

Lamentations 5:1-22 Still Sovereign GOOD FRIDAY March 29, 2024

We consider two scenes of the temple being destroyed. Scene 1 is from Lamentations chapter 5, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Scene 2 is from Matthew chapter 27, the destruction of Jesus. He said in John 2:19, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” Jesus was “...*speaking about the temple of His body.*” (John 2:21) Two scenes. Two temples being destroyed.

Why? What do we gain by considering these two scenes of the temple of stones and the temple of the body of Jesus? Before we can appreciate the kindness of God on resurrection morning, we need to appreciate again the severity of God on Good Friday.

There is actually a scene prior to scene 1, that we can briefly mention. Scene zero, or ground zero would be the very first garden in the history of the world. The Sovereign God had created everything, including His holy garden, The Garden of Eden, and Adam and Eve within it. Something terrible happened. Adam was removed from the Garden. Adam who had been created by God, was then ruined and undone by God’s judgment because of sin. But in the sovereignty of God, that was not the end of that story for the garden, or for its inhabitants, because God had made a sovereign promise. The promise was that an offspring of Adam would bruise the head of the serpent.

Now fast-forward to scene 1 when God raised up His holy city Jerusalem, and His covenant people within it, and His holy Temple in Jerusalem. Something terrible happened. God’s own city Zion or Jerusalem was ruined and undone by God’s judgment because of sin. Even God’s own temple was ruined and undone by God’s judgment, because of sin. But in the sovereignty of God, that was not the end of the story for Jerusalem, or for its inhabitants, because God had made a sovereign promise.

Now fast-forward to scene 2, the cross on Good Friday. In the fullness of time, the sovereign God sent His Holy Son to the earthly Jerusalem to carry the load of the sins of God’s people. Jesus was ruined and undone by God’s judgment, because of sin. But in the sovereignty of God, that was not the end of the story for Jesus, or for God’s covenant people, because God had made a sovereign promise.

Let’s understand scene 2. From about 9 o’clock until noon on Good Friday, the hill that we call Calvary was a very busy place. The soldiers had performed violent tasks. The passersby had blasphemed. The chief priests had scoffed. The robbers had reviled Christ. One of the thieves had repented. Jesus had spoken a few short and famous sentences. Each of these events and all of the busy activity is well documented in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Then, God’s Word reports to us that at twelve o’clock noon on Good Friday, something terrible happened. The whole land became dark. This mid-day darkness was not some fast-moving weather front resulting in a thick cloud

covering. No. Cloudy is not the correct word, and cloudy is not a sufficient word. It was dark. Fully dark. Everywhere. Matthew 27, verse 45 of the Word of God reports, *“there was darkness over all the land.”*

Let’s go to scene 1, Lamentations chapter 5, and at the very end of the sermon will we come back to scene 2, the darkness at high noon on Good Friday.

All scholars agree that chapter five is the bleakest chapter in a bleak little book. It fits for a study of Good Friday.

It is a prayer of desperation, after everything else has failed to bring suffering to an end. This is crying out to God.

Our mourning and crying out to God comforts us by reminding us that the Lord our God is still sovereign.

Chapter five is the first time in the book of Lamentations that the chapter is not an acrostic poem. This time the 22 verses do not begin with the 22 successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. When there is no alphabetical order to us, no fancy structure, few words, fewer metaphors, and no frills, we can still cry out to God. After everything else has been attempted, Jeremiah simply came unglued.

1. Remembering requires overcoming our condition. (v. 1-10)

How does the chapter begin? Well, how would you begin? You have tried everything else you can think of, and now you are becoming frazzled and overwhelmed. You want to begin one more prayer to God about your destroyed city. How do you start?

Verse 1, *“Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace!”*

Jeremiah’s last lament begins with a request to God to recall what His people have suffered. Remember and see, O LORD! In verses 2-10, Jeremiah provides us with a tour of the broken city, and what they lost.

