

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Is It Nothing To You...? Lamentations 1:12

The Lamentations of Jeremiah are largely neglected by the Church at large. Even Christians seem unconnected to the mourning poetry of Jeremiah. Each poem (there are five of them) are an expression of grief over the Fall of Jerusalem. The destruction of the city was cataclysmic, and the effect upon the citizens would have been profound. In the days prior to the fall of Berlin before the Russian armies overran the city, there was a depth of despair that was blatantly evident in the citizenry and the corrupt German leadership. Despair hangs like a pall, covering and shrouding everything with its mesmerizing power and effects. Such are the Lamentations of the great weeping prophet of God.

The nation is bereft of spiritual life and leadership (apart from Jeremiah). Nevertheless the prophet is deeply sensitive and allies himself with his suffering people. It grieves him that they reject the Lord. The destruction of the city prompts these lamentations to break forth as a funeral dirge.

The Lamentations are written as eye-witness accounts by Jeremiah (1:13 – 15; 2:6; 4:1 – 12). He has seen probably the actual destruction by the Babylonians of his beloved city, the walls torn down, the Temple desecrated, the homes and palace of the king burned. He has seen the brutality of the Babylonians. He particularly feels sorrow and shame since his people rejected his prophecies that were messages that came directly from the Lord.

It was Joshua who had given advice to the nation at the end of his life that they should be careful to obey and follow the Lord. (Joshua 23:15, 16). This follows in similar vein from the words of Deuteronomy 28, 29. Blessing follows obedience and judgment follows disobedience.

The rejection of Jeremiah's message truly affected the prophet. It was not because he had delivered one or two messages and they had laughed him to scorn. It was rather because he had labored for forty years with no fruit or favorable response. Jeremiah was not the kind of man to say, 'I told you so.' Once the nation had determined their course and God's judgment had come, he still felt the pain and anguish of their demise. They were his people, he was one of them. He is a man compelled by compassion for the continuing rebellion of his people. Their soon coming decision to leave Jerusalem and go to Egypt (against the wishes of Jeremiah) placed a heavy burden upon the prophet. Their rebellion is palpable.

The destruction of Jerusalem is recorded in Scripture in four passages (2 Kings 25; Jer. 39; 52; 2 Chron. 36). These passages focus on the long siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the famine in the city, the abandonment of the city in flight by the king and the army once the siege broke through the walls, the burning of the palace, Temple and city, the looting of the Temple, the execution of the king and other leaders, the subsequent enslavement of Judah and the failure of any foreign intervention to help Judah.

The book of Lamentations is read in Jewish synagogues on the 9th of July/August signifying the date of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. This same date is connected with the destruction by Rome of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jeremiah focuses on God's judgment in the Lamentations. He also provides hope for the compassion of God to come to Jerusalem. The theme of faithfulness and mercy is found in Lamentations (3:22 – 25 – see also 5:19 - 22).

The holiness of God can never be comprised – it must always be vindicated. God will uphold His glory, and the prophets will die defending that glory of God.

The anguished cry of Jeremiah is so expressly poured forth in Jer. 1:12. We see the disdain of the passers-by (*“is it nothing to you all you who pass by?”*). We feel the compelling call to pay attention to the demise of the city (*“look and see”*). We are invited to compare the devastating sorrow that prophet and city feels (*“if there is any sorrow like my sorrow”*). The supplier of judgment and wrath is recognized as coming from the Lord, not from Nebuchadnezzar (*“which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger”*).

The power of these words cannot be overlooked. There is compelling and direct pathos. There is heartfelt invitation. There is somber acknowledgement of the cause of this judgment. Can anyone pass by the ruins of this city and not feel something? Can anyone be devoid of feeling what the prophet feels – anguish of heart?

The answer to this, is how could anyone not feel something? The overwhelming sense of God dealing with His people must drive us to a response. But what will our response be? Will it be one of indifference or blame? Will we accuse or excuse?

I would ask that you consider with me another situation where the judgment of God was poured out. It was at a place called Calvary. It was cold and dark. The destruction of man was at hand, but here steps one who is blameless and perfect, who is willing to offer Himself in our place. Can we ignore such an act of grace and mercy? Here is the Lord Jesus Christ despised and destitute. Here is the violent hatred of man bent on destroying this glorious man. Here is heaven’s Lamb led to the slaughter. Here is darkness and despair. Here is Satan gleeful and sin rampant. What will you say to this?

Jesus says to us, *“is it nothing to you all you who pass by?”* can you walk by this rugged Cross so despised and still despise it and the One bleeding in forsakenness? Is it nothing to us? Can we contemplate Calvary and deal with it so academically or carelessly? Jesus calls to you and me, *“is it nothing to you?”* *“Look and see, He says, is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow with which the Lord has afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger?”*

Jesus asks us to consider Him. Consider what he has done for us. He asks us to consider His sufferings for us. Has anyone anywhere ever suffered like our Lord? The answer is no-one anywhere has ever suffered like Him. It was our sin that caused His anguish.

It is worth noting that it pleased the Father to bruise His Son. It was the Lord’s will that He should be put to death (Isa. 53:4, 10; Acts 2:23). It was God who laid our iniquities upon His Son. It was transcendent justice that demanded such a death, a death that only Christ could die, and die he did. Can we pass by Gethsemane and Calvary and be unmoved?

Jesus asks us to consider His sufferings and sorrows on our behalf, and we must never neglect the consideration of them. We consider Him in the Lord’s Supper. We must consider Him. His death is vicarious and efficacious for us. Do not pass by! Stop and look! See if you can compare this Jesus with any other? You cannot! He is the only One who could pay the price of sin, and so satisfy the justice of God.

God is satisfied with our Lord Jesus Christ. We must look to Him alone as our righteousness. We cannot pass by. We are compelled to make our confession of faith center on the fact the Jesus died for the ungodly, and that God has imputed our sins to Christ, and His righteousness to us. Let us see His sorrow for us. Let us remind ourselves of God’s judgment upon Him for our sakes. Jeremiah would invite us to do the same. In one sense, he too was man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So, look and see!