

I Am Weary Let Me Rest  
Lamentations 5:1-22

Intro:

- Os Guinness in his book on suffering titled, *God in the Dark* wrote, "Suffering is the most acute trial that faith can face, and the questions it raises are the sharpest, the most insistent, and the most damaging that faith will meet." His question is most poignant, "Can faith bear the pain and still trust God, suspend judgment and resting in the knowledge that God is there, God is good and God knows best? Or will the pain be so great that only meaning will make it endurable so that reason must be pressed further and further and judgments must be made?"<sup>1</sup>

While we know the reason for the suffering and pain in Lamentations Os Guinness' question is still relevant because the suffering was so horrendous in Israel and because God was silent in response to the lament of the people. The silence of God in our suffering is hard to endure but is God silent or is it that we do not listen well?

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his play, *The Devil and the Good Lord*, portrays a character, Goetz, who illustrates our response when God is silent in our suffering. In the play, Goetz was a butchering soldier-turned-saint but became disillusioned in his faith because of God's silence in his suffering. Eventually he wondered if his faith was real or whether he was simply talking loud to cover God's silence. He finally bursts out: "I prayed, I demanded a sign. I sent a message to heaven, no reply. Heaven ignored my very name. Each minute I wonder what I could BE in the eyes of God. Now I know the answer: nothing. God does not see me, God does not hear me, God does not know me. You see this emptiness over our heads? That is God. You see this gap in the door? It is God. You see that hole in the ground? That is God again. Silence is God. Absence is God. God is the loneliness of man."<sup>2</sup> Although this is only a play, it is a very real and raw response to God's silence in suffering.

The silence of God can leave us in despair. We hear lament in the words of Goetz but he lamented without hope. He lamented as if God had abandoned him. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been going through such suffering and sorrow that it seems God is not there because He is silent? This is a very real experience for us, even as Christians.

God is silent in Lamentations but His silence teaches us how to lament with hope even when God is silent. The horror, pain of suffering in Lamentations is real. It was real despair about the seemingly never ending pain inflicted by the tormentors and the grief that followed. It was real when the grief and sorrow cycled while it seemed God was silent. Yet . . . when we come to Lamentations 5, we are hearing a hope filled prayer in spite of the silence, penetrating the silence.

- Explain the literary uniqueness of Lamentations 5:
  - Lamentations 5 is different from the other four poems in Lamentations. It is not an acrostic. Lamentations 1 & 2 are poems that follow the Hebrew alphabet and each verse has three lines in the stanza. Lamentations 3 is a triple acrostic with three verses beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet and having three lines per verse making it a 66 verse poem. Lamentations 4 follows the Hebrew alphabet acrostic pattern as well but only has two lines per verse. Lamentations 5 is a much simpler poem that is actually a prayer. It has no acrostic and only has one line per verse. But in keeping with the rest of Lamentations, Lamentations 5 does have 22-verses. The book built up to its crescendo in Lamentations 3 and has gradually descended to a prayer of confession in Lamentations 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Guthrie, *Be Still, My Soul: Embracing God's Purpose and Provision in Suffering*, edited by Nancy Guthrie, quoting Os Guinness, "When We Don't Know Why, We Trust God Who Knows Why," 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 39-40.

- The grief has returned for the Poet. However the grief in this poem becomes a prayer. **Lamentations 1, 2 & 3** end with brief prayers. **Lamentations 4** contain no prayer so it seems appropriate that the whole of **Lamentations 5** is a prayer that brings closure to the book.

**Main point:** When we are enduring suffering and sorrow, through prayer God sustains our hope in Christ and grants us rest and restoration in Christ.

I. Suffering leads us to seek God as we lament and repent (vv. 1-18)

II. Suffering leads us to seek God for our rest and renewal (vv. 19-22)

#### **I. Suffering leads us to seek God as we lament and repent (vv. 1-18)**

We have heard the Poet lament the same things in previous poems. The intensity of the Poet began decreasing in **Lamentations 4**. By the time he gets to **vv. 1-18**, he runs through the list of things that have broken his heart one more time but with less intense language. As we have noted in previous poems that grief has a rhythm and it continues to cycle through this poem because it was cycling through the heart and mind of Jeremiah. It was not simply cycling because Jeremiah was weak but because the Spirit of God had put it in the heart of Jeremiah to grieve and lament. It was good that he was grieving. Jeremiah's grief was good grief, and Godly grief.

