

“What Sayeth You? Jeremiah: From Lament to Praise”

Scripture: Jeremiah 20:7-13

Graphics: prophets, enemies, lament, praising

Big Truth: The prophets of the Old Testament were instructed by God, sometimes begrudgingly, to speak God’s truth to His chosen people. They were not always received well and received persecution. Yet, they spoke truth and called the people back to faithful worship and action. Their call was for repentance, rejection of idol worship, love for God, and return to worship of the One True God, Yahweh. In our lives, we are called back to true faith and action, worship and prayer, healing and wholeness during every season of our lives, even the times of lament.

Focus Phrase: **Committing your whole life to God will turn lamenting into praising, despite how you feel.**

1. Introduction

A. PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)

B. L. Gregory Jones said this in a Christian Century article: “Our dominant cultural and medical approaches to suffering and death are characterized by complaint and optimism. People tend to be optimistic that any illness or wound can be treated and cured. If for some reason that does not seem possible, we shift into a mode of complaint — complaint about the pain being endured, complaint that medical technology has not progressed rapidly enough, complaint that we are not devoting enough resources to saving the lives of those we care about. ... In *Practicing Our Faith*, Amy Plantinga Pauw notes that the Christian practice of dying well should be shaped not by complaint and optimism, but by lament and hope. (L. Gregory Jones, Dean of Duke University Divinity School, “Shaped by Lament and Hope,” *The Christian Century*, April 14, 1999. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-12/shaped-lament-and-hope?reload=1640876795925>. Retrieved December 30, 2021.)

C. Lament - which Oxford Dictionary defines as *a passionate expression of grief or sorrow* - is different than complaint in that lament is a gut-level sorrow, where complaint is more about not getting what we want.

D. Hope - which the Apostle Paul tells us is something unseen that God gives us based on his promises of love and faith and everlasting life - is different than optimism, which we can create in our minds as we envision ourselves free from whatever stress or pain we have. Hope leads to deep joy and praise.

E. I agree with L. Gregory Jones that we don’t lament well. That wasn’t the case back in the centuries before the birth of Jesus, in the culture and lives of the Israelites. They knew that lament was an important process to express ones deepest desires and suffering to God, in community with others.

F. In fact, there’s one whole BOOK of the bible dedicated to lament, which, if you just sit down and read Lamentations, will give you some perspective, for sure. Sometimes, we just need some perspective, amen?

- G. As we turn to today's encounter with yet another prophet in the Old Testament, what we see is a prophet who, because he was called by God to say really hard things to the Israelites, he then became the focus of ridicule and mockery.
- H. Today's message in this What Sayeth You? series comes from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is known as the **Weeping Prophet**. That's mostly because throughout his life, he had a tender heart for God and for those around him. His life was marked by not only persecution, like all prophets, but by lament - this passionate expression of grief and sorrow - for the people of God who were not following God's commands to be faithful.
- I. If you're placing our prophets on a timeline, Jeremiah was alive in the 600s BC, so 800 years after Moses and over 100 years after Hosea, which were the first two prophets we encountered.
- J. Hosea said we must repent of our sin and receive healing. We ALL need healing in many ways. That comes when we turn our hearts to God alone.
- K. Moses said that your identity should be primarily in God. He has freed us from sin, so that we can live faithful lives to Him alone. Freedom leads to fidelity to God.
- L. Today, we ask, "What Sayeth you, Jeremiah?" By the time we're done we'll hear him say this: **Committing your whole life to God will turn lamenting into praising, despite how you feel.**
- M. Today's scripture is less about what God said to Jeremiah for the people, and more about Jeremiah's response to God's challenging call on - and circumstances of - his life as a prophet.
- N. Let's open our bibles to Jeremiah chapter 20, starting in verse 7.

2. Scripture

- A. **READ Jeremiah 20:7-13**
- B. See, what starts as a lament ends with praise. We'll get to the reason for that in a minute, but the question is, **why is Jeremiah so sorrowful and grieved** at the beginning of this section.
- C. Well, it doesn't take too long to look just a little bit up the page to see the REASON for Jeremiah's lament. Jeremiah just got done rebuking the people of God and one of the chief priests in the temple was pretty mad. (That's not good!)
- D. In chapter 19, Jeremiah prophesied against the temple and the Israelites and the chief priest. In 19:15, this is what he said, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words."

