

²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;

²⁶ it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke
while he is young.

²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence,
for the LORD has laid it on him.

²⁹ Let him bury his face in the dust—
there may yet be hope.

³⁰ Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him,
and let him be filled with disgrace.

³¹ For no one is cast off
by the Lord forever.

³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.

³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to anyone.

First World Problems

The Lamentations of the Rich and famous are also known as - First World Problems. First World Problems are the minor inconveniences of a civilized society. They aren't concerned with survival such as finding food or shelter but rather things only Americans could complain about. Such as, "I had too much to eat and now I'm tired. The string on my tea bag fell into the water. I have to turn up the volume on the TV when the dishwasher is running. I can't hear the music while swimming underwater in the pool." If your lament is something someone in a Third world country would be thankful for then it's probably a First World Problem. The Lamentations of the rich and famous don't usually drum up much, if any, sympathy. The complaint department just doesn't care about our so called, "problems."

But when it comes to the book of Lamentations and we realize the serious nature of suffering and that life isn't so easy and we are almost guaranteed to have more to lament later in life. The life of a Christian isn't a joyous celebration where we walk around with a perma-smile plastered to our face. We suffer and struggle. If all we portray is a perfect world with perfect people enjoying the perfect life God has given us - might give the impression of hypocrisy as well as those with real world problems just aren't welcome. We all have problems over which to lament. Last week we spoke about the physical suffering for our faith. This week we learn that we may suffer to the point of death. These problems can be so catastrophic that they lead us to question if God has given up.

Jeremiah's problems were real and he argues against a plastic faith. This isn't the Lamentations of the rich and famous - these are the real world problems of God's people as Jeremiah laments the sin, suffering, and death we've brought upon this first world.

For Jeremiah it all came to a head in 586 BC Babylon came. *2 Kings 25 - "Zedekiah was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. They put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. On the seventh day of the fifth month... the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The whole Babylonian army... broke down the walls around Jerusalem... and carried the people into exile."*

Don't feel too bad for Zedekiah - he was a fool who had no desire to stand up against the godless people and problems of the Southern Kingdom but he had no problem taking on the most powerful nation on earth. God's people suffered for his foolishness. Even Zedekiah suffered for it. The very last thing the king of Judah saw was the death of children. The houses are burned. The temple is burned. The wall around Jerusalem is torn down. The people suffered and Jeremiah wept. If there was ever a time to doubt God's steadfast love and faithfulness - this was it. During this time Jeremiah writes an emotional poem acknowledging the presence of weeping, groaning, and grief. He details the struggle of a God who has rejected his people. There is no attempt to minimize the tragedy of what has happened. There is no attempt to disguise the sorrow and the pain the author feels at seeing the city devastated, the people dying, mothers desperate to feed their babies and despair everywhere. There is no attempt to put on a happy face. There is no attempt to defend God.

Jeremiah laments: *"Deserted lies the city once so full of people! Once great among nations, she is like a widow! Queen among provinces, she is a slave... Her children have gone into exile... The LORD brings her grief because of her many sins." "The enemy laid hands on Jerusalem's treasures; pagan nations entered her temple... The Lord rejected his altar; abandoned his sanctuary. The Lord handed over to the enemy her palace's walls... her prophets no longer find visions from the LORD."* Everything is lost. The promise was tied to the land. Without the land it looks like there is no promise. Their

national strength is gone. Their religious strength is sapped. Their final defense, the city's walls, have fallen. The worst part is that all of this devastation and this punishment is from God, not the result of Babylonian. This isn't just any problem. The Rich and Famous, the powerful have fallen by the hand of God.

This lesson falls during the week of Independence Day. The week we celebrate our freedom we read of Israel losing their freedom. Our problems may not be as great as the destruction of everything we know and love. But we do know what it's like to lose freedom. Many already know and many more of us will know what it's like to lose the ability to do the things we once did. Serious illness, stroke, and age take away the freedom we once took for granted. They strip us of family and give us plenty of reasons to Lament the loss of God's gifts.

Rather than acknowledge the grief, weeping, and groaning we may put on a happy face and pretend all is well with the world. We may even imagine we are immune from such problems and they will never happen to us. If God's People Israel weren't too big to fall, neither are we. If we imagine God is here to make me happy and life will always be joyous when suffering comes along we may gripe, complain, and blame God for all the evils of this world. God want us to Lament. He wants us to Lament the pain and problems, the decaying influence of sin on this world. He wants us to take his word and sin seriously.

Rather than Lament the evils of this age, sin. Like Zedekiah we'd rather take on an even greater enemy - God. Why? I'm a spoiled brat with first world problems who has not learned the patience that comes from suffering. It doesn't take the destruction of a city with friends and family being carted off to make us whine. Instead we complain and lament little things like the sprinkler timer or a chicken that constantly escapes. If God cared enough to carry Israel off into captivity - he could do the same for us. Even if that were the case, even if America were to fall - all would not be lost.

While Lamentations begins and ends on a depressing note, *"unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure."* That's not the center or the focus of this poem. The most important piece of Hebrew poetry is found in the center. Out of the five poems found in Lamentations. The third, the center poem, the peak of this book has 66 verses instead of 22. It's a three fold acrostic, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a,a,a, b,b,b, c,c,c... When something is important you place it in the middle, protect both sides, and emphasize each point. If Jeremiah could, he would have bolded, underlined, italicized, and highlighted these verses.

In all of Jeremiah's laments this is the only passage of confidence. No, suffering does not mean we are forsaken by God. The reason for hope is found in the proclamation about what kind of God the people have and how God deals with them. God is faithful and merciful; therefore hope in him

never ends. God is good and the suffering he sends is good for his people. God is just; the suffering he gives is not unjust.

It doesn't matter if they've lost the land. "Jeremiah says to himself, *"The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."* When the lots were being assigned, when Israel entered the Promised Land, the priests did not receive an allotment of land. Their lot was the Lord. That is something that can't be taken even when everything else is lost. Jeremiah's response was to weep and to wait for the Lord. He would have to wait 70 years before Israel would return. He would have to wait 586 years before Jesus would arrive. Just as Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem so also we see God's heart as Jesus wept over the same city. He not only wept over the effects of the fall - sin and death. He did something about it.

Jesus came to a world reeling after the fall into sin. He took sin and death upon himself. He felt the full effects of separation from God. He struggled and suffered what we deserve. He endured hell on a cross as he was cut off from his Father. We will never have to experience that type of loneliness and pain. While his disciples wept over the destruction of his body, the temple, they waited, overwhelmed at the thought that God had abandoned them and given up on them but when Jesus rose from the dead. He provided peace, hope, and patience to hold on to the promise that the problems of this First World won't be with us in the Second.

God himself is the reason for our hope, and he is the object of our hope. The hope we have is found in the God we have. That doesn't mean we will leave with an overly optimistic view of the world. But instead, God gives us grief and allows us to feel the full effects of our sin. He disciplines those he loves. He provides us with his Lament, this study of sorrow, that we may read when sorrow hits our hearts. When everything fails us - worshiping science will make you feel like an imposter, possessions will own you, health and beauty will betray you but the Lord is still our portion.

Jeremiah says, *"It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust— there may yet be hope..."* We bury our faces in the dust. Not hiding from our sin and problems, but burying our face in the dust of repentance. We fall on our knees and accept the yoke of discipline that God gives.

When we reflect on the past, we recall the blessings and the abundance of God's provision. We also remember the pain, the sorrow and the many heartbreaks that have been endured. When we are tempted to identify with Jeremiah we remember that even in the times of deep sorrow, the Lord has proven Himself to be faithful, and for that reason we can face the future with great hope. It is only by God's abundant mercies in Christ that come to us new every morning that we are redeemed rather than consumed by our sins. Instead of lamenting our miseries, reflect on God's mercy. Look to the future with hope.

Get over your first world problems and rejoice in your second world blessings. Give thanks to God for them every day—for the greater spiritual blessings he gives, and then for the smaller countless blessings he showers on us daily: food, drink, land, cattle, all I need and all I own to support my body and life. But when all fails - Lament the loss, *“For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. ³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. ³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.”*

