

## **Anna-Marie Valles**

### **A Season of Lament**

Intro:

I think it goes without saying that the past 5 months have been extremely challenging for us as we are battling a Pandemic. If you read my devotion a couple of months ago I stated that I think part of the difficulty was we thought it would be a sprint, SIP for a few weeks and we would be back to normal. As this goes on for months upon months we realize it is more of a cross country race, going through hills and valleys but unable to see the finish line from where we are.

Today I want to give us permission to grieve for what we have lost. To grieve loss of celebrations, moments with family, grieve the normal we have lost, to sing during worship, being able to interact with friends at school or coworkers face to face. We grieve for those who lost their lives, health, jobs, lost wages. I think at times we feel guilty when we grieve. We think I don't have a right to feel sad about "fill in the blank" when I still have a job, my health etc.

Here is the good news- we can be real and vulnerable and bring out grief and sadness to our God. We don't have to pretend or hide.

The reality is grieving makes us uncomfortable. If we are honest we can admit that we tend to go towards sermons or books that make us feel happy etc. When we are in the Valleys we pray that trials will be over soon so that we can go back to the mountaintops or even just the plains.

Society promotes happiness at all cost. Buy this, wear this, pleasure at all cost, this will make you happy. But happiness at all times is not a reality. It's a myth, a façade. I believe God is calling us to be real authentic people.

But as Christians we have an imbalance theology when we always stress triumph rather than lament. We need both to have an accurate view of what God is doing in our lives

We need to know as believers that God is not absent in the pain and sorrows. He is there. There can be purpose, there can be growth and there can be a great intimacy birth between us and God in the pain.

Today we are going to focus on the importance of the lament, to mourn over loss and repent over any sin that is weighing us down.

For some of us we need to repent on how we have looked to other things instead of God to manage our pain during this pandemic.

The book that addresses grief and repentance is Lamentations.

## **The Story**

Lamentations is a book of sorrowful songs or poems. The name implies that the topic is expressing grief over something (to lament). The word lament means a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Jeremiah, also known as the "weeping prophet" writes this after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It was written soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.; he was an eyewitness. He predicted this destruction (as did others), watched it take place, and now in this book he is sadly reflecting on it.

- . Jeremiah pours out his emotions in compassion, and empathy for God's nation, as he watches them inhabit a foreign land.

Lamentations is only five chapters, here is the summary:

- In chapter 1, **Jeremiah mourns for Jerusalem and Judea as it lays in ruin by the raid and destruction of Babylon**, *"How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer!"* (1:1).

Explain (painting the picture of the devastation)

Chapter 1 and chapter 4 have similar themes, they contrast what was lost

Judah's treasures all affected:

- I. The tragic events of the siege and ultimate fall of Jerusalem.
  - A. Chapter four vividly describes the afflictions that have come upon the people of Judah.
    - 1. The youth, the most valuable asset of the nation, lay dead and scattered about like broken bits of pottery.**
    - 2. The little children starved from the lack of bread and milk.**
    - 3. The wealthy, accustomed to the finest food and clothing, were forced to scavenge in the city garbage dumps.**
    - 4. The princes of Judah once had been the picture of health. Now they were nothing but skin and bones. No one could even recognize them in the streets. Better for them had they been thrust through by the enemy sword rather than waste away in the famine.**
    - 5. The once tender-hearted mothers of Judah had resorted to cannibalizing their own offspring.**

## Chapter 2

- **Jeremiah describes the anger of the Lord who brought judgment to the wicked land** (as God had warned), *"In fierce anger*

*He has cut off all the strength of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy..." (2:2-4).*

Expound (painting the picture of God's righteous anger to Israel's sin.

Expound on my sin

- Chapter 3, **Jeremiah expresses his troubled spirit and suffering in gloom.** He too is afflicted, as his homeland has been pillaged,

He talks about being in darkness rather than life, he mentions how grief has even affected him physically , he has aged because of grief.

