

Read Lamentations 1

She weeps bitterly in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; she has none to comfort her among all her lovers. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Lam 1:2

Is there anything worse than the soap opera that makes up the lives of teenagers? My youth group growing up had 50 kids in it, and one of the worst things that could happen was when a boy and girl started dating from the group. As was the usual custom, they would break up soon after and then everyone had to pick a side of which friend they liked and which one they were mad at. It was completely ridiculous that one day two people could be friends and then next day, they just had anger towards one another. Not the best example in the church for lost teenagers.

It's amazing how the things we once loved become the source of our greatest disappointment, just like a boyfriend or girlfriend we thought we couldn't live without. Before Christ we did what we wanted, when we wanted. But now that we know who He is, it changes our lives. And those choices that were made so easily before have become our enemies. Those who lived for alcohol and eventually made the turn away from it, find it to be one of the hardest choices to leave behind. Sin all seems great until we realize the price that was paid on a cross to overcome sin. **You know that your sin never gives you satisfaction, so why do you go back to it? It entices like a lover, but afterwards beats you up. Going back to the things that defined us before Christ will never give us the satisfaction that Satan promises it will. You need to make a clear and conscious effort to leave the old you behind. Just as Jerusalem realized, all their old pals were gone when the day came to pay for their sin. Jesus died to make you a new creation, not re-creation of the old.**

Read Lamentations 2

Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish *visions*; and they have not exposed your iniquity so as to restore you from captivity, Lam 2:14

I was watching a church service on TV one Sunday morning as I got ready for church. I always enjoyed hearing the music while I started my day, and one particular morning I got to hear the pastor preach. He was held in high regard as a preacher of the Word, and was talking about relationships. He said that in a church their size, several thousand strong, there were probably some people who were unmarried but living together in the congregation. He said that wasn't "the best idea", but never called it sin and didn't develop the point at all. I'm sure there were some there that day that found themselves in that situation, but because the pastor didn't really emphasize the problem with it, the people didn't either.

Talking about sin is not fun. It brings up old hurts, regrets and reminders of our failures. But as Christians, we need to be prepared to confront our sin at any moment. In Lamentations, we learn part of the failure of the people came from the men of God they trusted. These prophets were responsible to point out sin in the lives of the people, but not only would they not tell them the truth about their sin, but they would lie to make the

people feel better! **How would you react today if your pastor told you that he can see sin in your life? Would you be embarrassed? Would you prefer he just lie and say nothing? The proper response would be thankful. When a pastor shows a believer his/her sin, the purpose is to help you get over your sin. These prophets probably felt they could keep everyone happy if they were told how great they were. The problem was, their lives weren't great, and we need to be prepared to examine our own lives for sin, and to listen to the admonitions of those around us. Will you be quiet for a few moments today and ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas of sin that are remaining in your life? Will you ask Him to prepare you for the moment a pastor or friend shows you your sin? There are few acts more loving than that.**

Read Lamentations 3

They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. Lam 3:23

I have struggled with my weight ever since college. I went to Basic Training for the National Guard during my freshman year and got into the best shape of my life. Of course after getting home, I could never work out to that same level and I began to gain weight. Eventually I tried a method called "The Weighdown" which is more emphasizing how much you eat over what you eat. So I really just tried to moderate my portions, but I remember one day that I ate a lot of junk all through the day. My wife told me that the weighdown book says to put a day like that behind you and start over the next day. What a relief that was to me that I hadn't totally blown everything in a day.

We've all had days like this, and apparently the great prophet Jeremiah was no different. He had moments that he felt completely cut off from God, and the first half of Lamentations 3 is pretty depressing. But then we see so much hope in the second half, that I could hardly pick which verse was my favorite. I love verse 21 where he recalls the God he serves and he has hope. But verse 23 is even better to me, because it reminds us of the lesson that God built into the days. The sun goes down and the moon comes up and the day is over and done. Then the sun rises again on a new day. It's the same with our sin. **Did you fail in your efforts to resist and leave sin behind yesterday? Well, today is a new day! You can seek the Holy Spirit to give you reminders when you begin facing temptation. Ask Him to remind you of the failure and disappointment you felt in your day before. You can be a new person. God doesn't hold onto the past...people do. If you're willing to repent and move forward, the Lord is waiting on you. Nothing you can do will diminish His love for you. So lay out the failures of your yesterday to Him, and embrace the new day He has given you today and serve Him in it!**

Read Lamentations 4

The precious sons of Zion, weighed against fine gold, how they are regarded as earthen jars, the work of a potter's hands! Lam 4:2

The president of my seminary was probably not the typical seminary president. He actually taught a class every semester, and loved to tell jokes. While I always had a good time in his class, it's one of the serious things that he said that I have never forgotten. Dr.

Mike said that when he graduated seminary, he wrote down the names of 15 of his friends who graduated with him, so he could remember to pray for them often. All these years later, 9 of the 15 were no longer in ministry, and he said that all 9 were out of the ministry due to sexual sin or misconduct.

The precious sons of Zion here are the Jewish priests. They were weighed against fine gold, indicating their purity and service for the Lord. But they lost sight of an important characteristic of God, just as Dr. Mike's friends did: God's holiness. Because God is holy He cannot just look the other way or dismiss our sin. He gives us warnings and reminders to make opposite choices when we are tempted or have fallen into sin, but sometimes we ignore Him, hoping for the merciful God. But God will do whatever it takes to make His people holy. In the case of the priests, He was willing to strip them of their duties and honor and start over completely to bring holiness back to the forefront of His people. **Are you living in light of the holiness of God? You may not be an Old Testament priest or a New Testament pastor, but we are all priests according to the book of Hebrews. We all approach God and serve Him as individuals. Are you serving Him, or serving yourself? Are you living differently in Christ or the same as you always were?**

Read Lamentations 5

Why do You forget us forever? Why do You forsake us so long? Lam 5:20

My wife and I have tried a variety of punishments with our children. During the Thanksgiving holiday, my middle daughter lost her mind and her manners. As a result, we sat her in a room by herself for 20 minutes where she couldn't play with her cousins. Our hope was that she would have time to think about her actions and how much she didn't like missing out on play time. I know I'm an old softy and around 15 minutes I was considering letting her out early for good behavior, but she started asking if she could come out now. I didn't want her to think she could just ask her way out of punishments, so I had to leave her in for the final five minutes.

This is a rough verse for me to read, because Israel went through a lot as God worked on their hearts. I'm sure that just like Kaitlyn thought I had forgotten her in that room, Israel thought God had forgotten them. Their hope was that they would get to see their mistake and move on, but God's judgment on the people lasted 70 years before some of the people were allowed to return to Jerusalem. I'm sure that felt like forever, but it wasn't just about recognizing what they did wrong. God had to level a punishment that would be a sufficient and future reminder to not stray away in the same manor. When I tell my children to stop doing something, but offer no discipline, they don't always listen. But when discipline is added, I suddenly have their attention. **Do you feel like God has disciplined you long enough for your sin? You might evaluate whether God is disciplining you, or if Satan is just keeping a guilt trip on you. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit, and He will let you know. If you're going through the consequences of your sin, write it down to remind yourself how it felt to be specifically disciplined by the Lord and how you plan to avoid those actions in the future. He'll keep the discipline on as long as He thinks is necessary to get your full attention. A spanking is short and gets our attention only until the pain subsides. God works much more**

patiently and His desire is that the punishment will lead us away from sin. It may not be fun, but it is one of the greatest proofs that God loves us and wants to see great things in our lives.