##### **A. Lamenting the shame of our sin points us toward the hope of our true inheritance in Christ (vv. 1-10)**

The people of Judah were not innocent sufferers and they knew that forsaking their covenant with God caused their suffering. Look at **vv. 7 & 16**. They knew the covenant curses that had come upon them. Yet even in this suffering they still appealed to the covenant Yahweh had made with them as their hope.

- **Verse 1: "Remember, O Lord".** This phrase is a covenant language that refers back to God's covenant with his people when He delivered them from Egyptian bondage, **Exodus 2:24**, "*And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.*" The Poet is leading the people of Israel to appeal to God's covenant love for them.
- **Verses 1-10:** Work through how Israel felt like they lost their inheritance in these verses.
- **Application: Teach how to pray the New Covenant from vv. 1-10 when we are suffering.**
  - **We can identify with how they felt when we sin.** Sin can have this affect on us as we become hindered by it as **Hebrews 12:1-2** says.
  - **However, I want to apply vv. 1-10 in light of the cross and God's silence.**
    - **God is silent in Lamentations but He has not been silent in regard to suffering in light of the person and work of Christ.** Jesus experienced God's silence on the cross so that on resurrection Sunday the Word of God would be heard by all who suffer. There is victory in Christ.
    - So suppose you have been discipling a friend who's spouse has died and it has been 18 months and they are still grieving the loss. (It might be another type of loss that has long term affects: loss of health, job, family issues) You have been reading Lamentations with them teaching them how to pray honest prayers, name the pain and suffering very specifically and even journaling their laments.

Now you come to **Lamentations 5:1-10** and your friend says he/she identifies with the Poets experience that God is silent. How can you show him/her that God has indeed spoken even in **vv. 1-10**? You have to read **Lamentations** in light of the New Covenant, in light of the cross.

Are you able to show them the inheritance Israel thought they lost was redeemed by Christ on the cross and they are the recipients of that blessing.

**Find the gospel texts that correlate with the OT covenant;** Ephesians and Hebrews are rich with connections to this passage. So you pray over verses like these over and over. You meditate on them drawing out the sweet juices of the gospel from each verse.

### **B. Lamenting the consequences of sin helps us press on toward hope in Christ (vv. 11-14)**

Within the Poet's appeal to God through His covenant in **vv. 11-14**, He asks Yahweh to remember the suffering they are enduring. His asking God to pay attention to their suffering is what He has been doing since **Lamentations 1** but this time the Poet asks with resolution and hope.

- **In vv. 11-14, he goes through the list again but with less detail in previous poems.**
- **Application:**
  - **We will all suffer many losses in our lives that remind us of the brokenness in our world.** The shooting in the South Florida high school this week shows the brokenness of our world. The families suffering and grieving because of the death of their children did not cause that shooting. Suffering is no respecter of age or standing in society. It comes to all.
  - Not all suffering we endure is directly due to our sin but all suffering is due to the brokenness of the world that is a result of sin. When we grieve because of what we are enduring we reveal that we realize that things are not as they should be—the world is broken.
  - **These verses teach us that when we lament, we can name the pain and loss and take it to God.** Over a lifetime we will find that there will not be a part of our lives that will not be touched by the brokenness of sin.
  - **Finally vv. 11-14 reminds us that there is a great need for restoration in our lives.** As we name the pain and loss and take it to God we cry out for restoration and long for the return of Christ. We long for Him to come and set all things right and make all things new.

### **C. Lamenting that leads to repenting (vv. 15-18)**

**Verses 15-16** bring the first part of the prayer to a close by mourning the sin that caused all of the destruction. It is a prayer of confession that expresses the loss of joy and the shame that has overwhelmed them due to their sin.

