

Circuit Service 28 November 2021 prepared by Symon Turner

Call to worship Matthew 23 37-39

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

In this sermon, we will explore the topic of lamentation; we will be guided by the psalms as differing examples of lament and focus on two biblical examples of lamentation. We will think about God's lamentation and the world's and even face our own. We do this with the promise of God in mind that he will wipe every tear from every eye.

Our first hymn echoes the lamentation of the world for its suffering and Gods call of lament to us

Hymn StF 256 When I need a neighbour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fExR7eOhJ00>

<p>1 When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there ? When I needed a neighbour, were you there ? <i>And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there ?</i></p> <p>2 I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there ? I was hungry and thirsty, were you there ?</p> <p>3 I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there ? I was cold, I was naked, were you there ?</p>	<p>4 When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there ? When I needed a shelter, were you there ?</p> <p>5 When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there ? When I needed a healer, were you there ?</p> <p>6 Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there, wherever you travel I'll be there. <i>And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, I'll be there.</i></p> <p>Sydney Carter (1915–2004)</p>
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Psalm adoration, Psalm 29 StF 807 (spoken)

Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings,

Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;

Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.

³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders,

The LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is majestic.

⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

The LORD breaks into pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶ He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,

Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes

With flashes of lightning.

The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;

The LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

⁹The voice of the LORD twists the oaks^[c]

And strips the forests bare.

And in his temple, all cry, "Glory!"

¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

The LORD is enthroned as King forever.

¹¹ The LORD gives strength to his people;

The LORD blesses his people with peace.

Reading Jonah 3 3-10

Reading Luke 29 41-48

Hymn StF 696 For the healing of the nations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXtflE6jSYQ>

<p>1 For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray with one accord ; for a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords. To a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.</p> <p>2 Lead us forward into freedom ; from despair your world release, that, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace. Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.</p>	<p>3 All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned ; pride of status, race, or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan. In our common quest for justice may we hallow life's brief span.</p> <p>4 You, Creator-God, have written your great name on humankind ; for our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind ; that by our response and service earth its destiny may find.</p> <p>Fred Kaan (1929–2009)</p>
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Sermon

Before we begin, I'd like to discuss what lamentation is briefly; lamentation is not limited to grief; though this can be its most expressive form, it can cover a sadness that the world is not as it should be or that we are not as we should be. When we see oil slicks or children picking litter on giant rubbish tips, how many of us don't lament for our overconsumption of our fellow humans. At its root, lamentation is a deep sadness that something is profoundly wrong, and maybe we are powerless against it or have actively contributed towards it.

So why the preacher does God, who is all-powerful, lament over his creation. Indeed, we hear an example of such a lament with Christ over Jerusalem. God / Christ is lamenting of state of the world his free design has made. In the case of Jerusalem, it will choose the path of violence, which will end in its destruction. In the case of our world, God laments over the inequality we have created, the destruction we have wrought and how far from him we remain.

So let us look at the two bible passages, and we start with a favourite of mine, the story of Jonah of the whale fame. Jonah finds himself in the whale because God demands that he warns Nineveh to repent or face destruction, and Jonah, who have Nineveh refuses.

One whale later, Jonah is in Nineveh and, I expect half-heartedly preaching of the need for this city to repent. Nineveh's response, however, is a radical and total one-eighty. They all face the evil they have done and from the king down repent of the evil they have done and trust in God that he will

deliver. Now I know their act of repentance is a tad dramatic. Still, the real revolution is not in dressing in sackcloth and forcing even the sheep to follow suit but in facing in truth the evils they have done and lamenting that they have done them and asking God to forgive them and trusting that He will forgive them.

How many of us trust in God's forgiveness and mercy enough to face him in the privacy of our hearts and ask his forgiveness of those secrets we so desperately and vainly hide from him. How much more unlikely that our whole town would suddenly have enough faith in God that we trust his love and overcome our depravity. We see here and in the gospel that God's call on us is that mercy is more significant than our failings, and he is calling for a new open relationship with us.

Why Does God forgive us if we lament? You may ask Well, Jonah asks the same thing? He goes off in a huff and harshly questions God's choice, is saved, and ends up spending the night beneath a giant plant. God replies to Jonah

Jonah 4 10-11

"You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

This echoes Matthew 6 vs 26

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

It is a timely reminder that though we may be sad about the evil we have wrought or the person we are, God's values us so highly that he took human form, brought to a cross and died, all so he could be joined with us and provided the guarantee to all who knock or lament of their action's forgiveness is here and free

Next, we come to the New Testament passage. This passage is full of very unchristian acts, but it is not the hand of God that will bring this but the hand of man. We see Jerusalem offered a chance to change paths to follow Jesus and the way of mercy like Nineveh, but instead, they follow a different approach that will lead to their destruction.

