

Lamentations 5: Hope-“Full” Future

Introduction:

It is a blessing to be able to finish our series on the book of Lamentations this evening. We come to the concluding chapter on the book of Lamentations. At this point in time you might be puzzled at what is happening in this book. If you remember, chapters 1 and 2 picture a horrible situation. A broken people and city. Jerusalem the deserted widow. God’s wrath poured out on her. And when we got to chapter 3, we reached the climax of the book in v21-24, “21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: 22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

At that point you would hope that chapters 4 and 5 would get better, but their situation doesn’t. Chapter 4 makes a contrast between the “then and now”. It begins by saying, “How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed! The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street.” (4:1) And for most of the chapter we have a great reversal. It is like a glorious and beautiful painting which has lost all its colour and shape. At the end of chapter 4, Jeremiah notes that their prolong exile won’t last, in God’s justice and sovereignty, God will pour out his redeeming grace and he will bring judgement on the wicked. And so, we are anticipating some future hope. Unfortunately, their situation doesn’t change in chapter 5 as well. We know nothing has changed because of what much of the chapter says. From verse 2-18 we have a description of their ongoing oppressiveness and horrendous situation. Life is still hard. The last verse of the book says, “unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.” (5:22) There seems to be no evidence of God’s acceptance and mercy upon them. They feel like God has rejected them and is very, very angry. And so, we ask the question in light of all these things, is there really hope? Is there hope for sinful people? Is there any chance for reconciliation? Is Lamentations looking forward to a “*Hopeless Future*”. I think the point is, regardless of your situation, there is hope. And I think you would agree that when times are tough you need to be reminded that there is hope. Both in your physical situation as well as your spiritual situation. The reason why I say that, is because of how he prays and what he prays for. We can see the hopefulness in the verses marked by Jeremiah’s call upon the Lord, in verse 1, 19 and 21.

1. *There is hope because **God Remembers (v1-18)***
2. *There is hope because **God Reigns (v19-20)***
3. *There is hope because **God Restores (v21-22)***

Look at verse 1-18 with me first.

1. Jeremiah speaks corporately and prays that God would remember (v1-18) *There is hope because **God Remembers.***

Chapter 5 begins saying, “Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace!”. You see, verse 1 is a powerful plea. It is an intense cry to God. And we know that when he asks God to remember, he isn’t saying that God has forgotten what has happened to them. God knows everything. The word “remember” carries important Old Testament history. Many times, in the Old Testament, the word “remember” is used in relationship to

God's covenant relationship with his people. The first use of "remember" comes out in Genesis 8:1 where it says, "But God remembered Noah". God had brought judgement to the world. They were sinful much like what we have in Lamentations. In Genesis 6:5 we are told that "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Because of their sinfulness v6 says that the Lord "will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land...". That is devastating. But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD, he saved him and his family, and when the whole world was flooded, in the ark God "remembered" Noah. God acted his grace and mercy towards him. In Genesis 9, God establishes a covenant with mankind promising to never destroy them in a worldwide flood again and gives them a sign of the covenant, the rainbow. God says in verses 15-16, "¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

Another example of the God who remembers is in the story of the Golden calf which we looked at briefly a few weeks ago and again there in Deuteronomy 9:27, Moses pleads with God to remember. There are a number of times where people sin, God judges and then God's people plead for him to remember. Asking God to remember is a plea for God to deliver. They are pleading that God would pour out his mercy and grace upon them. It is a cry to God for him to act out who he claims to be. A God steadfast in love. If you remember in Exodus 34:6-7, "'⁶ The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" Asking God to remember is asking him to act. And in this case he wants him to act upon his goodness by delivering them from their "disgrace".

"¹Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
look, and see our disgrace!"

They have hope because they know who God is. He is their God. And he will remember.

Their disgrace is outlined in verses 2-18. There isn't anything really new that we haven't seen in the past 4 chapters. I've wondered why there is so much repetition. I think besides showing us the intensity of the situation, it is rather helpful for us because by providing us with a detailed list of what has happened, their cry to God can be relevant to us. If you ever feel like you have been invaded (v2), abandoned (v3), in economic depression or in want (v4), exhausted, weary and burnt out (v5), if you have unwisely been dependent on someone and been betrayed (v6), if you have been disciplined under the weight of your own sin and those before you (v7), if you have been overturned (v8), if you ever feel desperate or in a situation of desperation (v9), if you are sick or assaulted (10-11), if you ever are dishonoured and rejected (v12), oppressed (v13), or in pain and agony, if you have life sucked out of you and your joy has turned to mourning because of countless of possible reasons (v14-15), if you feel ashamed and all you can do is grieve and feel devastated (v16-18), because that's what we see in verse 2-18, then what you can do is cry out to God. Cry out to him. Lament. Pour your burdens and your worries to him. I think that's why we are

given a detailed list. The whole book of Lamentations gives us a list of every emotion and situation under the sun.

