

Week 35: Lament Over the Death of a Kingdom

Lamentations 3

August 31/ September 1

Summary & Goal:

God's people have reaped the consequences of their choices to ignore the warnings of God and continue to worship false gods and idols. God has shown great patience and faithfulness generation after generation, always showing mercy. However, God is also a just God and now His people are in exile, having lost their homes, livelihoods and familiar surroundings of Judah. In the midst of this dark era of captivity, Jeremiah finds hope; not in the circumstances, but realizing God's compassions never fail, and are made new every morning. The proclamation in the midst of captivity is crying out to God, "Great is Your faithfulness."

Main Passages:

Lamentations 1:1; 2:11; 3:1-8, 17-24

Session Outline:

1. SAD REALITY OF JEREMIAH-- (LAMENTATIONS 1:1)
2. HEART OF JEREMIAH-- (LAMENTATIONS 2:11)
3. FEELINGS OF JEREMIAH-- (LAMENTATIONS 3:1-8)
4. HOPE OF JEREMIAH-- (LAMENTATIONS 3: 17-24)

Session in a Sentence:

Circumstances of life sometimes go from bad to worse. Regardless of the circumstances, when we remember the mercy, love, and compassion of God's faithfulness; we have H.O.P.E. Healing. Opportunity. Peace. Encouragement.

Kingdom Connection:

There have always been consequences to sin and turning away from God. It is during these dark times that God shows us a glimmer of light. The hope of forgiveness brings confidence and certainty. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In the words of Jeremiah, "this I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope."

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Introduction:

Have you ever had one of those days, weeks or months where everything went from bad to worse? And if you haven't felt that way on a personal level, consider yourself fortunate. We seem to live in a world that when we watch the news at any given hour on any given day, our culture seems to be going from bad to worse.

This summer marked the 50th anniversary of landing on the moon. There were several documentaries and specials depicting what life was like in America in the 1960s; the good, the bad and the ugly. One of the documentaries described what the Cocoa Beach area was like when Apollo 11 was about to launch. Hotel after hotel had on their marquees, "We are Praying for Our Astronauts." Media folks were asking about faith in a serious fashion, not derogatory. The astronauts in Apollo 8 read from the book of Genesis when they orbited the moon for the first time because they thought God's Word would be the most fitting words to say.

Look at how much we have changed in the last 50 years. And yet we are still considered by many people as a Christian nation, even though things seem to be going from bad to worse. Culturally, morally, and religiously it is a dark and challenging time in which we live; not unlike the days of Jeremiah.

In fact, God's people in the days of Jeremiah did have it worse. They had lost their homes, neighborhoods, places of worship, and livelihoods. Jerusalem had fallen. Judah and Israel were overtaken by the Assyrians and Babylonians. God's people were in exile, far from home.

Life for them had gone from bad to worse. The physical, psychological, and spiritual devastation of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. was horrific. (*An Introduction to the Old Testament—Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, Zondervan Publishing, 1994*). Jeremiah captured the heart, the pain, and the reality of the people of God during this time period as revealed in the book of Lamentations.

The name Lamentations means "to cry out loud;" so, going into this book we know it is not an upbeat happy story. However, it is also not a story without hope.

This was a very difficult season of life for God's people. They had been warned time and time again to stay away from false idols and worship only the one true God, Yahweh. And yet, they had for generations ignored the warnings. They had become complacent in their compromise. The result was judgment by a holy God, which led them into exile in Babylon.

Life had gone from bad to worse and now they were living in a foreign land where they would stay for the next 70 years. It was indeed a time to lament, a time to cry out to the Lord; and that is exactly what Jeremiah does for 5 chapters.

1. SAD REALITY OF JEREMIAH

Look at Lamentations 1:1:

Lamentations 1:1 How lonely sits the city That was full of people! How like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave! (Chronological Bible, August 26th, p. 1126)

It is like Jeremiah is walking through the deserted streets of Jerusalem. A city that used to be thriving. A city that hosted feasts and festivals. A city that had the temple built by Solomon. A city that had been home to kings. A city that had turned its back on God and His Word.

Consider how things had changed over time. Israel had been a united kingdom under the leadership of Saul, David, and Solomon. It was powerful economically, politically, religiously, and militarily. It was the premier city that people were drawn to and would flock to throughout the years.

When Solomon died, the kingdom that had been united, became divided. The Northern Kingdom, with 10 tribes had fallen into the hands of Assyria. The Southern Kingdom, with only 2 tribes had fallen into the hands of Babylon. Jerusalem was the capital of the Southern Kingdom and now was empty and deserted.

