

Jesus' Lament for His People - Matthew 23:37-39 Devotions

Monday, April 10

Opening thought - what do you typically do when you are frustrated, upset or disappointed with God or with what is happening in your life?

Read - Matthew 23:37-39

- What stands out to you about this prayer of lament that Jesus prays?

- What is Jesus' burden and frustration with the city/people of Jerusalem?

Pastor Ben reminded us that this kind of prayer of Jesus is a lament (passionate expression of grief or sorrow) and that the Psalms are full of them. In particular Jesus weeps over a city known for its false teachers, hypocrisy and religion. A city that is dead to what God is doing and facing judgment unless they repent.

- Consider the following passage and what it's showing us about lamenting: read Psalm 88:1-18
 - What heartaches or frustrations does the Psalmist lay before God?

- Why do you not do this when you are upset or frustrated?

Reflect - the Psalmist and Jesus are modeling for us how we can rightly come before God with all of who we are. Songs and prayers of laments allow us to be honest with God yet properly hopeful in the goodness and character of God. Listen to this song and it's accompanying message from John Piper. Then consider writing or praying your own lament to God.

- <https://vimeo.com/71765067>

Tuesday, April 11

Opening thought - what is so bad or awful about human nature? Are people basically good or bad? Why do you think so?

Read - Matthew 23:13-37

- How would you summarize some of the key points that Jesus makes about the Pharisees?

- What has happened to this religious renewal movement that they would receive such a rebuke from Jesus?

Pastor Ben stated that we must see the condition of our own hearts (and all of mankind) if we are to understand and grasp what Jesus is declaring in verses 37-38 of Matthew 23. It's not that we sin now and then, or that we are slightly sinful or selfish, but rather we are spiritually dead and completely uncaring about the things of God. This is who we really are. This is who the Pharisees are too.

- How do we see this truth in Jeremiah 7:25-28, Ephesians 2:1-3?

Jesus' words in Matthew 23 (the whole of the chapter) point to our need to see and confess our unwilling heart toward God. Naturally, no one desires and seeks after God unless God Himself seeks us and draws near to us as an act of Sovereign mercy and grace. What we naturally want is self-rule and independence from God, not submission to God and yielding to His Lordship in all of life.

Reflect - *consider afresh Ephesians 1:4-6 & 2:4-5. Read these aloud and confess the truth of these in prayer to God. Confess where your heart is unyielding to God and ask for His Spirit to make you heartily willing to live for Him today.*

Wednesday, April 12

Opening thought - why is it so hard to love those who are unlovely in their actions or behavior (even if it's your own children)?

Read - Deut. 32:9-13, Matthew 23:37-39

- How do you see the love and care of God in these verses? (Knowing that the object of God's affection and care reject Him and run after everything else but God)

Pastor Ben told us that the kind of love displayed in the gospel and by Christ is a merciful and gracious love. A love that comes to those who are completely undeserving. A love that is willing to warn about the dangers of the Pharisees as well as a love that will act to save from the wrath of God. (Take a moment to read 1 John 4:9-10)

- How do you typically respond when you give love or give your best, but it's met with rejection, rudeness or indifference?
- Yet Jesus is willing to go to the cross with joy for those who could care less. How do you see this truth in Hebrews 12:1-3?

Reflect - Am I living my life in light of the grace, love and affection that God has for me? Or am I living my life how I want to without regard for God and his mercy shown at the cross? Our actions are telling a story that reveal the true nature of our hearts. A willingness to lament, repent and return to God reveals a heart that's been changed and made new. An unwillingness to change and bring my life in line with the gospel is a life in danger of God's wrath and judgment.

- Both salvation and judgment are available today - respond to God this morning. Take stock of the condition of your heart. Turn to Him who wants to gather you under His wings and who has taken the wrath of God for your cleansing and forgiveness.

Jesus' Lament for His People - Matthew 23:37-39

Takeaway truth: *Jesus' lament for his people teaches us about our own hearts as well as His heart for us.*

Jesus is getting the disciples ready to celebrate the Passover. Jesus prepares to enter Jerusalem - for his passion. Many gather and lay palm branches and shout - hosanna (Lord, save us!). Yet very soon this same crowd will shout "crucify him!"

As Jesus prepares to enter all of this, he pauses to lament over Jerusalem.

1. *You can bring your lament to God (vs. 37-39)*

- A. A very brief prayer by Jesus. A gut wrenching expression of sorrow which is a prayer. He talks with his Father about the city of Jerusalem. A city known for its false teachers, hypocrisy and religion. Yet a city that is dead to what God is doing.
- B. Double mention of the name (Simon, Simon; see also Romans 9:2-3) of Jerusalem is a personal grieving
- C. More than a third of the Psalms are laments; Psalm 88 is a hard one to read.
 - a. Vs. 13-18 these are hard verses to read; hard pain
 - b. Jesus shows us that we should take our pain to the Father; Jesus will do this 2 more times (in the garden and at the cross)
 - c. Suffering - when you suffer it is not meaningless nor is it enduring but rather momentary; Job 15:13 ("thou you ruin me still I will worship your name")
 - d. Practical - write out your lament to God rather than bury it; it's ok to not be ok with God. It's ok to lament before God - in writing or on your face before him.

2. *You can be honest about your unwilling heart with God (vs. 37-38)*

- A. "You were not willing" - Jesus has just come after the Pharisees with 7 warnings and then prays this prayer of lament (you are blind guides, you lay heavy burdens on others, tombs with a cheap coat of paint, those who kill the prophets)
- B. Jesus' words are an echo of Jer. 7:25-28 - you were unwilling in your hearts but I was willing; this is a further picture of Ephesians 2 (spiritually dead, totally depraved; the depth of our sin shows the necessity of his unconditional election to choose you based on his good mercy (and not on anything I could do)
 - a. Ephesians 1:4-6; 2:4-5 -- not chosen because we (Christians) are better but rather it's clear that God saved us because of our sorry, sad and beyond-repair sinful, dead heart.
 - b. I'm free to choose lots of things but not free to choose to change my nature (my sinful nature that will always refuse to draw near to God; my nature makes us unable to do so)

3. *You can be Saved (vs. 37)*

- A. This is the focus of his coming into Jerusalem (v. 37c); hen protecting her chicks from a hawk or a storm; I can and I'm willing to protect you from the thieves who would steal you away and also from the storm of God's judgment that is coming to them.
- B. Chicken or the egg - by faith God comes first to love us but we did not love him (1 John 4:10). Jesus acted on your behalf when you didn't want him to.

- C. The Spirit is the one who will open hearts to receive the love of Christ as written in the scriptures. And Jesus goes to the cross to face the full wrath of God for those who could care less about him. And he goes anyway. With the joy set before him.
 - D. What do you want to do when someone threatens you or attacks you? Yet Jesus does none of those things we would do. He yielded to the plan of the Lord and went willingly.
 - E. Application: Am I living my life in light of the grace and love and affection that God has for me?
4. ***You can be Judged (vs. 38-39)***
- A. This brief prayer ends in a warning (vs. 38-39). This is the end of Jesus' public ministry at this moment. Quite a ending. Sobering.
 - B. "Your house is empty" - the temple, the city and even the people of Israel thru judgment. 70 AD Rome will come thru and destroy Jerusalem and the temple and many are slaughtered in the streets. And yet there is a much worse judgment coming for you!
 - C. The next time you will see me is at the Second Coming - for some this will be a great day but for others a day of weeping and wailing (Rev. 1:7-8)

We have all shouted "crucify him!" in our life and actions.

And we have all rejected Christ.

Will you come!?