Unlike chapters 1, 2 and 4 which begin by asking “how come and why”, Jeremiah on behalf of the people, begins chapter 5 by crying out to God. Please God help us. Remember your covenant and act upon your very nature. God is able to deliver, God is able to bring peace. God is able to bring wisdom and help in every situation. Cry out to God, cry out to him to remember. The only hope they had was that God had not forgotten their problems and his promises, and just like them you can stake your situation on him to remember. And we know that God understands, and God knows your pain and suffering.

In Hebrews 4: 14-15 it says that, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.” And in Hebrews 2:18, “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Jesus the High Priest lived on this earth. This sinful world. He was perfect yet, he was betrayed by his people, he was beaten, mocked and scorned. He suffered the pain and agony of the crucifixion. He was nailed on the that cross at Golgotha. And most importantly he suffered the full wrath of God in our place. And so, he does understand. And he will act. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” There is perfect rest in Jesus Christ. Even though our situation might not change, we look forward to the new earth and heaven, where there will be perfect rest.

God’s answer to our pain and suffering is twofold. We have a great high priest who understands and can sympathise with us in our struggles right now. He empowers us by the Holy Spirit to push through. And finally, when we meet him again, he will act out his covenant promises. And we will enter paradise, the new heavens and new earth, where our tears of pains will turn to tears of joy. Where our struggles and hardships, will be a light momentary affliction. Where physical death in this world is only a gateway to eternal life in Christ Jesus. The true and perfect rest. So, cry out to him and have hope because **God does Remember.**

2. Jeremiah acknowledges the sovereignty and kingship of God (v19-20) There is hope because **God Reigns.**

When life seems to turn upside down, it can seem like God is not in control. I mean if you read verses 2-18 and think about some of the horrible things that is happening, you can imagine not feeling any hope. But Jeremiah’s response to the circumstances of life is v19, “¹⁹ But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations.”

It is a declaration of God’s sovereignty and kingship. He is the King who Reigns. He is YAHWEH. And Jeremiah glorifies God by saying that He is in control and He reigns over all the kingdoms and enemies. Already in Lamentations 3:37-38, “37 Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most

High that good and bad come?”. The only reason why the kingdom of Babylon and all the other enemies and situations exist, is because God has spoken it to pass. And that means God rules over them. One of the stories in the bible that many children will know, is the story of Daniel. Daniel’s friends go in the fire and God saves them. Daniel goes into a lion’s den and God saves him. The book of Daniel is written in the same backdrop of Lamentations. It is from the perspective of Daniel while he is in the forefront of the exile. And the major theme of the book of Daniel, is that although all the Kings and kingdoms seem like they are all powerful and in control, they do not reign forever. Kings and kingdoms are broken down. And the only Kingdom that will last forever, is the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is eternal and reigns supreme. Every kingdom that arises, no matter how powerful and almighty they may seem will be overthrown. The Kingdom of God on the other hand will rule over all. Revelation 4 speaks of the throne in Heaven. Every king will cast his crown and worship him who lives forever and ever. (4:10-11), “10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.””

And the king who will reign is King Jesus. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of lords. (Rev 19:16). In (Philippians 2:10-11), “10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The question is how does verse 20 fit in the picture.

V20 says, “²⁰ Why do you forget us forever,
why do you forsake us for so many days?”

I think what is happening is that Jeremiah voices the tension between what he knows to be true and what the current situation looks. It is a voice of anticipation. A voice which looks forward to the future. God hasn’t forgotten, nor has he forsaken them. The temporary pain only brings longing. And I think that teaches us something about the pains and struggles that we face. We all face all sorts of difficulties. The pains and sufferings of this world point to the problem of our current life. We live in a world full of sin and the effects of sin. When consequences of sin come about, whether it is our fault or not, it helps direct our eyes to the only place where there can be hope.

Can you imagine if on this earth we couldn’t feel pain at all? Can you imagine cooking dinner for yourself or your family? Maybe you can’t. Can you imagine cutting some chicken, or potatoes or mushrooms and then accidentally cutting off your finger? If you couldn’t feel pain, you wouldn’t know there was something wrong. Last year I accidentally cut a small chunk of skin and meat from my left finger while cooking and I bled so much that I fainted. If I didn’t know I was in pain I wouldn’t know there would be a problem. I would literally bleed to death. But because I could feel the pain on my finger as well as on my head, I knew

I needed help. I knew I needed to cover it up and quickly get medical attention.

The pain and suffering in this world help us see that this world isn't perfect. And it hurts and we might try to find comfort and satisfaction in somewhere that can't provide it.

