

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Lamentations Overview

(preached Pine Grove 9/6/15; Sunday PM)

Introduction

I found an interesting study that ranked the reasons why people cry or weep...

At #6 was fear.

People cry when they are scared, but it is most common in young children...

Just put John Andrew around anyone in a costume..

#5 was anxiety...

People cry when they are anxious or worried about something in their life...

#4 was sympathy.

People cry when they see the sadness of others around them.

#3 was anger.

I found that a little surprising but according to studies, intense anger often triggers crying.

#2 was happiness...

People cry when they are really happy or filled with joy...

And the #1 reason that people cry is sadness.

They are moved to tears because they feel despair or sorrow or gloom in their own life...

Now, the book of Lamentation that we will look at tonight is book of lament...

Now, we don't use the word lament very often, but it is a word that describes the action of someone almost violently crying...

It would be similar to seeing someone sobbing uncontrollably.

Or crying loudly to the point of where it is quite noticeable...

This isn't the idea of a tear just rolling down your cheek or a big lump in your throat...

This is extreme grief, and the grief in Lamentations is over the fall of the city of Jerusalem..

Jeremiah is dismayed at the destruction of the city that occurred in 586 BC at the hand of the Babylonians..

How do we begin to relate to Jeremiah's grief?

I think it is hard for us to understand since most of us are not tied to a city like Israel was tied to Jerusalem.

Here are a few pictures of Columbia when it was destroyed by General Sherman in 1865..

The city was burned and looted and the people were attacked...

Here is picture taken after the attack..

It was total devastation, and I am sure that South Carolinians were saddened by it...

But I don't know if that even rose to the grief that we will see in Jeremiah...

For Israel, Jerusalem was God's city.

It was the place that Israel went to worship the LORD, to offer their sacrifices, to offer their prayers and their praise to the LORD.

It was the city on the hill that made them look to their God...

It was where the temple was.

Israel felt a connection to the city because the city helped their connection to their God.

Now, in some ways a church building does the same for us...

It is not the temple and God is no more or less present here than He is present anywhere else in the world..

But church buildings often hold that symbolism in our lives as believers...

It is where we go to learn more about the Lord, to see and meet and visit with God's people...

It may be where we were baptized, where we were saved, where the Lord began changing our lives...

Now, today church buildings are changing...

Some churches don't even have buildings.

They lease building from someone else, and there is nothing wrong with that at all...

It is just representative of the fact that people today no longer feel tied to an area...

People move and change jobs, and churches change as well...

The church has never been a building either; the church is the people who go to the building.

But often times, the buildings where churches gather become near and dear to our hearts...

And that was very true of Jerusalem in the hearts of Israel.

And that is why the destruction of Jerusalem caused so much grief for the nation and especially for the prophet Jeremiah, who most likely wrote Lamentations.

The book is quite literally a funeral for the city of Jerusalem...

You see a Hebrew word “ekah” that is translated “how” in our English bibles...

And that word starts three chapters in Lamentations..

The first line of chapter 1 says...

How lonely sits the city

The first line of chapter 2 says...

How the Lord has covered the city in anger...

The first line of chapter 4 says...

How dark the gold of the city has become...

This would be the similar to what you would hear at a funeral...

“Oh, he was such such a good husband...”

Oh, he was a good father..

Oh, he was such a good son...

This idea of “oh, oh, oh...” is what we see in Lamentations...

Oh, the city is so lonely...

Oh, the Lord’s anger was poured out on the city...

And so on and so on...

So, that is really the mood of the book, it is quite literally a funeral service for the city in 5 chapters...

Now, before we look at some of the verses of the book, we also see something very interesting in how these 5 chapters are laid out...

The first thing to notice is that chapter 1 has 22 verses...

Then you can flip and look at chapter 2....

How many verses?

22 verses...

Then chapter 3 has 66 verses...

Then chapter 4 has 22 verses...

And then chapter 5 has 22 verses...

