

August 30

Lamentations 3-5

This is Brad Mock, High School Pastor at CCC bringing you today's accelerator for August 30th.

Today we read Lamentations 3-5 and we're almost finished with all of the writings of Jeremiah. On the one hand I am very glad to finish with this material because it so sad and tragic. It is a little bit depressing to read day after day of so much trouble, rejection, disaster, and judgment. It is no wonder that as he writes Lamentations 3, Jeremiah is in the grips of a deep depression. He has experienced all kinds of mistreatment, adversity, and rejection. When he prays, it seems that God answers only with more judgment upon his rebellious people. To put it very simply, Jeremiah doesn't believe that he can take much more of this. In reading Jeremiah and Lamentations, we have seen the ultimate destruction of what godlessness and sin will do to a nation and it's not a pretty thing.

One the other hand, I have come to appreciate this faithful prophet far more than ever before. Jeremiah has always been one of my favorite books since I first heard what he went through in obedience to God. I feel like I know him a little more now and there is much about him that attracts me. Jeremiah is a man of great discipline and obedience. He has, at the command of God, done many things that most of us would not have obeyed God in. He has been faithful at enormous personal expense. He has a tenacity that I want for myself and for you. He was labeled unfairly as a traitor to his king and country, but he just hangs on fearlessly and says whatever God tells him, regardless of the consequences. I have learned a great deal from Jeremiah.

I want to begin this morning by calling your attention to the third lament where Jeremiah pulls back the curtain a little and lets us look into his own heart and mind. He is discouraged but not totally dejected. This lament reminded me of some of the Psalms of David we have read not only for its blatant honesty as he prays in effect, "God, I'm hurting badly here," but also for what the prophet says about his depression.

First like David in the Psalms, he is honest enough to talk about it and of course the one with whom he talks is God Himself. Sometimes as I go through the difficulties of this life, I get down, and I'm sure you are human enough for it to happen to you too. Well, Jeremiah was mightily depressed when he wrote this lament (and he had more reason to be depressed than you or I will hopefully ever have). But Jeremiah, like King David, does the right thing with his depression. He takes it straight to the Lord in prayer. He tells God exactly how he feels. He gets it off his chest. "I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea...You came near when I called you, and you said, 'Do not fear.'" That message, "do not fear," recurs over and over and over again in the Bible. Almost whenever a servant of the Lord cries out in discouragement or fear, these words come back from God, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you."

Then, after he had poured out his heart and told God exactly how he felt, Jeremiah's mind turns to what he knows to be true about God from Scripture. Verse 21 of the third lamentation is as important as any in this whole book: "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.'" When Jeremiah is in the pit of despair, he is honest enough to admit it. Then he begins to compare his thinking and his mood by what he knows about God and His ways and his conclusion is therefore: I have hope!!

There is a good example of King David doing precisely this same thing in Psalm 73 and in another Psalm which refers to in the story of David returning to the town of Ziklag only to discover that the town has been attacked. The families of all his men had been taken captive. Everything else being stolen or destroyed, and his men wanted to lynch him because it is all his fault. The scripture said at that point David "encouraged himself in the Lord." That is a great description of what is going on in Lamentations 3!

There is even a hint of an imprecatory Psalm here at the very end of chapter 3. Jeremiah cries out: "O Lord, you have heard what my enemies have said, you know their taunts and their mocking words. "Pay them back, ... O Lord May your curse be on them! Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord."

I am sure you also noted in chapter 4 the bitterness that Jeremiah and the Israelites felt toward the inhabitants of Edom who had assisted the Babylonians during the siege of Jerusalem, and who had gloated over the fate of Judah after the fall of the holy city. Jeremiah warns the Edomites that God will remember their treachery.

If you should wander into a Jewish synagogue in the middle of July, you will probably hear these five poems of Lamentations being read aloud. That happens each year to mark the anniversary of the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C. and to remember the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D. as well.

As our readings in Lamentations and most of the book of Jeremiah have almost ended, I wonder what you will take away from your reading? First I am sure you will take with you a better understanding of the history of Judah in the last years before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah. The prophets in Judah with whom he was contemporary were Habakkuk and Zephaniah, and Daniel and Ezekiel followed very closely after him. The politics of the Near East were in real turmoil throughout Jeremiah's career with the power passing back and forth from Assyria to Egypt to Babylon. The history will stay with you, I hope.

Next I hope you have discovered a profound respect for the weeping prophet who faithfully interceded for his people even though he knew they weren't going to listen to his message and were going to persecute him mercilessly. Jeremiah allowed his

own heart to be broken on behalf of the people he loved so much. For them he prayed and prayed and prayed. When was the last time you and I wept over the sins of others? We need to be more like Jeremiah.

The images of Jeremiah's prophecy are going to stay with me for a very long time. The broken cisterns, the loin cloth, the potter and the clay, the shattered jar, Jeremiah sitting in the temple court with his hands and feet in the wooden stock, the two baskets of figs, the burning scroll and the land deed tucked inside the pottery jar (which by the way is exactly how the Dead Sea scrolls were found, tucked inside jars of pottery).

Perhaps most of all, I'll leave Jeremiah with a greater appreciation of the fact that the Lord is sovereign over the nations and will accomplish his purposes among the nations! It's good to remember that just staying in close proximity to the temple of the Lord is no protection unless our hearts are full of obedience to His will and His word. The image of Johanan and his friends saying, just tell us what God wants and we'll be sure to obey it and then turning right around after Jeremiah spoke God's words and saying, "We don't have to listen to you." That is a powerful image. God's anger burned against them. I do not want to ever stand in their shoes!!

I wish we knew for certain what happened to Jeremiah down there in Egypt. Perhaps the traditions are right and he was martyred for his faith in God. It isn't hard to believe that scenario.

This is Brad Mock ending today's accelerator by saying how thankful I am that Jeremiah and all the Biblical writers wrote down God's word for us to feed upon and grow!