

GRIEF SERVICE - PSALM 56

Lots of people like to collect things. People that collect things are slightly obsessive. 😊 Others look at their collection and struggle to understand. What is the point?

The 10 Most Popular Collectible Items

- Antique Furniture. Vinyl Records. ...
- Comic Books. ... Coins and Currency. ...
- Classic Cars. ... Trading Cards. ...
- Dolls and Toys. ... Stamps.
- Wine Fine art, jewellery

But to a collector, their collection is precious. Years accumulating these objects. They can tell you the history of each one, where it came from, what is special about it, how much it cost. Beautiful verse in Psalm 56. 8 Says

*You have kept track of all my sorrows
You have collected all my tears in a bottle
You have recorded each one in your book*

The context for this Psalm is that David had been seized by the Philistines. 1 Sam 21:10-15. He has been anointed King of Israel, but things are not working well. Saul's jealousy has driven him mad, and he obsessively pursues David trying to kill him. In desperation he flees to the philistines, who were Israel's enemies. Possibly he went to offer himself as a mercenary. But he philistines kings servants know of his reputation. He is the guy who has been killing them. David realizes the danger he is in. He might have come in peace, but they consider an enemy. Possibly they seized him at this point – the intro to the Psalm suggests this. He only escapes by pretending to have gone mad.

This is an incredibly low time in David's life. God has promised him kingship but he is living as a fugitive. He is not safe in his own country but he is not safe outside of it either. David would have been experiencing fear, grief, confusion. He would have felt betrayed with no where to turn. He would have shed tears as he considers his future. And yet he writes these words.

There is more context to this as well. The idea of collecting tears in a bottle is more than just a poetic metaphor. In ancient times, mourners filled small glass bottles and put them in burial tombs as a symbol of respect. The Romans and Egyptians both did this. No one is quite sure how ancient the tradition is. (and the bottles found in tombs some contend held perfume, not tears) Woman whose husband went to war or were killed would have a tear

bottle. Tear bottles reappears in Victorian times and in the American Civil war, called lachrymatory bottles

God is not literally collecting our tears. But the image points to the fact that our tears, pain is precious to God. We only collect things that are important to us.

God sees our pain and he does not forget, Typically when someone dies, lots of people express their sympathy. Lots of support. But after a month or so, people have moved on and often forget that we are still grieving. They might miss the person, but if the person is a loved one, we are in a lot of pain and grief. The 2 worst things that we can say to someone who is grieving is

1. It is all in God's plan There are a lot of problems with this idea.

It might be arguable if the person who has died is a Christian and lived a good life. My Dad died this year. He was 88. He lived a good life. And he died relatively peacefully after only a short stay in hospital with his family by his side. That is a good way to die.

But are you really going to argue this to the parents of a teenager killed by a drunk driver. Or the mother of 4 young children who dies of cancer. Because when we say that we are suggesting that God has planned this. That he killed the teenager boy or the young mother.

Sickness and tragedy and death are never part of God's plan for this world. I have no easy answers for why God does not intervene in these things. Or why some people seem to cop more than their fair share of tragedy.

But David says in the very next verse

This I know, God is on my side. Or by my side

That is : God is a good God and as such he does not perpetuate evil and harm.

2. You just have to move on. And yet after a month, or a year, we have not moved on. Instead we have to learn to live with grief and loss, and in a sense live with it and grow around it. It does not go away. It has become part of us.

This picture tells us that God has not forgotten. He remembers and he keeps our sorrows and pain close. Every pain God sees. Sometimes they are major things. But sometimes there is a pain in our life that seems silly or irrational. But it still hurt. He sees every tear. He knows



the history of every tear, just as the collector knows the history of every item

Sometimes when we see a loved one suffering, it feels almost worse than if we were the ones suffering. To watch someone we love deeply go through great pain is heart wrenching. We feel helpless. We want to be able to take the pain but we can't. We want to make things better but nothing to take the place of the one who has died.

God weeps at our suffering. God is somehow not so high mighty that he is removed from our pain. He experiences that pain with us.

God saw the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. Ex 3:7

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because he knew the suffering they were going to experience. Wept because they would not turn to God

God weeps over our sin – it hurts him

Jesus wept over Lazarus death, even though he knew he was going to raise him from the dead. Wept because he saw the pain of death. Havoc that death had wrought on those close to Lazarus

Jesus cried in his time alone with the Father. During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus being fully human cried feeling his own pain and suffering. Isaiah says he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief.

Imagine ne watching someone who is incredibly close to you being tortured slowly to death. You would never get over the Truman of that. It would haunt you for the rest of your life. You would never get the screams and the agony out of your head. Imagine the father and the Spirit, watching the Son be beaten and tortured over 24hrs as he died an agonizing breath.

We have a God who weeps over us. At our hardness of heart. At our pain and sorrow that we experience, over every tragedy big or small. God weeps.

In pain the lie that is so easy to believe is that God is not good and that God has left us. In the face of the unexplainable pain that is a very easy lie to believe.. It seems credible. God says I have not left you. I see your pain. I have not forgotten. Every tear you shed I am collecting and they are precious to me. They will never leave my side.

Some of the tear bottles from ancient times had a special kind of cork, that allowed a little bit of air in. Over time the tears in side would evaporate until all were gone and the bottle was empty. When that happened, it was a sign that the time for mourning was over. God holds our tears. They are precious to him. But there will come a day when he will wipe away every tear. A day when there will be no more suffering. When the bottle will be empty. In faith we hang on for that day.

David goes on to say

*O God, I praise your word Yes lord, I praise your word
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me.
I will fulfil my vows to you, O God and offer a
sacrifice of thanks for your help
For you have rescued me from death
You have kept my feet from slipping
So now I can walk I in your presence O God
In your life giving light.*

In a sense this was a statement of faith. He was in captivity. But he believes that God is present with him and will rescue him. That is the same with us, in the midst of our pain and suffering. We can choose to say. Actually I am in Gods hands. I am not at the mercy of my circumstances. I am not going to believe that life is out of control. I don't know what is happening. But I am going to believe that you are with me.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. Are you or have you been a collector? Do you know someone who is passionate about their collection?
2. Have you known a time when it felt as if God had abandoned you, where everything seemed to be going wrong? What were the thoughts and feelings during that time?
3. What helped you and what hindered you during that season? Discuss the comment that " it is all in God's plan "
4. Discuss the idea that God suffers now , and yet there is a promise of no pian in the world to come.
5. Who could you reach out to this week who is grieving or suffering in some way? What is helpful to say or do in such times?



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