Expound ( yet in the midst of the darkness of this chapter there is a clump of verses that shouts hope) (We will come back to this)

Chapter 5

**An acknowledgement to God's sovereignty yet encamped in sorrow and lament.** 5: 19-22 ,

Expound: We would like each story to have a happy ending – some stories don't. The book of Lamentations ends with a plea. A plea to restore – a plea to refresh – a plea to renew. The good news is the plea doesn't fall on deaf ears, the plea goes to a God who is full of compassion and mercy.

### **Bridge**

This book highlights two themes, repentance and grief. There are principles in this book that we can apply to our life today.

Let's look at the importance of realizing that our sin has severe consequences.

### **Lamentations is a call to Repentance**

In our current society we rationalize , defend and water down our sin. Our sin is not ok, it grieves the heart of God,

it separates us from him, It keeps us from experiencing more of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Sin drags us down. Instead of downplaying it we need to lament, to repent so that God can forgive us and we can go to the place of healing and forgiveness. our sin repulses the Holiness of God. Our sin fractures relationships, our tongues, our tempers have caused damage to our loved ones. Our addiction keeps us strapped from moving forward. We need to address it, not gloss over it too quickly. We need to address it , confess it and then be free of it! I appreciate that repentance is part of our weekly service. The Psalmist cries out, search me God and see if there is any wickedness in me.

## Secondly -**Lamentations is a call to Grieving**

**Bridge –** . Even though the grief was due to the consequence of sin, grief is not limited to consequences of sin. We grieve over death , loss of relationships, brokenness et.

Many of us have experience a rough year, We have had family member die, we have had job losses, heartache and pain. Because of that, I think this is an important topic to cover.

Grieving is a part of life yet many of us probably struggle with grief. What should grief look like for a believer?

I don't think we should hide it or pretend it's not there.

Many of us adapt the ways of the world when we encounter loss. Think of a child who has lost his pet, a parents reaction might be, Don't be sad, we will buy a new puppy on Saturday. This is teaching the child to "bury the pain, and move on". What about when the child gets older, is in high school and encounters his first break up ? He may be told, she's not worth it, there are plenty of fish in the sea. Again, bury the pain and move on.

I remember a friend of mine who had lost her mother suddenly to death. I got a call in the middle of the night, on the other end I hear this extremely high pitch voice, Guess what ? I am so excited to tell you, mom just went home to heaven, isn't that great news I am so jealous. I drove over there and sure enough, 3 am in the morning and she had worship music loudly playing. I just sat there in silence while she made phone call after phone call sharing the good news. About a month after the funeral I asked her how her grieving process was going and she said, oh I let myself grieve a week and now I am done that's good enough.

We all grieve differently but the point is we need to grieve there is nothing super spiritual about not grieving. I think my friend thought it was.

During Old Testament times, God gave the Jews specific directions regarding grief and mourning. According to the Law, the Jews were allowed to express their grief in some of the same ways as the heathen nations around them - by crying, wailing and wearing sack cloth and ashes. They were forbidden, however, from another practice common in the Middle east - that of cutting themselves. Why was this? I believe it was because the Jews were not supposed to mourn like the heathen, who had no real hope. A cut will leave a scar - God doesn't want us scarred by our losses. He doesn't want us to make a memorial to them. He wants us to mourn and then go on to the future He has planned for us.

Are we pushing down the pain or are we lamenting, mourning so that God can heal our broken hearts ?

**Bridge** :Where do we go from here.

**lastly**

**Lamentations is a Call to Hope**

"The world" does not need Christians telling everyone life is always rosy- it needs us to deal with things the way they are.

Acknowledge the problem and barrier of sin- and confess it in repentance.

Acknowledge the faithfulness of God and rejoice in it.

We can face the pains of life with God or without him. I don't know about you church, but I choose with Him!

Because even when circumstances seem hopeless we are not without Hope.

End with Lamentations 3: 21-24

Yet, this I call to mind and therefor I have hope.

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

There are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, The Lord is my portion, therefore I will wait for him.

Closure- Prayer