Now, why do we see this?

And you know me already, I am not a believer in Bible codes or anyone who stresses numbers of the Bible..

But what is going on here, and there is a simple explanation...

The Hebrew Alphabet has 22 letters in it...

You can see the letters on the screen here..

And you can also see the first three verses of the chapter 1...

And you can see how each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet...

So, in chapter 1 and chapter 2, you have 22 verse and the first line of each new verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet..

Then comes the monster chapter 3 with 66 verses, and what you probably thinking is right...

Chapter 3 is simply three times the amount of verses.. $22 \times 3 = 66$..

Yet, tit follows the same pattern except 3 verses begin with the first letter...

The next 3 verses begin with the second letter and so on until the end of the chapter...

Then you get to chapter 4 and it goes back to normal, but then something strange happens in chapter 5...

Though it has 22 verses, it does not follow the pattern of ABC...

In fact, there is no pattern at all...

Most have suggested that chapter was meant to reflect the idea that the the structure of the book had collapsed just like the city has collapsed in the end...

In other words, the picture of the book of Lamentations is a mirror of the city of Jerusalem...

You had order for so long, but then chaos and destruction arrived.

So, why would God inspire the book to be written like this?

Well, the technical term is that chapters 1-4 were an acrostic....

Here are examples of acrostics...

Where you simply use the first letter of some words to help you remember something else...

And that is the point...

Having the book arranged by using the alphabet to form the first letter of each line, is would be easier to memorize...

And God wanted the sadness of the destruction of Jerusalem to stick in the minds of His people...

We need the consequences of sin in front of our eyes at all times...

As a reminder of the horror that it brings, and as an encouragement to turn from it...

You ever witnessed the sad consequences of sin in someone else's life and then vowed in your own heart to never let that happen to you?

Well, that's good.

You should do that.

Watch the news; it will keep you running from sin and pursuing Christ...

Every day, you witness the consequences of living a life without the Lord.

Use that as motivation in your own life to stay far away from sin...

God made it easy to memorize Lamentations because he wants the results of sin etched deep in our minds...

But there is another reason to inspire Jeremiah to write this book as an acrostic...

It shows the incredible glory of God...

The perfect knowledge...

To put together the words in an order, yet use that order to teach His people...

We use that beauty in our English translation but when you see that in a Hebrew Bible, it is a work of art...

Consider chapter 3...

Three lines with A, then three lines with B..

You ever have those kids books where they do this with the alphabet?

A is apple...

B is ball...

But where do they always struggle?

With Q and X usually...

Q is normally queen or a Quail .

But then X is worse...

It is always xylophone or X-ray...

Yet, our Lord is perfect and he can inspire the writing of a book of the Bible that is also perfect in truth and in form and structure...

There is one more thing that I need to mention about how the book is put together...

And it is the idea of what is called chiasm....

Here is an example of chiasm is a real simple example...

Matthew 23:12...

And the idea of chiasm is that both ends go together and the middle is the focus of what is being said...

In this example, exalting your self is bad, being humble is the point...

And it similar to the idea of a sandwich...

Bun on top, bun on bottom, but the meat is in the middle...

Now, the book of Lamentations has 5 chapters, which make it perfect for this idea...

Now, let me say this about the idea of chiasm...

Some Bible readers abuse this idea really bad...

Some people see everything as chiasm and that is not helpful at all...

But I do think that since the book of Lamentations is poetry, that the idea of a chiasm is very possible...

Now, here is the outline that we will use for tonight looked at in a different way....

And if you look at the outline like this, you will see that Jerusalem's destruction is not really the focus of the book...

And it is not even the wrath of God poured out on the city as the focus of the book...

But the focus of the book is on Jeremiah's grief...

On his anguish...

On his sadness over what has become of the city...

That would explain why chapter 3 is the longest...

Because it is the focus.

Yet guess what is found in the middle of the chapter 3...

Turn with me to verse 19 of chapter 3...

