

Three things I would like you to notice about whining. One, it is universal. Who wrote this Psalm? Not identified, like some of the psalms, some people think it is David, maybe Nehemiah, but most likely a young man in the Babylonian exile, dreaming about Jerusalem and the return of his people to the city of David. This young man is heartsick over the loss of Jerusalem, a town he may never have seen, but he feels the pain of his people. The point is that it doesn’t really matter who wrote the psalm, because the pain he feels, the affliction he describes, could be anyone, in any time.

Heart sickness – I suspect there is not a heart in this room that has not felt sick. You know the feeling, there is an emptiness in the pit of your body, color seems to be sucked out of your life, everything seems grey and dull, a weight descends on your soul, you can’t seem to move or even breathe. Heart sick is a great way

to describe it. The **great preacher Charles Spurgeon** said “The best of men are not always able to stem the torrent of sorrow.” I like that description – a torrent of sorrow, a downpour of grief, a flood of pain.

There is not a heart in this room, or any room, that has not felt lonely, forgotten, abandoned, cheated, hurt. And it is in our very nature, to speak that aloud, we want people to know how bad we have it, just how bad we feel. We are not good at keeping this stuff to ourselves. That’s why the words echo across thousands of years. “Let this be recorded for future generations,” says the psalmist nearly three thousand years ago, and so it has been. It is ok to speak, even cry our sorrow out loud.

Heartsickness is universal, and the words of the psalm could come from any man or woman in any age.

Second thing to note is there is a problem with whining. It can become an end unto itself, and it is a dead end. Unchecked whining can be self perpetuating, you can allow yourself to be consumed by it; it can even become your lifestyle, your personality. Have you met people who are consumed by their sorrow?

The story of Eleanor: Visited a friend in El Paso, years ago, talking over the back fence with the friends’ neighbor, she told me I am going thru a rough patch, my husband left me, my daughter and I are devastated, we talk on the phone hours each day, and can’t seem to stop crying. I said, that sounds really hard, you are dealing with some major changes. How long ago did he leave, I asked -- she said -- 16 years.

Our friend **Ben Patterson**, who visited us last month, in his observation on this Psalm says: ***Self can be swallowed up in suffering. Pain confines.*** Ben is right, we can create a prison for ourselves, bordered by walls of our pain. People can live in these prisons for years. God understands this pain, but he does not intend for it to be our home, our prison.

And that brings us to the **third thing to notice** -- God gets whining. He understands it, he knows about heartsickness. God has been there and done that. How many times in the old testament does God complain about his people, how many times does he lament their stiffnecked stubbornness, their faithlessness? And Jesus gets whining- born of woman, and living with us in a life of flesh, he experienced disappointment, and the failures of those around him, and the weakness of his friends and followers. There were moments in his life that he was surrounded by pain. He knew sorrow. He knew his sorrow. He knows your sorrow. Jesus gets whining.

The good news is that there is Good News. There had better be some Good News, we are Christ's family and we are sitting in Christ's family room. Pain is not forever. My mom is fond of saying that "this too shall pass." She is right, heartsickness is rarely fatal. It seems overwhelming, it feels like it can go on forever, but it doesn't, and the psalmist reminds of what does go on forever – a faithful God, seated on a throne, loving and caring for us, and hearing us in every whine.

Did you see where the **Good news begins**? Do you see how it gets started? Where can God's love enter this story of suffering? Where is the turning point in the sufferer's lament?

Some people in this room will remember the **first minister in the church** here in Kingwood, he visited last year for our 25th anniversary, Dick Houtz. Dick had a style of preaching, that sounded a lot like Psalm 102, he would tell a story, an illustration, a recent event, and discuss how bad it seemed, how difficult the situation was, how God seemed far away.

Then, at the exact half way point of his sermon, Dick would pause and say, And yet. And yet, that was the beginning of the good news, the beginning of how Dick was going to show us God's grace, or Jesus love, or the Holy Spirit's power in the story. One moment you are sitting in the stale room of doubt, and pain, and suffering. And the next moment the window opens, a breeze blows, sun streams in, everything changes. And yet, and yet, it was the signal to reorient our thinking, reset our compass, as Jim described it a few weeks ago.

In Psalm 102, the signal that things are changing is "But you, Lord." It is the moment when the psalmist leaves his self pity, his sorrow, his heartsickness, and reorients his compass, looking to God who can do what he cannot. But you, Lord, sit on your throne forever. **But you, but you, Lord** – that's where the good news begins for us whiners. The good news begins when we turn our thoughts, and our sorrows, and our fear, and our disappointment from ourselves, and acknowledge the one who was standing there all the time, ready to hear us. God stands ready, he always stands ready to hear from us about our sorrows. He doesn't belittle them, he doesn't ignore them, he doesn't make fun of them, he listens, and gives a measure of peace and healing. "Come to me, Jesus says, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Our circumstances do not define us, but rather we have the ability to respond to those circumstances in a way that our response defines us. It's like what your

have been told many times, life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. But for Christians, it's more than that. It's not what life gives you but the strength of our spirit and the power of faith that helps us transcend those circumstances. It is a choice to stand on the promises of God, it is a choice to trust that there is more than we can see, that God is present and moving in these heartsick moments. Does it make the problems and the pain go away? No, it adds perspective, a resource, a way out. And you sense a change in your outlook, it is not about you, it is about him, he has brought you this far, and can be trusted to bring you a little farther.

This is good news for us whiners. Our heartsickness is not the end of the story. There is a place to go with pain and disappointment. It is a place called prayer. And it begins with turning to God, and saying, But you, Lord.... And in prayer, healing can occur. Jim talked a few months ago about the difference between curing and healing, and I have been thinking about it a lot since then. Let me tell you about my understanding of healing – it is not a medicine, or a treatment, or a medical cure, but something more powerful and valuable. Healing is the peaceful understanding of what God wants **for you** and what God wants **from you**. This is the healing that cures heartsickness, that transcends hurt, and failure, and disappointment, and grief. This is the healing that God desperately wants to give to his children, you and me, the healing that is only available through prayer. The healing, the answers that us whiners so deeply need, begins with the words. But you, Lord...

And so, some things to remember about Psalm 102 - it is a psalm for us all, if you haven't groaned, and lied awake at night, felt like you were picked up and thrown down, haven't felt heart sick, well, just keep on living, it's coming. Do we need an 11th commandment, Thou Shalt Not Whine ? No, I think God got it right, 10 is just fine. We don't need to stop whining, it is in our very nature. But just because it is our nature, doesn't mean that our sorrow is the end of the story.

Also remember that this heartsickness can become a life style, a dead end choice to live your life wallowing in your grief, and reliving an injustice you have experienced. If you find yourself still bleeding from wounds that are years old, if you are still burdened by events long past, if you are stuck in a heartsickness that weighs on you daily , ask the question, am I drowning in a torrent of sorrow? And if so, how do I get out?

The good news is that there is a way out, a release from the confinement of sorrow, to stem the torrent of grief and pain. It begins with reorienting our compass. It begins with taking the psalmist's words, placing them in our own hearts, saying, But you, Lord, but you...

Please pray with me.

Almighty God, our lives can be a source of grief and pain, and sometimes we cannot stem the torrent of sorrow. But you, Lord, but you, remain on your throne, and at our side, ready to hear our lament, and to grant your measure of healing. In our weakness, grant us this healing. For it is in Christ's name we pray, Amen.