

Learning to Lament

A

DANGEROUS

LOVE



Recap

Rahab had a front row seat
to the **end** of her world

Before the spies went to sleep that night,
Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them.
“**I know the Lord has given you this land,**” she
told them. “We are all afraid of you. Everyone
in the land is living in terror. **Joshua 2:8-9**”

Recap

“Crises brings out some of your brain's **worst** tendencies.” Thomas H. Davenport, MIT
(**self preservation**)

“servanthood is ultimately the **outcome** of one who, having first **surrendered** [themselves] to God, is able to give [themselves] sacrificially for God and others.” J. Hampton Keathley
(“**one anothering**”)

Recap

In crisis Rahab recognized what was truly important and acted accordingly. She chose the Jewish God over her own safety and comfort. She chose the **future** rather than the present, the **eternal** rather than the temporary

Legacy

Salmon was the father of Boaz (**whose mother was Rahab**). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse. **Matthew 1:5**

Week 1

Self-preservation is the first law of nature

When comfort and pleasure become the highest goals, we **avoid** anything that threatens these values

Has COVID-19 inadvertently **revealed** the depth of our faith to the world?

And what do you benefit if you **gain** the whole world but **lose** your own soul? **Mark 8:36**

Week 2

Elihu had waited for the others to speak to Job because they were **older** than he. But when he saw that they had no further reply, he spoke out **angrily**. [Jeremiah 32:4-5](#)

Though their conclusion is the same, their arguments are completely different. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar perpetually argue: “Before you began suffering, you must have sinned.” Elihu’s case is different: “**Since you began suffering, you have sinned.**” The three concern themselves with Job’s hidden conduct; Elihu concerns himself with **Job’s present speech**. [Peter Krol](#)

“God neither ‘takes away judgment,’ nor sends suffering merely as a punishment, but acts as the **educator** and teacher of mankind.” [Jewish Encyclopedia](#)

Week 3

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“Crises brings out some of your brain's worst tendencies.” Thomas H. Davenport, MIT
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“servanthood is ultimately the outcome of one who, having first surrendered [themselves] to God, is able to give [themselves] sacrificially for God and others.”
J. Hampton Keathley (“one anothering”)

Where do we find **hope** when we feel hopeless?

“An essential part of the teachings and directives of the great religious and philosophical thinkers the world over has been on **the meaning of pain and suffering.**” **Philosopher Max Scheler**

Background

Jeremiah lived at a time of deep **upheaval** in Jewish history, most significantly the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the exile of the Jewish people to Babylonia.

Much of the Book of Jeremiah is a lengthy tirade against the people for their faithlessness and ominous warnings of the destruction to come if they do not mend their ways.

His prophecies, among the most stark and **pessimistic** in all of biblical literature, were aimed as a rebuke to Jews who had surrendered to idolatry and depravity **MJL**

Background

Jeremiah was probably born between 650 and 640, near the end of the disastrous reign of the cruel apostate, **Manasseh** (687-642). His home town was Anathoth, a short distance northeast of Jerusalem.

“O Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I can’t speak for you! I’m too **young!**” **Jeremiah 1:6**

Background

Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people in Judah and Jerusalem, “For the past **twenty-three years**—from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, until now—the Lord has been giving me his messages. I have faithfully passed them on to you, but you have not listened.

“**Again and again the Lord has sent you his servants, the prophets, but you have not listened** or even paid attention. Each time the message was this: ‘Turn from the evil road you are traveling and from the evil things you are doing.’ **Jeremiah 25:2-5**

Background

The prophet Jeremiah composed funeral songs for Josiah, and to this day choirs still sing these sad songs about his death. These songs of sorrow have become a tradition and are recorded in **The Book of Laments**. 2 Chronicles 35:25

Lamentations Introduction

Jerusalem, once so full of people, is now **deserted**. She who was once great among the nations now sits alone like a widow. Once the queen of all the earth, she is now a slave. **1:1**

She **sobs** through the night;
tears stream down her cheeks. **2a**

LORD, see my **anguish**! My heart is **broken** and my soul **despairs**, for I have rebelled against you. **vs 20**

Your prophets have said so many foolish things, **false to the core**. They did not save you from exile by pointing out your sins. Instead, they painted false pictures, **filling you with false hope**. **Lamentations 2:14**

The **Lament** is vital to navigate suffering because it accepts suffering and compels us to sit with the sufferers rather than providing **false answers**. A Lament at its core is authentic.

