

Title: Cultivating Confession
Text: Lamentations
Theme: The joy of confession
Series: Lamentations #6
Prop stmtnt: Confession is a gift from God for our wholeness (joy).

Read Text: Lamentations 3.24, 40-41, Matthew 1

This week and next week, I am wrapping up our study of the book of Lamentations with a two-part emphasis of: What are we supposed to do with this now? In other words, how does this book actually make a difference in our lives? My goal this morning is to help you/us see our need to regularly practice a gospel-based confessing of our sins because this kind of confession is a gift from God for our joy. Lamentations speaks to that and I want our study of Lamentations to leave that truth as a lingering taste in your soul. How does this book do that?

I. **Lamentations helps us understand our world and our place in it.** (Big Picture)

Many of you remember 9-11. In order to understand our country now, you need to understand what happened on September 11, 2001. Lamentations helps us understand our Bibles because Lamentations marks a major event in the history of the Jewish nation. The fall of the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the deportation of so many of the people to Babylon was a pivotal moment in the history of the nation. They did not know if they would survive as a nation! This was huge. In order to understand the people of God in the Old Testament and to understand the Old Testament, you need to know about this event.

There are books of the Bible that are influenced by this event, like Daniel, Ezekiel, Habbakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. However, it is not just the Old Testament. When you start to read the New Testament, the first thing you read in the very first gospel is a genealogy. Matthew records that there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen more generations from David to the DEPORTATION and fourteen more generations from the Deportation to Christ. That event was a big deal. And yet, human nature is to forget. This year's anniversary of 9/11 was not as big as the first anniversary. And while the deportation was obviously a huge event in the nation of Judah 2,600 years ago, is it really still that big of a deal? Why would God have this book in his Word>

This week, it dawned on me. The fall of the city of Jerusalem and the exiling of the nation of Judah to Babylon was like the fall of man in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve lived together in the Garden of Eden. They lived with God and enjoyed God and they had it made. However, their sin was the cause of their banishment from the garden and from fellowship (that beautiful unhindered relationship) with God. They lost that! They were sent out of the garden and away from the presence of God. What happened to them was re-enacted by the nation of Judah and they lost their garden, they lost the Temple (the dwelling place of God with his people) and were sent out from the presence of God. (Powerfully described by Ezekiel) So, Lamentations looks back to Genesis 3, but it also looks forward.

600 years later, Christ came to Israel. He came to his own. He was the one that the prophets had promised. The promised One, the Messiah, the Healer, the Redeemer, the ultimate prophet, priest and King came. Moreover, just as the nation had rejected the word of the Lord through his servants the prophets, they rejected the Word made flesh. They rejected the Servant Himself. They rejected the ultimate Prophet. Their rejection was the occasion for Christ to weep over the city of Jerusalem. He knew it was only a matter of a few years when the city of Jerusalem would fall again. This time it was the Romans, and not the Babylonians. And it happened just as Christ said. In 70 A.D. the Roman general Titus destroyed the city, killed most of her people and Israel as a nation ceased to exist for almost 1900 years. Lamentations echoes the loss of Genesis 3 even as it is a preview of an even greater loss yet to come.

These five chapters take us a long way into the depth of loss and they should. Rejecting God's Word is the worst thing that you could do. The consequences are catastrophic. History reminds us of what is true in our own lives. The devastation of Jerusalem is a picture of our lives when we reject God's Word. That brings me to the second point.

II. **Lamentations helps us understand ourselves and what we need to do about it.** (Personal)

The story of our lives begins with God. We were made by God and for God. If we lived in sync with that reality, we would be in our groove. We were made by God in order to enjoy God. God has revealed himself to us as Father because he is not only our source, we are known by him and we know ourselves as we know him. Sin is our rebellion against God. Sin is any attempt that we make to live independent of God. Sin puts us out of sync. Sin puts us out of whack. Our timing is messed up. (Harley Davison motorcycles) We struggle. All of the questions that nag every one of us are evidences of us living out of whack. We try to find meaning and significance without God and it does not work. The human race was designed to function in harmony with God. We were made in his image and that will never change.