**Verses 15-16** are Adam and Eve mourning the loss of their relationship with God and the Garden of Eden. It is Noah grieving the wickedness of his generation. It is Isaiah grieving the wickedness of the people of Israel and it is most certainly Jeremiah grieving the sin of Judah on the heels of Babylon's destruction of the nation.

**Verses 17-18** confess the brokenness of the people. It is not only the city that is broken but the hearts of the people finally reflect the state of the city of Jerusalem.

- **Application:**
  - Sin should cause us to grieve whether it is our sin or the sin of others.
  - It was our sin that sent Christ, the Holy One of God, the sinless Son of God, to the cross on our behalf. He did not go for His sins but for our sin. Does this grieve you that Christ died for your sin?

### **II. Suffering leads us to seek God for our rest and renewal (vv. 19-22)**

Verses 19-22 begin the last part of the prayer in **Lamentations 5** and they conclude the chapter and the book with a prayer of hope in the good providence of God.

- **Verses 17-18: Verses 17-18 transition to the conclusion of the Poet's prayer.** In v. 17, he says, "*For this . . .*" When he says "*For this*" he is referring to everything he has just confessed in vv. 1-16—the shame and suffering for their sin. Now look in v. 19 . . .

**Verse 19: Resting in Yahweh.** After all that has happened when it seems like everything is out of control, we hear the Poet confess that all is not out of control—God is still on the throne. He confesses with the Psalmists, "*The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*"

The first three Hebrew words in v. 19 are massive: "***But you, Yahweh, reign forever your throne endures to all generations.***" This is not just a confession of the sovereignty of God but also of the mercies of God that are promised in the covenant. Yahweh shows His mercy to those who love him up to a thousand generations.

The Poet sounds like the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:5, "***But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.***" The Poet believes that no matter how bad things can get even when it seems death reigns, the truth is God reigns and He can restore His people and restore His glory. The temple may be destroyed, the temple may have been stripped of everything, the walls torn down and the glory of God has left but that does not mean the promises of God have failed. The fact that God is dealing with His people, disciplining His people, means the word of God is at work. God has a plan.

The Poet's confession is essentially Habakkuk's confession in Habakkuk 3:17-19: "*Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup> GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.*"

- **Verses 20 & 22: Yet it seems like as soon as he makes this confession of faith he then takes it back.** Why does he follow this confession of the sovereignty and trustworthiness of God with a question of doubt? It is because God has been silent in Lamentations.

If we have learned anything from Lamentations it is that even though God is silent we still need to pray honest prayers to God. We should not sugar coat our prayers and let the "halo affect" cause us to sound super spiritual when our hearts are breaking or we have real doubts.

At the time Lamentations was written the people were uncertain what God was going to do in the future. Verse 22 echoes the same concern, ". . . *unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.*" At this point they did not know if God would hear their prayers because the people of Israel has been rebelling against Yahweh for generations.

Yet their hope in v. 21 was that He would hear their prayers and restore them, "*Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old.*" This was their hope and even though God were silent and they were suffering they were going to hope in Him. They would express their confidence in their sovereign God who had covenanted with them and that He would restore them.

Literally they ask God to do for them what they cannot do, help them to repent. When you admit your helplessness you finally have reached the point where you can be saved. It is at this point you truly begin to wait on the powerful working of God to do for you what you cannot do. At this point you begin to see the glory of God revealed as His mighty hand saves.

In v. 21, the Poet asked God to *renew their days as of old*. It is like they were asking God to take them back to Eden. Make it all new again. The Hebrew word *renew* is the same word David used in **Psalm 51** when he asked God to *create in him a clean heart*. They were asking God to make all things new again. What they did not realize was that God was going to do more than they could even ask or think or dream. He was going to come Himself in Christ and reconcile the world to Himself and make all things new. He was going to restore Eden but He was going to make it even better than before.

## Conclusion

**Let me ask you some questions as we close our time in this book and in particular, in this chapter.** The issue of restoration and renewal is one we desperately seek. We crave it. We desire it. We pray for it. It is the hope that drives us. This really is what we want and what we need after we have been through a period of difficult suffering.