We know the people of God looked for comfort elsewhere. We looked at that in Chapter 1. They didn't trust in God alone. But at the end of Lamentations 5 they are finally getting it. We can find hope in the God who reigns, in the God who will bring us into his kingdom as co-heirs with Christ, into the kingdom which will never fail and where all the enemies and other superpowers in this world will bow before the feet of Jesus. And so, Jeremiah is looking with anticipation for God to be working. He is waiting for the King to act and reign. There is Hope because **God Reigns**.

And finally, we can have Hope because **God restores**.

3. Jeremiah's final plea is for God to cause them to turn back to himself. (v21-22) There is hope because **God Restores**.

Maybe you weren't convinced that verse 20 is a hopeful voice. We know it is because he follows up his declaration of the Lord's kingship by asking him to restore. And I think this is a very important verse in the whole book. At the core of all their suffering and hardship, is a broken relationship because of sinful humanity. At the very core of what is happening, the exile and brokenness, is the fact that God in his holiness must judge sin. He can't be in a relationship with sinful people. They have not been obedient to him. And so, notice what he asks to be restored, he says, "²¹ Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!

Renew our days as of old—

What Jeremiah prays on behalf of the people is to be restored to God himself. It isn't a restoration for the power and wealth of the past. It is not a restoration of the land. Rather it is a restored relationship. The rough literal translation is, "Cause us to turn to you, O Lord, and we will turn!". Their rebellion and sinfulness have caused them to walk the opposite direction. A direction completely against God. There is a spiritual separation between God and mankind. There is alienation because of sin. There is ongoing sinfulness. And the people of God have yet to turn. And what this text teaches us is that we need God to be working in our hearts to turn. We need God to take the initiative. Only his "decisive turning" can change the situation. Only he can fix it. And notice, when God turns us, when he restores us, we will definitely turn. When God restores us to himself, we will be restored. Jeremiah wants a renewed relationship, just like in the past where God was for them and not against them.

The great thing is, there is hope because God does restore. God does reconcile relationships. Not because we are deserving but purely by his grace and mercy. That is evident on the cross. On the cross Christ became the propitiation for our sins. He absorbed the wrath of God. Our sins were imputed on him. And in exchange, his righteousness became ours. His righteousness was imputed on us. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God". We can have a right relationship with God on the basis of Christ's work on the cross.

A few verses before that, in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gives us the ministry of reconciliation;" There is only hope of a reconciled relationship in Jesus Christ. But we know that isn't the end of the story. Because this reconciled relationship is for those who have repented from their sins and turned away from it and towards Jesus Christ. It is for those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus and submit to his Lordship. The issue is, in our hearts we are totally corrupt. We are totally sinful. We won't and we can't turn to God because we are spiritually blind. And so, what we need is a new heart. We need God to make us spiritually alive. We need to be born again. We need to be regenerated by the spirit. We need God to work decisively. And what Jeremiah is praying for is just that. God please cause your people to turn. Work your sovereign powers in their hearts. If you know Jesus today, then God has done that to you.

Is there any hope for someone who has turned away from God? Is there any hope for someone who has completely rejected God? Yes, God can sovereignly work in their hearts. There is hope for all. That means there is hope for my older brother who hates the church and hates God. There is hope for my sister-in-law who isn't interested in knowing Jesus. There is hope for my dad who idolises money and finds satisfaction in pleasure. There is hope for my best friend whose family used to go to church, who played a big role in my spiritual growth but no longer attends or has any interest in it. There is hope for close Christian friends who now reject the faith and live a life of seeking all the world's temporary pleasures. And there is hope for your friends and family too who maybe for years have rejected God.

Peter Adam who was the principal of Ridley College posted on Facebook this week saying that his brother John came to Christ 4 days before he died. Peter Adam was the first member of his family to be converted and by the time his brother became a Christian he had been one for 50 years.

"I wish I could say that I had prayed for his conversion every day, but so often I had become discouraged and given up. John seemed so uninterested. O that I had prayed every day! O that I had waited on God every day! O that I had begged God every day to convert my beloved brother!"

The challenge for us is, are we lamenting to God? Are we crying out to him to be working a miracle in our friends' hearts? Are we crying out to him to changing our family? Shame on us for giving up hope. I am not sure if you know Joshua Harris but he was the author of "I kissed dating good-bye" and former pastor of Covenant Life Church in Maryland. He influenced many and had a big ministry in his church, through his writings and his work with The Gospel Coalition. This past week he has rejected his Christian faith on Instagram and many brothers and sisters are praying for him to turn. Cause him to turn to you, O Lord, and he will turn.

As we conclude our series on Lamentations, may God be reminding us of his goodness and grace even in the midst of all life's difficulties. There is hope all the time because **God Remembers, God Reigns and God Restores.** He is the God of "Chesed". Keep praying and crying out to Him.