Jeremiah and others grieved at the empty streets, empty homes, empty buildings, and exiled people. That which they had been warned about, was now a reality. Things had gone from bad to worse.

In our lives, there have been times when we have felt deserted, empty and perhaps even in exile. For those who have gone through the death of a spouse or loved one, there is an emptiness and heaviness that is physically painful. There are moments you want to pick up the phone and call that person but cannot. There are songs you hear that bring back a memory of what it was like with them and a smile turns into tears. There is a feeling of being left behind and lonely. Your home and neighborhood feel empty because of this loss.

Others perhaps have gone through a divorce which is a very different kind of loss, though still very painful. Life is going to be different, especially if there are kids involved. There are times of heaviness, emptiness, and loneliness. It is a time to grieve the loss of a marriage.

Others perhaps have gone through a job loss. One day you were working for a company that you were confident you would retire with and the next day you find out your services are no longer needed. It is a time of heaviness, emptiness, and loneliness. For some, their identity is shaken with the loss of a job. It is a time to grieve the loss.

This time two years ago, there were many in this church and throughout the city that had suffered a loss of their homes and cars due to the flooding of Harvey. It was a devastating time for individuals and families. It was a time of heaviness, emptiness, and loneliness. For many of those who lost their homes, it was a time of exile in an apartment for months up to a year or more. It was a time to grieve the loss of a home.

We all have experienced loss in some form or fashion. In a sense, we have all experienced a personal “exile” where we have felt like we did not “belong” because of what was lost.

Jeremiah was grieving the loss of that which had been home to God's people. The silence was deafening. The streets and empty homes were blurred because of the tears being shed. Jeremiah, one of the more prolific prophets wrote down his lament during this season of grief.

Verse after verse there is sadness and grief trying to make sense of what has happened; knowing that God had been warning His people for generations but to no avail.

2. HEART OF JEREMIAH

Listen to the heart of Jeremiah in Lamentations 2:11

Lamentations 2: 11 My eyes fail with tears, My heart is troubled; My bile is poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, Because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city. (Chronological Bible, August 27, p.1131)

Notice the grief is manifesting itself both emotionally and physically. It was absolutely devastating for individuals and families. This was the kind of grief from which Jeremiah could not escape. It did not matter if it was day or night, he was grieving. It did not matter if he was walking or writing, he was grieving. It did not matter if he was praying or questioning, he was grieving.

The Bible never sugarcoats any part of the story of God's people. The consequences for the choices of God's people had been delayed time and time again. In fact, the consequences had been delayed for generations. But now God's people were experiencing first hand the consequences of their rebellion against God.

No one ever thinks it will happen to them. They had heard the warnings, but life seemed to go on just the same. Different prophets, different kings, different centuries, but the same warning from God. There was no longer any place to hide or any finger to point in trying to blame someone else. God's people were experiencing God's judgment. And it hurt.

Jeremiah had been one of the prophets God used to warn His people. You can imagine what Jeremiah must have felt. Well, you don't have to imagine because he wrote it down in Lamentations.

3. FEELINGS OF JEREMIAH

Here are some verses that express Jeremiah's feelings.

Lamentations 3: 1 I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. ² He has led me and made me walk In darkness and not in light. ³ Surely He has turned His hand against me Time and time again throughout the day. ⁴ He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones. ⁵ He has besieged me And surrounded me with bitterness and woe. ⁶ He has set me in dark places Like the dead of long ago. ⁷ He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. ⁸ Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. (Chronological Bible, August 27th, p. 1132)

Obviously, Jeremiah is in a dark place emotionally and spiritually. He seems to be a man who feels like he has been deserted by God. He seems to be a man whose burden is so heavy he cannot even move. He seems to be a man without hope.

If you or someone you know has been in that dark place of feeling deserted by God; feeling all alone, you know that you can spiral downward pretty fast if you stay in that dark place both emotionally and spiritually. It is in that downward spiral that you have to somehow, somehow put the brakes on.

Part of that braking process is to be just as honest before God as Jeremiah was. He did not hold anything back. He laid it all out to God, the same God who had warned the people. The same God that had allowed, if not caused, His people to be overthrown and taken into exile. Jeremiah knew that God was the same God in the darkness as He was in the light.