Just think back through **Lamentations 5**, who among us has experienced shame, lost your retirement or your family's inheritance, has been an orphan, lost a father or mother, worn out from life and cannot rest, have been hungry, lost your direction in life, perhaps you were raped or molested, have been in prison, lost your joy, lost your position, constantly overlooked, constantly forgotten and yet you have tasted the depth of your sin and corruption and not just for short period of time but for so long that it seems life does not feel like it is worth living? What is it you crave and desire? You desire to be restored. You desire to be made new. We can identify with the people of Lamentations can't we?

**Lamentations** is a book that is like a dark heavy garment of grief we wear when we are grieving. Yet it is a garment that has gold worked into the fabric. As Old Testament scholar Barry Webb says, *"It is a garment for sinners to wear as they make their way, trembling yet hopeful, to the cross of Christ."*<sup>3</sup>

**Resolution for the people in Lamentations was not answered in their time.** The restoration they desired was **NOT** accomplished until Christ came. In Christ, God was silent no more. Jesus was and is the Word of God given for people who were walking in darkness. He is the Light of the world. Jesus is the Restorer, the Redeemer and the One who makes everything eventually come untrue. He comes to make all things new.

**How did He do it?** Well He is the One who came and paid for the sins of His people. He put on the garment of suffering for them, the dark garment of grief for His is the man of sorrows who bore our sins although He never once sinned. He then goes to the cross and pays for our sins. He was dead and buried and rose from the dead on the third day. Now everyone who comes to Him in faith and repentance is adopted into His family. He gives them a new heart and promises to be with them even unto the end of the age.

**At the end of the age Christ will return.** He will come on the clouds and He will come to take His people home with Him. At that point He will fully and finally wipe away every tear and heal every hurt. Every question will be answered by Christ because every answer is found in Christ.

**But until He returns we must walk this road together as a church and we must trust in Him.** We must walk together on this pilgrim's journey to see our Father in Heaven. Remember Lamentations is a communal book of suffering and grief. It reminds us we do not travel this road alone. We must meet together to encourage one another regularly. We must exhort and rebuke and correct one another from the word of God. We must learn to listen to one another and pull together as a community of faith. We must preach the gospel to one another and if we do not know how to do that we must learn.

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<sup>3</sup> Barry Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on The Song of Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*, 81.

**Lamentations reminds us that God is sometimes silent when we are going through grief, sorrow, suffering and pain.**

Yes He has loudly spoken in Christ and we look to His purposes in Christ for our suffering and we can know some of them but we will never know all of what God is doing in our pain and suffering.

**Lamentations teaches us how to grieve with hope.** It teaches us how to cope with grief by taking suffering personally, finding hope in Christ as we face adversity knowing He is with us and does not abandon us.

**Lamentations teaches us to be very specific and name the pain as we pray honest prayers.** We take that very specific hurt and grief to Christ and lay them before His cross knowing we have a Savior who has been tempted and tested in every way but never sinned.

**Finally Lamentations teaches us that God is still in charge.** We know this because when we suffer and we wonder where God is we look at the cross and know we have not been abandoned. Christ's abandonment on the cross means our acceptance with the Father. This was God's plan from the very foundation of the world. So when we cannot trace His hand in our suffering, we must trust His heart and know that He is still in charge.

**The time will come when you have to sit with someone grieving, what will you do?** How will you handle it? Will you know when to be silent and when to speak? When the time is right, will you know when to point them to the gospel and how God has not been a simple observer of suffering and that He is acquainted with grief and suffering.

**Illst: The grief and pain that we find in book of Lamentations and the pain and suffering we experience are weaving a beautiful tapestry.** If you are looking at the back of the tapestry all you see are loose threads and knots going every direction. It is ugly but when you flip it over you see the beautiful image that has been woven into the tapestry. The problem is we often only look at the backside of the tapestry. It takes the eyes of faith see the tapestry from the side God has been working on and when you see that side what you see is that your Father in Heaven has been weaving the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, into your life. The push of the pin and the tug of the threads were painful but what has resulted is a priceless work of art made by the God Himself.