

The Greatest Story (Part 30):

Faith & Repentance

Lamentations

Memory Verses: Lamentations 3:40

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Last week we saw the Prophet Jeremiah offer the hope of a New Covenant in the coming Messiah. This week we look at the second book written by Jeremiah; Lamentations. Last week Jeremiah's perspective was from that of a country in danger of being judged. This week Jeremiah's perspective is from that of a country that is in the midst of that judgement. Last week we saw the hope of our sins forgiven and this week we will focus on the punishment of sin and the means of forgiveness through repentance & faith.

The book of Lamentations is an eyewitness account of the destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah being taken into exile. The author laments the punishment which has come upon God's people and the land that they were given. Here we see two things abundantly clear... God must punish sin and his punishment is suffering. Read with me in **Lamentations chapter 1:1-18**.

Here we can see that the sin of the Israelites brought about suffering that was tragic. Notice in **vs.1** how Jerusalem is seen as a female in two different scenarios. Once she was a princess; she was royalty among the nations. But now she is a widow and a slave. A nation who once was the princess daughter of the King of Kings is now like a widow whose husband has vanished in the night. In a sense the nation of Judah had killed God in their hearts and replaced him with idols. Now God has left her as a widow. Is there a more tragic end than to be left a widow by the God who made you a princess?

We can also see in Lamentations 1 that the suffering of Jerusalem was not only tragic but also Just. Look at **vs.8**. Jerusalem sinned grievously and therefore became filthy. Some suffering, as we saw with Job, is to test our faith and make us stronger in our walk with God. This could be considered a righteous suffering. Other suffering is a suffering of discipline brought on because of continuous rebellion. Judah was guilty of not only sin but grievous sin and in God's just retribution he destroyed their city and made them filthy. He caused their physical exterior to match their spiritual interior.

It was a tragic suffering, a just suffering, but also a severe suffering. Look over at **Lamentations chapter 4:1-3,10**. Notice just how bad it had gotten in verse 10. The women were boiling their children to

eat. Is this not one of the most disturbing images in the entire Bible? And it begs a question; why do we have this in the Bible? We've seen the fall of Jerusalem at the end of 2 Kings. We saw it again at the end of 2 Chronicles. We've heard the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both proclaim this day for chapters upon chapters. So what else do we need to learn about this tragedy? Well for one it helps put us in the shoes of the Israelites at the time of the exile, but more importantly it causes us to ask the same type of questions that it caused the Israelites to ask. These are the questions we should be asking ourselves in light of the wrath of God and the punishment for our sins.

Turn over to **Lamentations 5:16-22**. I want you to see two specific questions that are asked here. First, we see just how severe the suffering has become... the crown has fallen for we have sinned. Mount Zion lies desolate. Next we see that the Lord is in control of this suffering. In the midst of his wrath he reigns supreme for all generations. But then we see in **verse 20**. Why, God do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us so many days? After recognizing that we are under the wrath of God for our sinfulness the next questions must be... Are we forsaken? That is a sobering question isn't it? Is there any hope for us or have we been utterly rejected?

Which brings us to the second, more important and eternally significant question; Can we be forgiven? Look at **verse 21**. Restore us to yourself that we may be restored...unless you remain angry with us. In laymen's terms... Lord can we be forgiven? So can we? Can we be forgiven or are we forsaken?

I know there are many people here this morning who would say that, "I have made an absolute mess of my life. I have sinned, and I feel as though that I'm no longer close to God. I can remember times when I felt an intimacy with God. I know that there have been times in my life when there was a closeness, an intimacy, a relationship with God that was vibrant, and that was lively, but because of sin, I no longer feel the same way." There are people in here that are struggling within. There are people in here that are deeply afflicted by sin, and it may not always be an external reality. There are people here this morning that are struggling inwardly with all manner of sin, and that sin is driving us away, and away, and away from the presence of God, and the book of Lamentations comes to us and says, "It doesn't have to be that way. This morning I want you to realize that there is a way to be forgiven instead of forsaken and that way is faith & repentance. **We Are Forgiven Through Faith & Repentance. Faith as a Supernatural Belief In the Work of Christ & Repentance as a Supernatural Desire To Work for Christ.**

So turn with me once more to the most famous portion of **Lamentations; Chapter 3:18-26, 39-40**. And let's see how we can be forgiven through faith and repentance.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

First I want us to see here that... **Forgiveness is Found In a Faith of the New Mercies of God (vs.22-23)**. Notice in **vs.22-23** that we cannot exhaust the mercy of God. Of course we give it our best shot by consistently wandering from him, but the mercy of God is not dependent upon how much we sin, but rather on how much he forgives. **Richard Sibbes** says it this way; "there is far more mercy in Christ than there is sin in us." Let's examine the mercy of God for a second. For every new sin there is a new mercy in Christ. **There is mercy for our general sinful state**. When we initially place our faith in Christ we are forgiven our sins past, present, and future as we are imputed the righteousness of Christ and justified of our sinful state before God. But even after we are converted; **there is mercy for our individual sinful mistakes**. As believers we unfortunately will continue to sin and make mistakes that are outside the will of God for our lives. When that happens we renew our faith by once again seeking the mercy of God and find forgiveness anew. A faith in the mercy of God is a sure way to be forgiven of your sins.