The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. **Yet I still dare to hope** when I remember this **Lamentations 3:19-21**

A Deeper Hope

his mercies **begin afresh** each morning vs 23

it is good to **wait quietly** for salvation from the Lord vs 26

Let them **turn the other cheek** to those who strike them and **accept the insults** of their enemies vs 30

for **no one is abandoned** by the lord forever vs 31

if they deprive others of their rights in **defiance** of the Most High, if they twist justice in the courts—
doesn't the Lord see all these things? vs 35-36

Instead, let us **test** and **examine** our ways. vs 40

Lamentations' hope requires something of us

The Bible is filled with this song of sorrow. Over a third of the Psalms are laments. The book of Lamentations weeps over the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus lamented in the final hours of his life. “Laments turn toward God when sorrow tempts you to run from him.” But lament is different than crying because lament is a form of prayer. It is more than just the expression of sorrow or the venting of emotion. Lament talks to God about pain. And it has a unique purpose: trust. It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God. Mark Vroegop

It is one thing to say, “Oh, God!” as a cathartic expression of pain, and another thing to say, earnestly “Oh, God help me in this time of trouble! **You are God and I am not.** Save me!”
The difference is **profound.** **Heath A. Thomas**

Helping People Find Hope When Hope Seems Gone, Brad Brandt

Jeremiah watched the Babylonian army invade his homeland, destroy his country, murder his people, and then haul the survivors away in chains. I don't know how many thousands of people perished, but Jeremiah heard the wailing firsthand. And after doing his own share of wailing, **he wrote something to help his people grieve God's way.**

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They (the laments) force the reader to mourn thoroughly, and that's something we resist. When life is hard, we don't want to face the hard questions as to why it might be hard in the first place. We just want to get on with life, and so we gloss over the situation, or make jokes about it, or put a positive spin on it. **But the book of Lamentations won't let us do that.** By using five individual acrostic poems, Jeremiah forces us to go over the painful story again and again and again and again and again.

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It's to those who feel hopeless, or want to minister to others who feel hopeless, that I have good news. God's Word provides us with the testimony of a man who faced horrendous circumstances, yet experienced hope right in the midst of it all. Furthermore, he wrote a God-inspired book to show others how to find and minister hope in hopeless times.

The Process of Lament

We **acknowledge** our suffering
(avoid avoidance)

We accept the **emotions** that we are experiencing
(embrace our humanity)

We then bring everything to God in **humility**
(embrace the Divine)

Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To, NT Wright

No doubt the usual silly suspects will tell us why God is doing this to us. A punishment? A warning? A sign? These are knee-jerk would-be Christian reactions in a culture which, generations back, embraced rationalism: **everything must have an explanation. But supposing it doesn't?**

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The point of lament, woven thus into the fabric of the biblical tradition, is not just that it's an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. **The mystery of the biblical story is that God also laments.** Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in his world. That's not the picture we get in the Bible.

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It is no part of the Christian vocation, then, to be able to explain what's happening and why. In fact, it is part of the Christian vocation not to be able to explain—and to lament instead. *As the Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell.* And out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope. New wisdom for our leaders?

Where do we find **hope** when we feel hopeless?

A Lament **invites** God into our suffering
and in that invitation we are transformed
by His presence. We find hope

He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. [Isaiah 53:3-5](#)

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