Verse 2, they lost homes, in verse 3, they were like orphans and widows, in verse 5, they were weary! In verse 6, in a time of desperation, they made bad alliances with other nations, such as Egypt and Assyria. In verse 7, there was shame, in verse 8, they were enslaved to slaves, without a deliver, and in verse 9, they were in danger. In verse 10, they were exposed to the heat of the sun, and to famine level shortage of food.

Jeremiah has sadly recited their terrible situation. In times like this, how should people of faith overcome? By remembering God is still sovereign.

2. Remembering requires overcoming our own individual suffering. (v. 11-18)

Here Jeremiah considers the impact that suffering has had on certain persons, on individual lives.

Verse 11, in both the city and the towns, there were individual women who were raped. In verse 12, individual leaders were humiliated and elderly persons were mistreated. In verse 13, young men were forced to do work and boys were given heavy burdens to carry. In verse 14, each man had left the city gate, the place

of sitting and giving out justice, advice, or help with legal transactions. And each younger man who earlier had felt artistic enough about life to create music and uplift others with it, now has fallen silent. Each older man was feeling useless. Each young men was feeling joyless. Each leader was not leading. Every singer was not singing. In verse 15, the very joy of each heart was stolen, each dancer was no longer dancing, but instead could be found still and sobbing, desperate.

Verse 16, the nation lost its place of honor among the nations. They were crying out in prayer from a silent and lonely city, literally saying “*woe to us, for we have sinned.*” (v.16) In verse 17, their hearts were sick, and their eyes were dim. In verse 18, wild animals were walking through the city center.

It was the entrance of sin that ruined the city. Jeremiah’s well-loved city of Jerusalem had become a place devoid of music and cheerfulness. No levity or merrymaking could be mustered up anywhere from anyone.

3. Remembering requires overcoming our unanswered questions. (v. 19-22)

When we fix our eyes on the problems, we weaken, and the troubles bring a cloud over our eyes. We start to ask questions that distract us. We need to overcome, and we need to know how to do that. The way to overcome is to remember God is still sovereign. We must raise our eyes to again look to God in faith.

We must not be distracted from coming to God in prayer, when we are in agony. No matter our own sin. No matter how turbulent and complicated the events and our situation. No matter the monstrous size of the grief that we bear, along with our confession of sin there must be a flare sent up from Lamentations 5:19, “*But You, O LORD, reign forever; Your throne endures to all generations.*”

The visiting Babylonian army never posed a threat to the sovereign rule of the sovereign God over His holy city, or over His own people.

God is still sovereign. Jeremiah reminded himself, as he prayed to God, telling God that God was reigning on His throne.

Verse 20 brings our first question to overcome, “*Why do you forget us forever? And the second question follows along the same lines, “why do You forsake us for so many days?”*

In other words, O LORD God of Israel, since you are in control of your capital city, why allow Jerusalem and Your temple to be dismantled?

Here is Jeremiah’s overcoming prayer in verse 21-22, “*Restore us to Yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old - unless You have utterly rejected us, and You remain exceedingly angry with us.*”

The answer that overrides the questions of Lamentations is the victorious answer of the grace of the gospel of Christ. When Jesus asked His disciples whether they wanted to go away from following Jesus, Peter answered on behalf of the disciples, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!”

God has not rejected us! Instead, God has sent His only Son to be rejected for us. Jesus became the sin-bearer in order to be cast aside, paying for our sins.

There is salvation for us in no other way. Acts 4:12, *“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

Is there any hope for us? Yes!

When we look at the destruction of Jesus on the cross, and the burial of the body of Jesus into the tomb, we are looking at a greater destruction than even the destruction of Jerusalem lamented thoroughly in this book. All of our hopes for salvation and acceptance from God are hinged on Jesus, who was then rejected by God, put to death and placed in a tomb! If any of us are to have the hope of salvation, it rested on the destroyed Jesus being restored and renewed unto life. We all need the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead for there to be any hope.

Concluding application:

When you are in pain, don't pray for the removal of pain.

When you are in pain, pray to be made right with God.

Lament points us to God's sovereign grace!