Jesus only cries twice, once over this friend and once over Jerusalem, which will not repent or lament. Jesus knows the folly of the path they are following, but it believes is it right and will not reflect on how corrupt they have become. Jesus even goes into the heart of its temple and clears it of earthly corruption and again and again, wants them that the temple which had become an idol of worship will crumble and he is the new temple, but no one will hear him.

You see, unlike Nineveh, Jerusalem is convinced it has God favours and believes its sins virtues. In a few decades, it will rise in violent revolution against the equally fierce Romans, and this will end in disaster and Jesus' lament coming true. Jerusalem trust only in earthly power to restore it; it is proud and stubborn. Unlike Nineveh, it only trusts in itself, not in God.

I wanted to leave you with one more picture of lamentation and salvation, and that is the pennant thief Luke 23:40-43

"Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

He is almost a side character in the biblical epic, but he shows what lamentation is and the power it holds. On his own cross, he reflects honestly over the life he has led and its bitter results. In the light of Christ's life, he can see the life he should have left and defends Christ as a final act of lamentation and trusting in Christ goodness.

Christ does not despise the thief or reject him, but promises him salvation. All because he had the courage and humility to seek His heart and be honest with God over how far he was from the person God wanted him to be and how badly he needed God in his life

Prayer of Lament Psalm 22 (STF 804 spoken)

The next is a prayer of lamentation for our suffering and the time we felt God far away from us but also palms of rejoicing that God never abandons us

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
So far from my cries of anguish?

² **My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
By night, but I find no rest.**

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
You are the one Israel praises.

⁴ **In you our ancestors put their trust;
They trusted, and you delivered them.**

⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
In you, they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ **But I am a worm and not a man,
He was Scorned by everyone, despised by the people.**

⁷ All who see me mock me;
They hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ **"He trusts in the LORD," they say,
"let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."**

⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
You made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰ **From birth I was cast on you;
From my mother's womb, you have been my God.**

¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
And there is no one to help.

**Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
Save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
You have answered me**

I will declare your name to my people;
In the assembly, I will praise you.

²³ **You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!**

²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;

**he has not hidden his face from him
But has listened to his cry for help.**

²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
Before those who fear you, I will fulfil my vows.

²⁶ **The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
May your hearts live forever!**

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

²⁸ **for dominion belongs to the LORD
And he rules over the nations.**

²⁹ **All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
Those who cannot keep themselves alive.**

³⁰ **Posterity will serve him;
Future generations will be told about the Lord.**

³¹ **They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!**

Prayer of intercession

It is usually my habit to think of some things in the world you want to take to God, but today, I want you to think of anything you feel guilty about or are embarrassed about. I want us to pray on those things we hide from God

A moment of silence

Prayer of forgiveness. God who sets us a feat for the prodigal child, who commands all of heaven to rejoice when one who has been lost returns, flood our hearts with the knowledge of your forgiveness, let us live Christ's forgiveness from the cross. Shine the light of your glory into our hearts so we hide our sins no more and can be reconciled with you through your son Jesus Christ. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 407 Hear the call of the kingdom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSycGm5yXjo>

<p>1 Hear the call of the kingdom, lift your eyes to the King ; let his song rise within you as a fragrant offering of how God, rich in mercy, came in Christ to redeem all who trust in his unfailling grace.</p> <p>2 Hear the call of the kingdom to be children of light with the mercy of heaven, the humility of Christ ; walking justly before him, loving all that is right, that the life of Christ may shine through us.</p>	<p><i>King of heaven, we will answer the call. We will follow, bringing hope to the world, filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim salvation in Jesus ' name.</i></p> <p>3 Hear the call of the kingdom to reach out to the lost with the Father's compassion in the wonder of the cross, bringing peace and forgiveness, and a hope yet to come : let the nations put their trust in him. <i>King of heaven, we will answer the call ...</i></p> <p>Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)</p>
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Blessing

May God fill our life with his Goodness, give us the strength, to be honest with him and empower us to lament and move beyond our past. We do this in the faith of Christ's free and perfect forgiveness and the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit.