

The Journal of Tears

June 18, 2015

I don't think that the majority of us have ever been involved in the place after a calamity of hurricane, earthquake, or enemy's attack. But those who have been involved, like the first responders, testify that it is one of the most painful and devastating experiences any human being can endure. The ravages of war or the consequences of natural disasters are usually beyond belief or description. It is no wonder that some people end up living with deep emotional scars, a.k.a., PTSD.

Not many people can capture the tragic scene in words, because their minds are too numb to articulate their thoughts into words. The weeping prophet Jeremiah was one of those few people who could. He was describing what he was seeing in Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah after the mighty Babylonian army just about ravaged the whole country.

The majority of the Books in the Bible was named after the author or the recipients. But for this Book, it bears its contents – Lamentations. I subtitled it "The Journal of Tears."

Just a side note, as I was preparing this sermon, I wanted to get some insights for this Book from other Bible commentators. Do you know how hard to find any commentary of this Book? Even the most well-known Bible scholars didn't write any commentary of the entire Book.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

Although the Bible never specifies the actual author, but many Bible scholars believe that it was written by Jeremiah due to the writing style because it contains Jeremiah's style Hebrew phrases.

Additionally, the Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT puts a unique comment before the beginning of the Book:

"It came to pass after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem made desolate, Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem."
The Latin Vulgate adds, "He wrote it in bitterness of heart, sighing, and crying."

I think that we are safe to believe that the Book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah.

The date of the event described in this Book is 586 B.C. To average Americans, it means absolutely nothing. But to any nationalistic Israeli, it meant everything, because it was the year that their nation came to non-existence. During that time, Jeremiah wrote down on his journal of tears what he saw and how he felt on the street of the devastated Jerusalem.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

Throughout the five chapters, the weeping prophet tells us, "Sin always has its consequences." Sinners by nature and choice, including all of us, believe that there are ecstasies connected with sinful activities. They cannot see the horrible end result of their sins pass the current pleasures.

Proverbs 9:17 Stolen water is sweet, And bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

Throughout five chapters, the same theme is pretty much repeated again and again to the readers of the Book. Jeremiah doesn't want us to forget that we cannot get away with our sins. But because sinful beings that we are, we still sin against the Lord. I've seen one too many pastor friends falling and walking away from the Savior who died for them. Some of their hearts are so hardened that they are willing to dilute the grace of God into "Anything-is-accepted" of cheap grace.

We need to get this very important lesson into our hearts so that we can sin less, and we will be blessed. But if we don't learn the easy way, the Lord will let us learn it the hard way. It strictly depends on how stubborn we are. Our loving Father in heaven does not enjoy us suffering in our own consequences. He wants to bless us with His everlasting love. It is up to us to honor His wish.

B. CHAPTER 1

Lamentations 1:1 How lonely sits the city That was full of people! How like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave!

What a way to start the journal! As you read this chapter, I am sure that you've noticed Jeremiah's theme. And he adds one penetrating point upon it. Sin's pleasures can be shared with others, but its consequences are endured alone. The Bible gives us a great example of it in Luke 15:

Luke 15:13-15 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

I am sure that this prodigal son was very popular when he had money, but as his money was dwindled down, so were his party animal friends. When he had nothing to eat, there was no one with him.

We will never be more alone than when we suffer the consequences of a lifestyle of disobedience of God's Word.

If we sow sin, even after we confess it and restore our communion with God, we must live with the consequences – the broken trust, the painful memories, the bruised reputation and the fractured hearts. The pain of the reaping always eclipses the pleasure of the sowing.

But our loving God is still with us as we endure our consequences. In fact, He often uses them to restore and redirect and redeem our lives.

Galatians 6:8b but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

C. CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 contains the voice of the Lord that was against His people. The Israelis thought that they could do anything they wanted and they wouldn't be punished from the Lord. They brought in the worthless pagan idols to the Holy Temple and put them next to the Ark of Covenant and worship them. They were not thinking. They didn't realize that our Lord does not play favorites. All who sin suffer its consequences.

This applies to us as well. Just because we serve the Lord in ministries; just because we study His Word at the church services; just because we think that we are following the core doctrines of Christianity, these things do not put us in the corner of protection. Nor will we be spared the consequences of sin.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Lamentations 2:14 The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.

Nothing has changed. Most recently, an Emergent Church leader Tony Campolo has called for full inclusion of gay and lesbian "Christians" into the church. Campolo is a "Progressive Christian" and was a spiritual counselor of the former President Bill Clinton after Monica Lewinsky scandal, so it comes as no surprise that he would go against the clear teaching of Scripture on the sin of homosexuality. Campolo is one of these false and worthless prophets who did not expose the sins of the people and gives them false and misleading words that are not from the Word of God.

D. CHAPTER 3

In this chapter Jeremiah reminds us that we will never come fully clean with our life until we take full responsibility for how we live our life. We are living in the age that no one takes responsibility of their own sins and behaviors. From the politicians in Washington, D.C. to the thugs on the street, it is always someone else's fault, not theirs.

John Burroughs, a contemporary author of Mark Twain once said, "A man can fail many times, but he isn't a failure until he begins to blame somebody else." When consequences come, there is never any reason to blame the Lord. But there is plenty of reason for God to blame us. The road to healing and restoration begins with confession.

Lamentations 3:21-27 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. 22 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" 25 The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. 26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord. 27 It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth.

As Jeremiah stared at the destruction of his homeland, I am sure that he felt completely hopeless. But then he recalled the mercies and compassions of the Lord. Oh, how grateful we are for His mercies that are new every morning!

I love the way that God extends His kindness toward us through His mercies. The psalmist of chapter 103 tells us so accurately.

Psalms 103:10-12 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

E. CHAPTER 4

Lamentations 4:1-2 How the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold become dull! The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street. 2 How the precious

sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands!

We are not supposed to, but people, including us, still put so much emphases on the things we can tangibly see, touch, feel, and count. Because they hold on to their possessions so much that when they lose them, they get devastated.

I am not against having possessions, but I am against allowing ourselves to be possessed by our own possessions. I've seen so many Christians who put too much of their attention into their possessions that they put their Lord in their backseat. I've known one Christian brother who invited his church Men's Bible study group to his home for a Bible study, but told them to park their cars on the street, because he didn't want them to leak their car oil on his long driveway. Something is not right with that kind of mindset.

F. CHAPTER 5

Lamentations 5:15-16 Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning. 16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!

Those who remained in Israel were heartbroken and filled with bitterness of soul. They'd never thought that they'd come to this point. Their hearts were filled with disgrace, their bodies were weary from labor to the Babylonian slave masters.

Finally, their sins had caught up with them, and they were broken. They had learned one of the most painful lessons known to humanity:
There is no greater misery than the misery of living a life of disobedience.

Let's never forget that.