- E. OUCH! In response, a guy named Pashhur, the chief priest, had Jeremiah beaten and put in the stockade for the night. But when Pashhur released Jeremiah from prison, Jeremiah KEPT GOING with this furious prophecy from God against Pashhur, who, Jeremiah said, God actually renamed “Terror-all-around”! How about THAT for a nickname!
- F. Needless to say, Jeremiah, was persona non grata, which led to the lament starting in verse 7.
- G. He started with some rebuke toward God - “You have enticed me and I’ve been enticed...you overpowered me and you prevailed.” You can just see Jeremiah giving God the stink-eye and shaking his fist at God.
- H. He went on to say that he was “a laughingstock...everyone mocks me.” Jeremiah felt alone and persecuted, simply because he was doing what God asked of him.
- I. He said, rather exasperatedly, I think, “Whenever I speak, I have to shout, ‘Violence and destruction!’ God’s word to the people has become for me a reproach and derision.” Every word he said was rebuke and venom towards the people and the priests, contempt and mockery towards them. Not fun!
- J. Yet in vs. 9, Jeremiah had to acknowledge that when he wanted to quit, because of all the persecution and gut-wrenching mockery, he couldn’t! Why? Because in verse 9, he admitted that when he tried to stop speaking God’s words to the people, it was like a burning fire in him that couldn’t be contained. He was weary of trying to keep his mouth shut, so he MUST speak.
- K. And not only was he getting blowback from those he was rebuking, but from his close friends too! They were looking for him to stumble so they could rebuke him too, taking revenge on Jeremiah. This guy’s in an impossible spot!
- L. BUT! BUT! (I’m so thankful for that word in scripture. Especially here...) “BUT the Lord is with me like a dread warrior.” Wow! Despite all the persecution and even anger at God, **God was with Jeremiah.**
- M. Can I be honest for a second? Recently, I got pretty mad at God. Yep. It wasn’t pretty. One question I pray-shouted (that’s a thing, I guess) was, “Where are you, God?” (except it was a lot louder and angrier than that) As my little temper tantrum was ending, I heard the most gentle and loving still small voice say, “I’m right here.” That was it. “I’m right here.” Man, did I feel small in that moment. Yet, I also felt confidence rise up in my to face the challenges in the path.
- N. Jeremiah just got done stating everything that was wrong and pray-shouting at God, BUT then he KNEW that God was with him like a dread warrior.

- O. Charlotte Lawrence wrote this, “Jeremiah indicates God as his dread champion (Hebrew word “ariyts”), meaning awe-inspiring, terror-striking, awesome, terrifying, ruthless, mighty, warrior that is feared or dreaded by His enemies.”
- P. Jeremiah is like the bear cub standing before a hungry lion, only to have the lion run suddenly away. The bear cub thinks he’s pretty tough, until you zoom out and realize that standing right behind the bear cub is momma bear, twice the size of the lion, with teeth bared and claws out.
- Q. “BUT God is with me like a dread warrior!” And that warrior will, Jeremiah proclaimed, cause persecutors to stumble, shame them, make them fail, be dishonored and they will be defeated. The dread warrior would do what Jeremiah was powerless to do, apart from God’s presence with him.
- R. In verse 12, Jeremiah began to pray...O Lord, you test the righteous (Jeremiah being one of them), you see heart and mind...all I want is justice for what I’ve done.
- S. This reminds me of Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” This is a humble and humbling prayer that should be on the lips of every believer...because this prayer leads to transformation and healing and deeper levels of faith and commitment to Christ.
- T. Then Jeremiah said this statement of faith, “...for to you I have committed my cause.” Jeremiah reminded himself and God of the commitment he made to the WHOLE cause of God - that God would provide and care for his people. As we learned last week, he reminded God that He would make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a treasured possession! And, like the Israelites to Moses, Jeremiah said, “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do!”
- U. Then, quickly, and without any fanfare or drama or a worship team or instruments or even screen (can you imagine?), Jeremiah started to spontaneously praise the Lord!
- V. Let’s read this together in an attitude of praise, “Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.”
- W. After all the lamenting for the circumstances in his life - which didn’t go away when he praised God, by the way - Jeremiah turned to singing and praise for the Lord, who was with him like a dread warrior as he committed his life fully to God’s will.
- X. Committing your whole life to God will turn lamenting into praising, despite how you feel.**

3. Application

- A. SO...What Sayeth You, Jeremiah? What do you have to tell us?

