

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Jeremiah's Lamentations*

Readings: *Lamentations 3:1-5:22*

Reflections:

- Lamentations 3 is an acrostic poem based on the Hebrew alphabet. It is parallel to many of the psalms that wrestle with personal struggle and suffering. The first section is riddled with disturbing and unnerving images but then at verse 22 we see a turn. "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassion never fails. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." Jeremiah is modeling for us the hard emotional work of truly trusting in God when everything is going wrong and you are waiting for God to fulfill his promises and there is absolutely no evidence that God will come through. Jeremiah trusts God for one reason alone: God's character. We can not trust what God says because of what we see or understand about how life works. If we based our trust on those visual cues, we would despair. But when we focus on God's character of grace and faithfulness and then remember what God has said to us, then we can find the focus we need to endure the suffering and pain that comes with obedience and faith. When Jeremiah says, "I say to myself," this reminds us that sometimes we need to grab hold of our emotions, stand ourselves in front of a mirror, and talk our emotions down off the ledge. "The Lord is my portion therefore I will wait for him!" In other words, God is all I need therefore I will wait for him to act on my behalf!
- The next question is, "so what happens when we trust God this way?" Does God hang us out to dry? No, Jeremiah makes it clear: "The Lord is good to those who hope in him, to the one who seeks him; It is good to wait quietly (that is without complaining endlessly and speaking out words of disbelief and despair) for the salvation of the Lord.
- Now here is another key lesson. "It is good for a man (or woman) to bear the yoke (the yoke of faith and obedience) while he is young." In other words, your life will be revolutionized if you get this when you are young and have a whole life ahead of you. Many people who are young will not wait, will not submit and therefore throw off the yoke of faithful obedience to God. Jeremiah challenges us that the sooner we learn and apply this lesson, the better.
- So as we wait and submit to God in our suffering and difficulty, does this mean that God delights in causing us grief? No. "For [God] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the

children of men.” “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? Why should any living man (or woman) complain when punished for his sins?” In other words, it is the sin and rebellion of humanity that has set in motion the consequences of a broken world. We all contribute to the sin of this world and therefore must all endure the consequences of our broken condition. The key is not to rebel against the painful circumstance but to cry out to God and seek him in all things, repenting if necessary for our part in whatever has caused the painful circumstance.

- Jeremiah here refers specifically to being in the pit. The pit was a symbol of being completely helpless in the depths of despair (see Psalm 40). For Jeremiah, this was literally his experience. Yet what did God say to Jeremiah? “You came near when I called you and you said, ‘do not fear.’” The promise of God’s grace and faithful love calls us out of lives of fear and into a secure trust in him.
- Almost immediately Jeremiah returns to plead his case before God because of his enemies and the incredible suffering of the nation. Why did all this happen? “But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous.” The spiritual leadership of the nation rebelled against God and instead of honoring the righteous (like Jeremiah) they’re consistently putting them to death. How prophetic these passages are as one day the Messiah would be put to death at the hands of Israel’s spiritual leadership.
- In Lamentations 5 we listen to Jeremiah’s final plea with God. “We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers like widows...” The return to captivity has devastated what was to be an extended family under God. Rather than being a refuge for the orphans and widows of the world (like Ruth), Israel had rejected her call to be a place of grace and justice for the nations and herself became the orphan and fatherless and the widow.
- What a horrible statement of despair concludes Lamentations: “Rest us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return; renew our days as of old unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.” Where Jeremiah could have confidence in God for his own salvation and deliverance, when he gazed into the rebellion of his people, he is left wondering if their hearts could ever truly change. What we will see is that there would be a people who would be changed from the inside out. It would be a community not determined by ethnicity or religion but by one quality alone: their ability to simply trust God. The new Israel ushered in by the Messiah would not be ethnic descendents of Abraham who share his genes but spiritual descendents who share his faith.