
MATTHEW MCBIRTH • 5 SESSIONS

Lamentations

Wandering Through Sorrow and Prayer



OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

SESSION 1: Sorrow Shared

Opening Considerations:

- ❖ About _____ minutes on spent remembering Jesus' death and agony in worship services.
- ❖ About _____ % of the Psalms are classified as songs of lament.
- ❖ Yet on average _____ % of Western church hymns can be classified as laments.
- ❖ Around _____ % of contemporary Christian music can be called songs of lament.

The unapologetic statement of Lamentations is that we must not avoid sorrow but instead, we must go through sorrow.

THREE LAYERS OF LAMENTATIONS:

1. The first layer Lamentations takes us through is the _____.
 - ❖ Traditionally, the author of Lamentations has been identified as the prophet _____.
 - ❖ Lamentations is part of the Megillot, meaning five scrolls.
 - ❖ Lamentations is read in Jewish synagogue on the month and day remembering the destruction of _____, which was destroyed around _____ BC.
 - ❖ The city was conquered by Babylon by a military tactic called a _____.
 - ❖ In the same way the Babylonian army broke through Jerusalem's wall causing pain and sorrow, Jeremiah invites us to walk through the destroyed city.
2. The second layer Lamentations takes us through is the _____.
 - ❖ The structure of Lamentations is a poetic device called an _____.
 - i. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 contain 22 verses.
 - ❖ Two reasons for this structure:
 - i. In the midst of the chaos, the poetry tries to bring peace and _____.
 - ii. The poet demonstrates the intensity of the pain of the city.
3. The third layer Lamentations takes us through is the _____.
 - ❖ Lamentations is set up as a funeral dirge.
 - ❖ Mourning in the ancient world was an invitation/ritual to bring comfort.
 - ❖ Two ways to offer comfort in the ancient world:
 - i. To _____ the problem causing the pain.
 - ii. To lament and _____ with the person suffering.

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you think the church today should have worship songs of lament?
2. Why do you think it is difficult for some churches to practice lament corporately?
3. What are your expectations as you study the book of Lamentations?
4. What has been your engagement with poetry before doing this series?
5. From your own experiences or from the content, how do you think Lamentations disciples us to become more like Jesus?

SESSION 2: Sorrow Shouted

Lament requires feeling the pain of the suffering before offering words of hope.

1. Hear

- a. ***"How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal."*** Lamentations 1:1
- b. Lady-Jerusalem is described as:
 - ❖ Widow
 - ❖ Plagued by _____ (1:5)
 - ❖ Childless
- c. Verses 8-10 contain the most heart-hurting image of a woman thrown on the ground, attacked, and invaded. What started as voluntary promiscuity has become rape.
- d. This metaphor leaves us with two simultaneous thoughts and feelings:
 - ❖ We see where sinfulness leads to: _____.
 - ❖ We are left with _____ for the city.

2. Look

- a. Lady-Jerusalem calls upon two people to look at her:
 - ❖ Those who _____ (1:12; 1:18).
 - ❖ The _____ (1:9; 1:11; 1:20).
- b. The poetry intensifies the sorrow by giving a general image and then _____ in on the image.
 - ❖ 1:2 – ***"She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks."***
 - ❖ 1:16 – ***"For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears."***
 - ❖ 3:48 – ***"My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people. My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, until the LORD from heaven looks down and sees."***

3. Question

- a. As the sorrow is shouted, we are left with a question: _____?
- b. _____ times in Lamentations, the poem will say there is no one to _____ Jerusalem.
- c. The Scripture demonstrates that when we feel like God is distant and silent, we dare to go to him nonetheless.
 - ❖ Abraham dialogues with God on the destruction of _____ and _____.
 - ❖ _____ dialogues with God when God is angered with the Israelites.
 - ❖ Job cries out to God out of frustration, demanding an answer.