4. HOPE OF JEREMIAH

Look at Lamentations 3: 17-18

Lamentations 3: 17 You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity (happiness--NASB).¹⁸ And I said, "My strength and my hope Have perished from the LORD." (Chronological Bible, August 27th, p.1133)

Jeremiah spiraled downward, a man without hope. But then something remarkable happens. The spiral stops as he "remembers." For a moment Jeremiah stops thinking about the present and puts it in proper perspective.

Lamentations 3: 19 Remember my affliction and roaming, The wormwood and the gall.²⁰ My soul still remembers And sinks within me. (Chronological Bible, August 27th, p.1133)

We have all had that "sinking" feeling. It's the kind of feeling that takes our breath away, we feel it in our gut. Jeremiah was honest with God about his feelings, his pain, and the sinking feeling inside.

And then there is a glimmer of hope. That which he thought had perished, arises.

Lamentations 3: 21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.²² Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" (Chronological Bible, August 27th, p.1133)

Dr. Warren Weirsbe says, "Jeremiah turned from contemplating his misery to remembering God's mercy."

The circumstances of Jeremiah and God's people did not change. Jerusalem was still desolate. God's people were still in exile. Jeremiah was still grieving. But in the midst of those devastating circumstances, Jeremiah found hope.

Jeremiah's memory changed his perspective from loss to the faithfulness of God. It was God's ultimate faithfulness that gave Jeremiah hope in the midst of such difficult and dark circumstances.

Jeremiah realized that if it were not for the mercies of the Lord, we all would be consumed. Our circumstances would be overwhelming, and we would all spiral downward both literally and figuratively if it were not for the mercies of the Lord.

Whatever your “exile” may look like, know that the mercies of the Lord are at work and His compassions do not fail.

Even though God’s people had brought this on themselves by their relentless rebellion and consistent ignoring of the warnings of God; there was still hope. The reality is that God is faithful and just. Sometimes His justice is hard to embrace, and it brings about difficult circumstances. Yet, His mercy, compassion, and faithfulness will not fail. Jeremiah realized in his heart that God’s faithfulness is so great and that His mercy and compassion are new every morning.

No matter how dark your night may be, God’s mercy and compassion are new every morning for you too. God is faithful in all circumstances, whether in exile in Babylon or walking the deserted streets of Jerusalem. God’s faithfulness was and is greater than the circumstances.

Notice what Jeremiah says in vs. 24, “The Lord is my portion.”

The Hebrew word for “portion” is Cheleq (pronounced: Kay-leck). It is the word used for territory or parcel of land.

Remember what Jeremiah was doing when he writes those words; he is walking through a deserted, fallen, desolate city called Jerusalem. God’s people are in a foreign land called Babylon. There is no “portion of land” that they could call their own.

The land could be taken away, overthrown, burned or even flooded. But the Lord cannot be shaken. The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Lord is faithful beyond circumstances. The Lord is my portion, is a declaration of freedom and confidence.

The Lord is my portion; therefore I have hope in Him!

Notice the hope that Jeremiah held onto was not in the circumstances that fluctuate, nor the land which can be overtaken, but the hope that is life-changing is the hope that is in the Lord.

When you have hope in the Lord you can move beyond the darkness of your circumstances.

If you think about it in terms of an acrostic, H.O.P.E. in the Lord brings about:

Healing---Even though Jeremiah was grieving, there is a healing moment here when he realizes the Lord is merciful and compassionate every single day.

Opportunity---Jeremiah could have continued the downward spiral, but when he put everything in perspective and measured it up again the faithfulness of the Lord, he had the opportunity to change his attitude.

Peace---in these verses we see a peacefulness that we see nowhere else in this book. I think it is significant that these verses happen to be in the very middle of the book when Jeremiah is literally surrounded by dark, difficult, sad circumstances and grief.

Encouragement---the truth that Jeremiah held on to, was that God cared enough every single day to show mercy and compassion. God cared enough every single day to be the portion, the territory that no one can ever take away. God cared enough every single day to listen even in times of grief, loss, and frustration. Jeremiah was encouraged because he realized God is faithful every single day.

Sometimes it seems like everything is going from bad to worse. Sometimes we all feel like Jeremiah, walking through the deserted streets of Jerusalem and wondering how did we get here.

Sometimes we need to cry out to God, not holding anything back; God can handle it.

Remember to “recall to your mind” the faithfulness of God; it is there you find true hope that brings healing, opportunity, peace, and encouragement.

Resources:

The Wiersbe Bible Commentary Old Testament

www.biblestudytools.com

An Introduction to the Old Testament, Dillard, and Longman; Zondervan Publishing