Jeremiah 31:33-36, *“...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

*35 Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day
and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—*

the Lord of hosts is his name:

*36 “If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord,
then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.”*

God is saying He kept His covenant to forgive us our sins, and to remember our sins no more! God is saying that if the sun does not shine ever, if it is permanently dark, then and only then do you know that God ceased to be faithful to His own covenant people. The fact is that on the darkest day, the sun only stopped shining for 3 hours, and then the sun reverted back to its fixed order of shining each day without fail.

Our prayer for God to restore us, is something that only God can do.

The sovereign God is still sovereign. What does God see when He looks at our world?

SI – in Poland at the Auschwitz concentration camp, plaques have been placed on the rubble of the crematoriums. The various plaques each say essentially the same thing, but each is written in a different language. The English plaque reads, “Forever let this place be a cry of despair, a warning to humanity.” The place of Auschwitz serves a crucial educational role. No visitor can avoid the evil that pervades the place, even though the camp has not been used in 80 years.

We could stand in the gas chamber and ask – what was wrong here, what must we remember?

We could stand at Jerusalem and ask – what was wrong here, and what must we remember?

We could stand at the Garden of Eden and ask – what was wrong here, and what must we remember?

We could stand at the cross of Calvary and ask – what must we remember?

We could stand and look at our lives and ask – what must we remember?

Remember that our God is still sovereign.

We can trust that the answers to these questions God has provided through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself, before He died for us, rose again, ascended to heaven, poured out His Spirit, and promised to come again, gave us this promise in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:4, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*”

The same God who is still sovereign, is still loving, still merciful, still faithful to us in His covenant promises.

Out of this present death, will come a resurrection.

This is the conclusion of the Lamentations 5 text for scene 1, so let’s go back once more to scene 2 - high noon at the cross on Good Friday. The sky was dark, remember?

How does scene 1, the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple, relate to scene 2, the darkness of the sky on Good Friday when Jesus was dying? Both scene 1 and scene 2 show us the wrath of God against our sins, poured out on sin.

After the three hours, the narration picked back up with Matthew 27, verse 46, “*And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’*” We then have a return to Matthew’s busy narration of a flurry of events following the end of darkness and the return of light. In the light, we can read what others said, the running to fetch a sponge, the offering to Jesus a drink, and the comments of other persons. In verse 50, Jesus cried out again, and in verse 50 Jesus yielded up His spirit. In verse 51 the curtain of the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, rocks were split. In verse 52, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised to life. In verse 53, the resurrected people came out of the tombs, and in verse 54, the centurion saw the earthquake and what else took place, and

was filled with awe and said, *‘Truly this was the Son of God!’* Verse 55 tells us many women were there looking on from a distance, women who had followed Jesus from Galilee.

A lot of things were narrated by Matthew before the darkness fell.

A lot of things were narrated by Matthew after the darkness lifted, beginning with the ninth hour when Jesus cried out.

Why? Why was the light of the sun withheld from Christ? Because God the Father made Christ to be sin for us, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God! 1 Peter 2:24, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”*

The darkest day in human history is not whatever you are facing.

The darkest day in human history was not when Adam failed in the Garden.

The darkest day in human history was not when Jerusalem’s temple fell.

The darkest day in human history was not the murders at Auschwitz ovens.

The darkest day in human history was Good Friday, and God used it to change everything. Because of Good Friday, our view of darkness and suffering and pain and lamenting was transformed. Paul gives us the new view in Romans 8:18, *“...I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* We lament while we wait for glory. We wait for Christ’s victory to be applied, and we keep looking for God’s good purposes in our pain and in the darkness. Lament teaches us to believe in the darkness that God makes all things new. Lament enables us to point others to the source of hope. We guide people from darkness to light.

Let’s close with the end of the Bible about why there is the conspicuous absence of a temple and the absence of the sun in heaven in Revelation 21:22-23, *“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”*

And revelation 22:5, *“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”*

In our suffering and through our lamenting, we remind ourselves that our Savior God is victorious, and He is filled with mercy, and He is still sovereign.