This week, I've been reading through Matthew's gospel and I was struck by two things related to this. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his audience not to pray by just repeating the same thing over and over and using empty phrases. He says not to do that because your Father (your Father – relationship, his Father and your Father – fascinating) knows what you need before you ask him. (6.8) When you pray, know that you are not praying to inform God of what you need. He already knows. So, why pray, right? What's the point if he already knows? Why talk to God if he already knows what you want? Let me ask you something. Do you have people in your life who only call you when they want something? It's not that they actually like you or want to spend time with you, they want something from you? Kids can be like that; right? Hey, have you ever thought about just spending time with your dad because he's your dad, not because you're getting something? That's the point that Jesus is making about the Father. He wants you to talk to Him! He wants you to know and talk to your dad, because you won't really know who you are until you know who He is. So, Jesus then says, here's how you do it. "Our Father in heaven..." That's your daddy! But, sin means that we have daddy issues, right?

Let's say that are struggling with who am I, where do I belong and fit in, does anyone love me, who makes the rules, what is right, what am I going to do, what is going to happen to me, why

am I so messed up, what is wrong with me, etc. You know that you are out of whack, you just don't know what to do about it and you conclude that perhaps you are a boy who is trapped in the body of a girl or a girl trapped in the body of a boy. Do you see what is going on? You are right in that you realize that you really do not know who you are. But, while you realize that there is a problem, you have misdiagnosed what it is. Therefore, your attempt to treat the problem only makes things worse. Biologically, physiologically, you are either male or female. Your DNA does not lie. Your DNA is your divine coding; it is your VIN from the Manufacturer telling you who you are. So, let's say that you start cross-dressing and try living as a girl, even though you are a boy. Not only are you in conflict with your Creator, but you are in conflict with yourself. What you are attempting to live as does not match what you are. DNA doesn't lie. If, you then go to point of taking medications, or even gender reassignment surgery, it will not change your DNA. What you have done is elevated the stakes. You have turned your body against itself. Instead of finally finding peace, and finding your groove, you become deeply pained to realize that all that you went through has only made things worse.

Dr. Paul McHugh, professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine put it this way. "Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men. All (including Bruce Jenner) become feminized men or masculinized women, counterfeits or impersonators of the sex with which they 'identify.' In that lies their problematic future." Sweden has been very culturally accepting and supportive those identifying as being transgendered. Therefore, what am I am about to tell you cannot be blamed on the culture. In Sweden, "*10-15 years after surgical reassignment, the suicide rate of those who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery rose to 20 times that of comparable peers.*"¹ Sex-reassignment surgery is radical. It is truly amazing to see how far people will go in an effort to numb their pain, escape their pain, and stuff their questions and feelings of loss.

Most people do not drink themselves to death because they really like alcohol that much. Most people do not love crack or meth. They hate it. They hate what it does to them but choose it because what it does seems better than life without it. Lamentations is lamenting the result of trying to live in rebellion to God. It is a sad, lonely, terrible place. Lamentations not only helps us understand ourselves (as rebels who are messed up), it points us to what we ought to do about it. Now, think back with me to one of the points that Dave made last week. We tend to use God as a means to help us change our circumstances instead of surrendering ourselves to him in order to change us. We think the problem is our circumstances, when God knows that the problem is us. In fact, it is easier for our circumstances to change than for us to change. That is the point that Jesus makes in Matthew 9.

A man who was paralyzed what brought to Jesus in order for Jesus to heal him. When Jesus saw their faith, (which I take to be the faith of the men who carried the guy and the guy himself), Jesus said, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." There were some scribes who were witnessing this and they thought that Jesus had just committed blasphemy because only God has the authority to forgive sin, which of course, they were right. They did not know that Jesus was God. However, Jesus knew they were thinking about this, so he says, "What's easier? Forgiving sin, or making someone who is paralyzed walk again? The easier thing is changing someone's

¹ <https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/sex-reassignment-doesnt-work-here-the-evidence>

health and circumstances. The harder thing is restoring them as a person by actually forgiving their sin.

Most of us would settle to be healed of our paralysis rather than deal with our sin. But, Jesus won't let us get away with that. He loves us too much to let us settle for being healthy and wealthy and lost, broken and damned. What Jesus says here elevates the issue of being forgiven to the highest level, above any physical need you may have.