This is what Jeremiah writes in the midst of his grief...

19

Remember my affliction and my [e]wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.

20

*Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.*

21

*This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.*

22

*The Lord's lovingkindnesses [f]indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.*

23

*They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.*

24

*"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."*

25

*The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,
To the [g]person who seeks Him.*

26

*It is good that he waits silently
For the salvation of the Lord.*

27

It is good for a man that he should bear

The yoke in his youth.

28

*Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid it on him.*

29

*Let him [h]put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.*

30

*Let him give his cheek to [i]the smiter,
Let him be filled with reproach.*

31

For the Lord will not reject forever,

32

*For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.*

33

*For He does not afflict [j]willingly
Or grieve the sons of men.*

34

*To crush under His feet
All the prisoners of the [k]land,*

35

*To [l]deprive a man of justice
In the presence of the Most High,*

36

*To [m]defraud a man in his lawsuit—
Of these things the Lord does not [n]approve.*

37

*Who is [o]there who speaks and it comes to pass,
Unless the Lord has commanded it?*

38

*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
That [p]both good and ill go forth?*

39

*Why should any living [q]mortal, or any man,
Offer complaint [r]in view of his sins?*

40

*Let us examine and probe our ways,
And let us return to the Lord.*

The point of those verses is that God is a God of justice and wrath,...

But He is also a God of compassion and mercy...

And a God of hope and faithfulness to His people...

Well, that is probably the longest introduction of a book that I have done...

But I hope that is helpful to help you understand this book...

Now let's just take a minute to look at some key verses in the book...

Going to back to our outline...

Let's begin in chapter 1 with.....

I. Jerusalem's Ruin (1)

Jeremiah begins chapter 1 but talking about how empty the city has become...

And how she was overtaken by the enemies of God...

But then he offers a reason in verse 8...

***8 Jerusalem sinned greatly,
Therefore she has become an unclean thing.***

Then again in here 9, we read this....

***9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
She [l]did not consider her future.***

The reference to her skirt goes back to idea of Jerusalem as a weeping woman, which Jeremiah talked about in verse 2..

Often times, Jerusalem is talked about like the city is a person...

And the reference that her uncleanness goes to her skirt just means that the city was sinful all over...

Just like a skirt would go to the floor on a woman, all of the city was covered in uncleanness...

But then I love the truth of the second line of verse 9...

She did not consider her future...

That is a perfect picture of what sin is...

It is the inability to see beyond yourself or beyond the moment..

Sin is temporary blindness to anyone else..

It is blindness to see the consequences of it.

Sin blinds you to the holiness of God as well...

When you can't see God, and you can't see who you hurt and you can't look to the days ahead, you sin and you sin and you sin...

A great way to battle sin is to keep tomorrow in focus..

Keep your family in focus.

Keep your loved ones in focus..

And keep the coming judgment of God in focus...

The people of Jerusalem did not consider the future and so they fell deep into sin...

And that is the message of chapter 1, Jerusalem is ruined...

Then chapter 2 is.....

II. God's Wrath (2)

Jeremiah moves to the wrath that God has poured out on the city...

And he talks about the pain that has come to the people of the city...

Look at verses 15....

*15 All who pass along the way
Clap their hands in derision at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem,
“Is this the city of which they said,
‘The perfection of beauty,
A joy to all the earth’?”*

Then look down at the last part of verse 17...

*17 And He has caused the enemy to rejoice over
you;
He has exalted the might of your adversaries.*

One tragic consequence of sin is that it gives all Christians suffer from one sin...

Last week, when the oldest Duggar boy confessed to adultery and other sins....

The entire Christian community suffered...

Rightly or wrongly, that family has become the picture of Christianity in the world...

And so, when one falls, the church suffers...

Now, we should pray for Josh...

We should pray for his family.

And we should pray for his repentance and restoration...

But what a horrible example of Christianity he displayed...

And how badly that reflects on the Lord and His church...

The same was true for Jerusalem and Israel.