- B. Let's get one thing foundational clear: every single one of us has, is, and will go through times in our lives when we are sad, angry, unsure, grieving, persecuted, and feel like what we've done for the Lord is in vain. Maybe you've made the commitment to be in worship as a family every Sunday and that has cost you. Maybe you've agreed to serve as a ministry leader, and that has cost you. Maybe you have spent time in a Sunday School class or small group, and that time could've been spent in some other way. Possibly, you're called to witness to someone in your life and the sheer thought of that causes anxiety, not to mention the fallout if you do open your mouth to speak the name of Jesus.
- C. We ALL have reason or reasons to lament. There's nothing wrong with lamenting - of passionately expressing grief or sorrow over the circumstances of our lives. Many times, when we acknowledge our lament and turn to God with that lament, we'd be way farther along in a healing process, as opposed to burying our laments and pretending like we're fine.
- D. Jeremiah showed his lament. The author of Lamentations showed lament. Jesus himself, multiple times in the gospels, showed us what lament is all about. He wept over Lazarus. He wept over Jerusalem. He lamented his role in God's plan of salvation in the Garden of Gethsemane. He lamented the weak faith of the disciples and the crowds. **Jesus lamented.**
- E. But the one thing that Jeremiah and Jesus did, that you and I are called to do in our lament is this: **even in your lament, remember that God is with you.**
- i. Jeremiah was CONFIDENT that God was with him as a dread warrior.
 - ii. Jesus was CONFIDENT that the Father had everything under control and his plan was for Jesus to yield to the will of the Father.
 - iii. Let me read Jeremiah 20:11 again: "But the Lord is with me like a terrifying warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten." The phrases **will** and **will not** are absolutes. They're not maybe or perhaps. They're bold expressions of confidence in God.
 - iv. When you are in a season of lament, make a bold expression of your confidence that God is at work...that he is your dread warrior to defeat the sin in your life, that he will turn around the places of pain...but most importantly that he will be WITH you. Period. God is with you.
- F. Then, like Jeremiah, **quickly move from lament into praise** BECAUSE of your bold expression of confidence in God's presence.
- i. You won't feel like it, probably. Or maybe it'll rise up in you like a flood that can't be held back by the levee of your heart.

- ii. 1 Chronicles 16:34 says, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Giving thanks is a form of praise.
- iii. Psalm 89:1, “I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.”
- iv. If you can’t muster the words of praise in the midst of your lament, then let scripture speak for you. Let the Holy Spirit speak for you. But speak! Sing! Praise God for his presence in your life, despite how you FEEL about Him or your life or your circumstance.
- v. And do that as quickly as you can, because God is always worthy of our praise...and he waits patiently for us to turn from lament to praise.
- vi. In fact, as you put all your weight behind this shift from lament to praise - committing your whole life to God - then the momentum carries the day. Your **heart** comes with you to praise. Your **mind** comes with you to sing. Your **eyes and your hands** raise up to give glory to the One who is YOUR dread warrior - a champion of all your foes and anything that tries to defeat you, especially the evil one who wants to kill and destroy.

G. Committing your whole life to God will turn lamenting into praising, despite how you feel.

4. Conclusion

- A. What Sayeth You, Jeremiah?
- B. Jeremiah's word for us today is this: in your time of struggle and suffering, God is with you. Because you have committed your whole life to Him, He will always be with you as your dread warrior. And he will move you from lament to praise, even while you’re still lamenting.
- C. The rest of Jeremiah 20 is pretty harsh...maybe you’ll want to read that later today. Needless to say, Jeremiah didn’t stop being the Weeping Prophet. Jeremiah simply got to a place where being a tender-hearted and sharp-tongued prophet for God was more important than who he felt, who came against him, or who he offended for God.
- D. In your lament, boldly express your faith in God’s presence and then move quickly to praise, for even the smallest voice in your heart that reminds you, “I am right here.”
- E. What Sayeth YOU?
- F. Let’s pray...