Why does God give us mercy for forgiveness? It's simple; his motivation is his steadfast love that we see in **verse 22**. For God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to be our atoning sacrifice. And now because of that love his mercy is available to all who believe. **Ephesians 1:3,7** tells us that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. It is through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the love of God which sent him that we are blessed with the spiritual blessing of mercy for our sins. So we place our faith in Christ's sacrifice for our salvation and we place our faith in the daily mercies of Christ for our everyday shortcomings. **We are Forgiven Through Faith**.

Secondly I want us to see that... **Forgiveness is Found in Turning To The Lord In Repentance (vs.39-40)**. Scroll down and look at **verses 39-40**. In **vs 39** we recognize that our punishment is just. As we have already concluded... we deserve the suffering for our sin. But one who has placed their faith in the mercies of Christ embrace this reality differently than the world. Instead of chaffing at the discipline of the Lord we learn to humble our selves and submit to his discipline. Instead of being upset at God, blaming others, or becoming bitter we recognize that we deserve God's wrath for we have rebelled against the Holiness of God. We see the enormity of our God and the weight of our sin and say... yeah that makes sense. But here's the thing... only God given faith can give one this revelation. The lost don't have this attitude. The religious don't have this attitude. Only the saved can recognize their

own depravity and be transformed by it. So this leads us to a decision to turn back to God. Look at **verse 40**. Our renewed faith in God leads us to return or turn to him. This is our memory verse for the week and it is powerful. If we look at our lives compared to the Christ... if we examine our ways then we will determine that we are not holy. The only way to be righteous is to return or turn to the Lord and follow him. **There are many who need to turn to God for the first time, there are others who need to return to God again... our journey with God begins and ends with repentance**. You see... a turn to God is not merely mental but practical. We turn to God with our actions. James makes this point throughout his entire book; faith is necessary but faith without works of repentance is dead. If you have faith then your life will be transformed in repentance. And this repentance is not some work you must force yourself to accomplish... the Holy Spirit inside you will help you. Your transformation will not be merely by will but by the Spirit. And so we see.. **We Are Forgiven Through Faith & Repentance. Faith as a Supernatural Belief In the Work of Christ & Repentance as a Supernatural Desire To Work for Christ**.

Application (Resolution, You)

So... Do you recognize the depth of your sinfulness? We have all sinned and fall short of the Glory of God. Just like Judah, we have turned to idols and sinful lifestyles and rebelled against our God. Do you recognize this?

And, do you recognize the penalty for your sins? In Lamentations we see a destroyed Jerusalem, an impoverished people, and starving mothers who boil their children. And as horrible as that image is it is nothing compared to the fate of hell which awaits all who are guilty of sin. Sin utterly destroys and it destroys for all of eternity. You are guilty of sin and you are condemned because of your sin. So the questions remain... are you Forsaken or can you be Forgiven?

Well that all depends upon your faith. Do you understand the mercy of God in Jesus Christ? That though you are a sinner and though you are condemned because of your sin that God has made a way for you to be forgiven of your sins and escape that fate? His mercy is felt in the fact that... He didn't have to make a way. But get this... just as mothers in Jerusalem were boiling their children in pots... God sent his son to Jerusalem to die on a cross. And... if you merely place your faith in this great mercy you can be forgiven of your sins.

But that's not the end... this question is for those who would accept Christ and for those who think that they have been a Christian for many years. Has your faith manifested itself in repentance? If you have not turned to God with your lifestyle you have not trusted in Jesus as your Lord. So perhaps today is the first time that you recognize that a faith in Christ means

a repentant lifestyle of turning to God and living for him. Or perhaps you truly are a Christian but you have just fallen behind a bit. You're in a rut and you need to be revived. I want you to know this this morning.... If you have fallen away from your faith and have sin in your life that you need to repent of – now is the time to return to God. Look again at **Lamentations 3:40** – let us return to God. The bottom line is this... we are all sinners in need of salvation... and **We Are Forgiven Through Faith & Repentance. Faith as a Supernatural Belief In the Work of Christ & Repentance as a Supernatural Desire To Work for Christ.**

Conclusion

So... Jesus is the object of our faith. We place our faith in him for our salvation. Jesus is the means of our repentance. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit, given in salvation that we can live a life of repentance. And so we depend upon Jesus – We can't be forgiven without him, we can't have faith without him, we can't find mercy without him, we can't be reached without him, and we can't be transformed without him.

So... as we transition from this building we keep our eyes on Jesus. Not buildings, not gimmicks, not productions, not budgets... Jesus. We depend on Jesus and Jesus alone... and that's why our vision must be at the forefront. Our last Sunday in this building is merely the continuation of God's moving. And the last thing I want uttered from our church in this building is our statement of dependence upon him and him only. So as we depart today would you say our vision statement with me... **Depending on Christ we will reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely transformed.**