This was God's city filled with God's people.

Yet, they are different than the rest of the world...

In fact, they may act worse than the rest of the world..

And that is the price of sin; it doesn't just reflect bad on you..

It reflects bad in the world, and even gives the enemies of God a chance to insult Him even more...

Then we move to chapter 3, which is the longest chapter and we have really talked about it enough already...

It is simply called...

III. Jeremiah's Grief (3)

I do want to point out one thing about chapter 3 that we haven't talked about...

But at the end of chapter 3, Jeremiah says this...

Look at verse 59...

Jeremiah writes this...

***59 O Lord, You have seen my oppression;
Judge my case.***

***60 You have seen all their vengeance,
All their schemes against me.***

Jeremiah is reminded God that he has been attacked as well as God's prophet...

People have come against him.

People have tried to silence him, and even kill him and then look down at verse 64...

***64 You will recompense them, O Lord,
According to the work of their hands.***

***65 You will give them [w]hardness of heart,
Your curse will be on them.***

***66 You will pursue them in anger and destroy them
From under the heavens of the Lord!***

Jeremiah calls down the Lord's judgment on those people...

People often problems with verses like these in the Bible, where God's people ask Him to pour out his wrath on their enemies..

You see this in the book of Psalms...

You even see it in Revelation, where the tribulation martyrs ask God to avenge the spilling of their blood on the earth...

So, are prayers like this ok?

Should we pray for God's wrath to be poured out on unrighteousness?

Absolutely.

We don't pray from a heart that wants personal revenge..

But we should pray from a heart that wants God's name honored and defended in the world...

We should pray from a heart that wants God's enemies defeated in this world...

And that is Jeremiah's point here...

God avenge the people who sought to do me harm,
not because I am special..

But because I am yours and your name is great.

Then the final two chapters area return to God's
wrath and then to Jerusalem's fall once again...

IV. God's Wrath (4)

V. Jerusalem's Ruin (5)

No need to drag you through that again, but let's go
to the very end of Lamentations and we will end
there tonight...

Verse 15....

***15 The joy of our hearts has ceased;
Our dancing has been turned into mourning.
16 The crown has fallen from our head;
Woe to us, for we have sinned!
17 Because of this our heart is faint,
Because of these things our eyes are dim;
18 Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate,
Foxes prowl in it.***

And what is important to see there?

The second part of verse 16...

Woe to us, for we have sinned!

Needless to say, God did not turn his backs on His people...

Though Jerusalem fell and Israel was hauled off in captivity, God brought them back to the land after 70 years..

And I want you to notice, and I know I am speaking to the Sunday night crowd..

But what is always the beginning of a new day in your life?

A fresh start?

It is the admission and confession of sin before the Lord.

Jeremiah admits it here on behalf of the nation, and that is the start of God's compassion falling on the nation again..

How do you get saved?

You repent and you believe upon the Lord.

There is no salvation without repentance...

An acknowledgment and confession of sin is the pathway to salvation and restoration...

That is such an important biblical concept...

We must never forget that even after salvation...

Our lives need to be a rush to repentance every day when we see our sin...

Conclusion

Let me close with this....

Psalm 32 is one of the greatest psalms in the Bible...

Here is what David writes in Psalm 32...

*3 When I kept silent about my sin, my [b]body
wasted away*

Through my [c]groaning all day long.

*4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon
me;*

*My [d]vitality was drained away as with the fever
heat of summer. [e]Selah.*

5 I acknowledged my sin to You,

And my iniquity I did not hide;

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the
Lord";*

And You forgave the [f]guilt of my sin.

David understood it after some pain, but he knew
that silence is not golden when it comes to sin...

You need to repent and confess your sin, and then
when you do, there is relief...

God hears and God forgives..

Though Lamentations is the book of grief, it is also the book of hope...

Hope that is found in the faithfulness of God to hear our cries of repentance and not forsake us or leave us...

But rescue us from His judgment..