How can someone be made whole? How can a sinner be forgiven? How can we know our Father? How can we come home? How can we find our groove? How can we who are out of sync with God come into relationship with him? Or, for those of you who are followers of Christ, how do you live more and more in harmony with God? How do you get more and more into your groove and feel at home with God? Here is another example of how helpful Lamentations is. Lamentations models for us the importance of confession.

Here is what I so earnestly want to impress upon you. How you become a follower of Christ establishes a pattern for how you grow as a follower of Christ. Conversion has two parts. 1) I repent of my sin; that is, I turn away from it, I renounce it, I leave it, and 2) I believe in, follow and surrender my life to Christ. I believe that he lived a perfect life in my place and therefore died as a perfect sacrifice in my place that paid in full all of the debt of every sin I have ever committed and will commit. As my Savior and Lord, I trust his salvation and surrender to his Lordship and authority over my life. I am his. Repentance and faith = Conversion. Another term that describes our salvation is justification. Justification means that God has declared me righteous because I have been credited with the righteousness of Christ. He was credited with my sin and I am credited with his righteousness.

That is my position. That is my standing. That is my identity. Now, growing as a follower of Christ means that I take what happened to me at that point in time when I became a follower of Christ and I live in view of that. Look at Colossians 3.1-11, 12-17 (explain). What does it mean to "put to death?" What does it mean to "put off?" It means to repent. Just as I repented of my sin and trusted in Christ in order to become a follower of Christ, I grow as a follower of Christ by living a life of repentance and belief. I continue to confess my sin, grieve my sin and repent of my sin, not in order to be a believer, but to grow as a believer. This is what believer's do! Lamentations helps us cultivate confession. I am convinced that the reason why some of you struggle so long with the same sin over and over and over and never seem to make any progress, is because, while you get angry at yourself for your sin, and in the moment make promises never to do it again, you have never really cultivated confession as a regular part of your daily life.

I said this earlier. Lamentations is like holding our breath under water. In Lamentations, we learn what it is like to look at the reality of our sin, feel the consequences of our sin and mourn over it. Christ is way too important and way too smart to let you get away with behaviorism. Know what I mean? We do not respond to our sin by saying, "Alright, I'll take my licks. I'll pay the price. Tell me the punishment. Let's get this over with and go one, ok?" You can do that at school, at work perhaps in the military, but not with God. He will not settle for anything less than your entire heart because you won't live as you could live, unless you are wholly devoted to him.

I want us to avoid two extremes: 1), Think that we have to pay for our sin and that confession is self-punishment. And 2), Minimize our sin. Most of us do not take the confession of our sin seriously. When we pray, “God forgive me if I did anything bad today, amen.” We are not taking our sin seriously. I’m guessing that some of you don’t even pray that. What we need to do as followers of Christ and members of this church is learn to practice confession so that we will treasure the gospel more, love Jesus more, and look more like Jesus. Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. Jesus is worth your holiness.

Now, the way the gospel is often presented is belief without repentance. Repentance carries very little weight in our churches. It is as if we are embarrassed about it because it might offend someone or cause someone to be uncomfortable. So, it tends to get ignored, therefore, I think that one of the reasons why you can’t tell much of a difference between people who claim to be Christians and the world is that many who claim to be have never repented of their sin. Salvation is being saved FROM our sin and saved TO God. Repentance is part of the gospel.

Cultivating confession in my life is a wonderful means of grace that helps me treasure the gospel. How do we do it?

1. Take time to be still before God so that you can ask him to search your heart.
 - a. Psalm 139.23-24

Ask God to bring to your mind anything and everything that you have done that has not been dealt with in the right way. As you think of things you have done, note them.

Write out a lament, describe what sin has done to you and how that has affected people who love you...

2. Make a list of unresolved issues for which you are responsible.
3. Confess these to God as sin and ask for his forgiveness.
4. Make a plan to change. As part of that plan, read and memorize specific passages, learn and sing specific songs, retrieve and listen to specific sermons that address the issues you are working on. Share that with a brother or sister, small group, etc. Let your church be your church.