July 18

Happy Monday, everyone!

Today we continue our study of the books of the Bible in order with the Book of Lamentations. So, let me start with a quick question: When’s the last time you read the Book of Lamentations? I thought so. It’s a dour, dark book that is often overlooked. Nonetheless, it contains an important message, so let’s jump in.

Like the book of Jeremiah, which we studied last week, Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah. It was written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC. This was a punishment sent by God for the ongoing sin of the Jewish people. Along with it, the Jewish people were sent into exile away from the Promised Land.

Lamentations is exactly that: a powerful expression of grief and sorrow, in this case, over what has become of the Chosen People, the Temple, and the Promised Land. These are Its opening verses:

“How deserted lies the city,
    once so full of people!
    How like a widow is she,
    who once was great among the nations!
    She who was queen among the provinces
    has now become a slave.
    Bitterly she weeps at night,
    tears are on her cheeks.
    Among all her lovers
    there is no one to comfort her.
    All her friends have betrayed her;
    they have become her enemies” (1:1-2).

Notice the language Jeremiah uses here within the mournful tone of this lament. He alternately describes “The city,” meaning Jerusalem, as a “widow,” a “queen,” and someone with many “lovers.” What is going on here?

Recall that in the book of Jeremiah, God described Himself as a “husband” to His people (3:14). Now, the people, as symbolized by Jerusalem, are a “widow.” In other words, because of their ongoing sin and idolatry, they have experienced separation from God and spiritual death. From a divine point of view, they are widows.
Further, none of her “lovers” provide comfort. The lovers here refer to the many false gods the Jews worshipped and, not surprisingly, are now no comfort in their time of deep distress.

What do we make of this ancient poem of lament today? As we have said before, God chooses intimacy and relationship with us such that he wants to be our “husband,” that is, our intimate spiritual partner. When we turn our backs on Him, we experience separation such that it is like being widowed.

That’s the bad news. Here’s the good news: as we will see, that is never the end of the story with God. He is always waiting for us with open arms and a gladdened heart. God’s character is love, grace, mercy, justice, hope, and redemption. Always. In all circumstances. When we embrace Him, His embrace in return is always full, always complete, and always perfect.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
Greetings, DGCC Family.

“The Lord has rejected his altar
and abandoned his sanctuary.
He has given the walls of her palaces
into the hands of the enemy;
they have raised a shout in the house of the Lord
as on the day of an appointed festival” (2:7).

The great temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish spiritual life. God’s presence and glory dwelt in the temple, and here we read that with its destruction, God has “abandoned” it.

So what is going on here? Is God so capricious that He just up and leaves? Does He not keep His promises? To the contrary. Later on, we read this:

“The Lord has done what He planned.
He has fulfilled His word,
Which He decreed long ago” (2:17).

The words “He decreed long ago” were actually through Moses nine hundred years earlier as the people were getting ready to enter the Promised Land:

“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country…The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies” (Deuteronomy 28:15-16; 25).

God had given the Jewish people everything: personal relationship with Him, a land “flowing with milk and honey,” the ability to exercise dominion over their enemies. And, like any good parent, He told them that despite all this, if you disobey me, “I will take it away.” Because God is always true to His word, that’s exactly what He does. But…there’s more to the story.

Tomorrow: The message of hope.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
July 20

Grace and peace to you this day.

In the midst of great national disaster, the Lord provides a message of hope. The Promised Land is inhabited by ruthless enemies. The king has been taken captive. The people have been chased from the land and sent into exile. The temple, the dwelling place of the Lord, has been destroyed and He has abandoned it. But yet, this is what He says:

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 whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (3:22-26).

Love. Compassion. Faithfulness. Again, these are the essence of God’s character, no matter what our circumstances. And then Jeremiah says a somewhat curious thing: “The Lord is my portion.” What does that mean exactly? The Hebrew word used here for “portion” is cheleq (pronounced kay-lek). A deeper understanding of this word means a “tract” or a “territory.” In other words, Jeremiah is saying that I don’t need the temple or the land. The Lord is my territory, my land, the place where I find comfort and rest. The psalmist said it like this:

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (18:2).

Have you ever thought of the Lord as your “portion?” As the ground where you set your feet? As the cool grass where you lay your head? As the fertile ground where your faith is planted and grows and blossoms? Have you ever thought that we are justified to stand on that holy ground because of the sacrifice made by His Son on the cross?

The Lord calls on us to stand in Him. It is a place where we experience His great love…expressed most beautifully in the sacrifice of our Savior. It is a place where His compassions abound, where hope resides, and where His abiding grace rains upon us. Go ahead and stand there. And be renewed…morning by morning.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
July 21

Greetings, DGCC Family.

The book of Lamentations ends on a sorrowful note, but also with this acknowledgment:

“You, O Lord, reign forever. Your throne endures from generation to generation” (5:19).

Forever. We often think of that concept as only moving forward in time. But a full understanding of it, especially in the divine sense, means backward in time as well. God has always reigned and will always reign. He is not bound by time or space, nor is He bound by human understanding.

And yet, two thousand years ago, at a certain time and at a certain place ordained by Him in the mists of eternity, He humbled Himself and came to His created earth in the form of His Son, to die on the cross and to rise again so that if we trust in that truth, we can spend eternity with our eternal God.

Amen and Amen.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

July 22

Happy Friday, everyone! Here’s your musical devotion for today. Turn up the volume and enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT0HcAr9aeI

IHS,
Pastor Lou