_____ will have its day once _____ has had its day.

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

1. What feelings are engendered in you as you meditate on abandoned Lady-Jerusalem?
2. Have you experienced a time when God felt distant? If so, do you see any overlap of experiences between your experience and Lamentations 1?
3. How has the church disciplined you to approach those moments when God feels distant?
4. Do you think it is okay for us to go to God with our frustrations (like Job) and confusion?
5. What is one thing from this prayer in Lamentations 1 that you can implement in your prayer habits?

SESSION 3: Sorrow Served

The Bible, broadly speaking, has three different types of poems:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Lamentations operates largely within _____.

Chapters 2 & 4 present three reversals that epitomize the experience during and after the destruction of Jerusalem.

1. Reversal of _____.
 - ❖ 2:6: ***"He has broken down his booth like a garden, he has destroyed his tabernacle..."***
 - ❖ 2:9: ***"Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and broken her bars."***
2. Reversal of _____.
 - ❖ 2:7: ***"The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; a clamor was raised in the house of the LORD as on a day of festival."***
3. Reversal of _____.
 - ❖ 4:10: ***"The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of my people."***

The wrath of God causes disorientation in order to reveal that humans have already made the world upside down and have chosen to ignore it. God will not ignore it and instead will shove it into our faces.

Lamentations 2 and 4 help us see that God's _____ dishes out just desserts for the purpose of _____ with God's ways.

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

1. Why can it be hard to talk about God's wrath, even though Scripture doesn't shy away from it?
2. How does knowing the sins of Jerusalem help you understand the three reversals of Lamentations?
3. What is something in your own life that goes against God's way that the Spirit is bringing to your attention?
4. What is one way you can better talk about God's wrath not just as being about judging sin but also about realigning God's people and God's world?

SESSION 4: Sorrow Sighted

Opening Considerations: Structure of Lament

1. Address
2. _____
3. Disorienting Experience
4. _____ who God is
5. Expressing who God will _____

Worldly Understanding of Happiness: (utilize space to draw a diagram and take notes)

Lamentations 3:1-6:

- ❖ ***"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord's wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead."***

Lamentations 3:21-28:

- ❖ ***"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it."***

Biblical Understanding of Happiness: (utilize space to draw a diagram and take notes)

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

1. Which of the steps of lament comes easily to you, and why?
2. Which of the steps of lament makes you uncomfortable, and why?
3. What are ways you (as an individual or as a group) can better incorporate prayers of lament in your prayer rhythm?
4. What is a hard moment in your life where God was faithful that you can recall to mind when you are in future rough seasons?

SESSION 5: Sorrow Answered

Lamentations 5 seems to repeat the main themes developed throughout the book.

- ❖ Reversal
- ❖ World being upside down
- ❖ Hunger and thirst of the people
- ❖ Siege of the city
- ❖ Exile
- ❖ Acknowledgment of sin
- ❖ And the initial question

Lamentations 5:19-22:

- ❖ ***“But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations. Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old— unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure...”***

The QUESTION:

- ❖ The question that was asked at the beginning and is being asked again is: God, do you _____?
- ❖ At no point in Lamentations does God speak.

The ANSWER:

- ❖ The text does not provide an answer to the question, but _____ does.
- ❖ Israel will be returned to Jerusalem _____ year later.
- ❖ More importantly, God will answer this question of sorrow now with a word, but with the coming of the _____ .
- ❖ The solution to _____ is redemptive _____ .
- ❖ Let us therefore let lament have its day – for we know that _____ will get the final say.

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

1. How does recognizing God's actions through history, especially in the sending of Jesus, help us understand his character and care for us?
2. Can you think of a time when walking through sorrow allowed your faith to grow deeper in God?
3. How might God be transforming your view of him or yourself as we see him not as “Santa Claus” but as the incarnate Word of God?
4. In what ways can the modern church better incorporate lament as a part of its worship and community life?
5. How can we support each other in times of sorrow, ensuring that we don't bypass the process of lamentation but rather see it as a pathway to deeper unity with God and each other?

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