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October 3, 2010

Great Is Your Faithfulness
Lamentations 3:19-26

Do you remember where you were the morning of ***April 19th 1995?***
I was at Princeton, studying in our apartment when a neighbor called to say that he thought something terrible was happening in Oklahoma and I should turn on the television.

When I did it was Channel 9—not NYC but—Oklahoma City’s channel 9 being streamed into New York stations directly—showing the Murrah building on fire, collapsing, and reports of a bombing, possibly terrorist in nature, in my beloved home state, the city of my birth.

I called Jim because his Dad worked in a law office by the building, and of course he couldn’t get through to him. I called siblings because I couldn’t reach my parents—they were at the capitol, Dad lobbying for education. Soon the whole world started to panic, then grieve for those who were lost.

It was worse on ***September 11, 2001.***

I was in Tulsa at a friend’s house with my little ones when we got the call to turn on the TV, and then the phone calls from family starting flowing because my sister Sharla lived in Manhattan and worked at a hospital just down the street from ground zero.

Of course we couldn’t reach her.

My friend Laura knew people who worked in the towers.

The world went into a state of shock, then lament.

Lamentations is a ***book of grief***, for a people who watched the destruction of their holiest place, Jerusalem, and their holiest site of worship, The Temple, by a wicked king and the barbarian Babylonians. These barbarians not only destroyed their city, their temple and many of their people, they took the rest as slaves into exile, and the book of Lamentation mourns this great tragedy.

Lamentations means what it sounds like—***to lament***.

To express sorrow. It comes from a Hebrew word for funeral dirge, and it is indeed fit for such an occasion.

These are some of the most sorrowful words in all the Bible.

Some say that the ***prophet Jeremiah*** penned all these words for the people but many scholars say that several could have brought these words together from all the Israelites, a people in mourning.

The stanzas of the poetic book are arranged according to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, indicating it was a book to be read in public.

It is much like opening people's thoughts at a funeral.

This is a –holds-barred book about a people's grief.

And its very ***presence in our Bible*** says something important.

God's people do lament.

At times we experience profound, heart-breaking, soul-searing grief that threatens our very existence.

Tragedies like the OKC bombing or 9/11, other disasters in the world, plus the disasters in our own lives, at times threaten to disable us, and we need the space and time to grieve and lament.

Should you sit down and read all of Lamentations ***you might be shocked*** to see the depth of anger, despair, bargaining and sadness experienced by the writer and God's people.

You might be shocked....Until you realize that you too have walked in those shoes.

Until you are honest about your own anger, despair, bargaining and sadness in your own grief.

In a way Lamentations is a ***handbook for grief***.

It's especially good for those who haven't attended very many funerals, who don't know that when you go to enough of them you start to experience your OWN grief at each one, not just the loss of the person you are there to remember.

It's a book that reminds us that funerals are for everyone, because either you've just experienced, are experiencing or will be experiencing some sort of grief in life.

Lamentations affirms that ***grief is ok***.

And how gut-wrenching grief works.

It hits you at any moment in time, and it comes out in so many different ways—despair, anger, bargains with God, denial, and maybe a mixture of everything all at once.

We live in a society that avoids and denies death.

We live in a religious culture that often suggests that if you have enough faith you will be able to avoid or deny suffering.

We, in this century, need the book of Lamentations more than ever before.

I like how William Willimon describes Lamentations. He says,

*“Lamentations is the part of the Bible that **teaches** us how to grieve, how to be **angry** with God when we need to be, how to **weep** when tears are necessary.”*

Knowing **how to grieve**, having **permission** to grieve is important, **Why?**

Because it is a universal experience. We have been and will all be there.

Because it can be a growing experience.

In the process of grief, we can be driven into the arms of God, into a place of hope because we have nothing and no one else to turn to.

But perhaps most importantly, grieving is so important because **God is in it.**

Our living God knows the pain of a suffering and dying **Son.**

Our God knows the sorrow of **wayward children** (not that any of us are those wayward children.....)

Our God knows the heartache of a **world in chaos**, filled with terror, disaster, sin, and sickness.

And Our God is **right in the midst** of all the grief, all the sorrow, all the lament.

What is God doing there, in the midst of the suffering and sorrow?

Well, that’s the eternal question every heart asked by every heart at one time or another....

What are you doing God?

If you are everywhere, how could you let this happen?

But then we come back to **free will**, a fallen world, a world of sinful choices and brokenness, not yet redeemed,

And we find a God still right in the midst of the suffering and sorrow.

What is God doing there, in the midst of the grief?

Lamentations 3 has an answer.

Lamentations 3 says that God is bringing mercy and hope.

His mercies are new every morning.

We might call it trite to say ***'take it day by day' or 'one day at a time'*** to those who are walking through tough times, but the truth is that it's very biblical advice. Even the Psalms repeat this advice.

Psalms 30 says that sorrow may linger for the night but joy comes in the morning.

Lamentations 3 reminds us that God's mercies are new every morning.

If we take it one day at a time, we will see day by day the new life that God can bring.

Even if we can only see what God is doing on that one day—that is enough for the day.

Go to bed and try it again in the morning, and see the mercies for that day. You don't have to know the master plan.

Just trust and wake up day, after day, after day.

Great is God's faithfulness.

When we are often tempted to give up, and some do,

God does not give up, day after day after day, God is faithful

Despite the sorrow, despite the anger, despite the despair,

God's mercies are new every morning, Great is God's faithfulness.

Perhaps you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death right this very moment!

And God is reminding you and me that the mercies are new every morning. Great is God's faithfulness.

It is in the ***midst of*** sorrow and despair that our God brings hope and help.

It is in the ***middle of*** life's trials and tribulations that God brings new life and light.

Isaiah 43 says it so well,

*I will be WITH YOU through the waters and they shall not overwhelm you,
I will walk WITH YOU through the fires, and they shall not consume you,
for I am the Lord your God the Holy one of Israel, your Savior....
I have called you by name, and redeemed you,
you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.
Do not fear for I am with you.*

We may not be promised freedom from suffering or death,
but we are promised the **presence of a loving God**,
the hope of a Savior who has been through the ultimate suffering and
now stands beside us wherever we go, whatever we face.
Philippians 4:13 reminds us, that *I can do all things Christ Jesus who
strengthens me.*

Francis de Sales wrote a wonderful poem to this effect, found on the St.
Anthony's hospital wall in OKC, something I memorized as a little girl
waiting on my grandfather during his cancer treatments. I've shared it a
few times before:

*The Everlasting Father who cares for you today will care for you
tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering or give
you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then, and put aside all
anxious thoughts and imaginings.*

Knowing how to grieve,
having permission to grieve,
These things are important.
Because we are all going to be there, if we aren't already.

And when we are in the thick of it.

God is there right beside us.

Bringing **new mercies** every morning.

Some little ray of light and life,

Maybe it's the smile of baby, or a moment of laughter.

Maybe it's a good memory of a loved one,

or a promise from God's Word that finally rings true.

A rainbow, a sunset, a walk in the park, or a breath of fresh air.

God's mercies come in all shapes and sizes.

And they come—day by day, for great is God's faithfulness. Amen.