



3.17.24 Honesty Leads to Hope | Lamentations 3:19-24

I don't know about you but I have now added a new word to my vocabulary.

That's right...lament. It's bound to happen, right? We have spent weeks building a deeper Biblical understanding of lament. And today will be no different.

Today we will continue to deepen our understanding of lifting up emotionally honest prayers to God around what is broken and taking action.

As we look at what Jesus lamented and then took action around.

Our specific focus today will be on the necessity of facing reality and how even though it might be painful, filling us with sorrow...it is that pain and sorrow that motivates us to take necessary, God-seeking action.

We must face what is truly broken and allow ourselves to feel that pain, channeling that pain to empower us to respond as Christians.

A couple of weeks ago I shared that I had participated slightly in the search for a boy named Kevin Jay Ayotte in 1982. That three-year-old boy had either wandered from home or had been kidnapped.

As I was sharing about Kevin, I was pretty sure we were also probably thinking of another boy who went missing in 1989:

...Jacob Wetterling.

On Sunday, October 22, 1989, just after 9:00 p.m. in evening, Jacob Wetterling (11) and his younger brother Trevor (10), and a friend, Aaron Larson (11), were biking home from a Tom Thumb in St. Joseph Minnesota, to rent a video.

Danny Heinrich, wearing a stocking cap mask and armed with an unloaded revolver, came up to them and ordered them to throw their bikes into the ditch.

Danny then told Trevor and Aaron to run away without looking back. Making it the last time Jacob was seen alive by anyone other than his captor.

Eventually, Mr. Heinrich admitted to what he had done and is in prison. He may be available for parole in 2037. But the judge told Heinrich it would be highly unlikely as (and I quote) **"this crime is so heinous, so brutal and awful that it is unlikely society will ever let you go free."**

This was both an extremely tragic event in our state, stealing the innocence of children all across Minnesota, and it was also time for lament.

It was a time in which his devastated mother found the strength to rise. Making her name as famous as her son's.

Only four months after his abduction, Patty Wetterling and her husband and others formed the Jacob Wetterling Foundation and began to advocate for children's safety.

She allowed her pain and sorrow to lead her to find her voice and take action. To not only fight for other children and support other families torn apart by the same tragedy but she also raised incredible awareness.

Putting fear in the hearts of predators everywhere.

Her courageous response in the face of her tragedy was amazing.

That's what we are talking about today.

That's what pain and sorrow can do, it can lead to amazing empathy and courageous action on behalf of others. Making lament a gift to us; pain leading to actions that blesses others.

The concern is not the scale or size of our response. It's just that we take some kind of action in response to the distress and anguish either in our lives or all around us.

From starting a foundation to setting the Temple in order, and everything in between.

I have a couple of pastor groups that I am a part.

We zoom and support each other and talk about sermon series. Pastor stuff. Recently one pastor asked in response to something we were lamenting, **"If Jesus was here, what would he do?"**

What would Jesus do?

It got me thinking. Here is my response this week, **"I don't know what Jesus would do about this or that happening this week. But I do know what Jesus did. In his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his lament, and cleansing the Temple."**

I do know why Jesus entered Jerusalem on a colt.

And I do know how his lament led him to cleanse the Temple.

And I believe we have an opportunity to learn from his lament and the God-honoring actions he took. As we focus on who Jesus is to us, where we find true peace, and to invest in God's priority of prayer.

As we look at scripture, let's keep an open mind to what Jesus is teaching us.

In our first section of the Word, we have our typical Palm Sunday text. We have to mention it.

Jesus asks his disciples to get him a colt on which he then rides down the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem. The people outside of Jerusalem see Jesus approaching, they began praising him, spreading their cloaks on the ground.

Culturally for them, laying down their cloaks was a sign of greeting a ruler. They remembered 2nd Kings chapter 9. When their ancestors spread their cloaks on the steps to herald Jehu (Jay-U) as their new King.

Likewise, Jesus is being joyfully and triumphantly received as Jerusalem's long-awaited king.

We often take time on Palm Sunday to compare and contrast the clashing of two different kingdoms and two different leadership styles.

We witness Jesus coming humbly, lowly, and slowly expressing certain values of his reign...power under, gentleness, servanthood, and compassion. A way that opens and warms the heart in being loved.

In stark contrast to the power of Rome and Pontius Pilot. They use their power externally through military might, power over and oppression. A way that hardens and closes the heart in fear of being used or destroyed.

We are left pondering which kingdom do we want to live in? Which King and Kingdom will we invest our lives in? We vote with our lives every day.

Two very different crowns.

Two very different leaders.

Two very different kingdoms.

You must choose.

With that said, it is our very next 8 verses that is our real focus for today. The mood shifts significantly from cheers and praise to tears and action.

As Jesus draws near to Jerusalem and overlooks the city, he begins to weep. As we listen in with the disciples we overhear Jesus' lament, **"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace..."**

Jesus' lament reveals his priorities and the true condition of the city. Jesus values and desires true peace for Jerusalem **"...if you had only known on this day what would bring you peace..."**

Jesus as Lord and King, because of his character, meant they would have experienced peace in their city. They would have experienced perfect peace in their lives under his perfect reign.

So haunting..., **"...if you had only known what would bring you peace..."**.

Did they know? Had they not been informed about the true source of peace?

They knew. They were the people of God.

Do we know where true peace comes from? Have we been informed?

We know. We are God's children.

Are we trusting in ourselves, our community, our church or our government? But where do we then turn if we are anxious, our town has problems, our church struggles, or our human government disappoints?

Jesus lamented then and possibly even now the ways we seek to know peace.

Bringing us to the consequences of choosing other than God. We destroy any hope of peace and open ourselves to mistreatment of others, to violence and death.

We open ourselves to this judgment promised Jerusalem,

⁴⁴They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Are we failing to recognize God at work in our midst? Are we even looking and expecting to see God at work?

One commentary made this startling observation.

Throughout his ministry Jesus never begged or pressured others to trust him and follow him with their lives. He came, spoke truth, and left the decision making up to those who were listening.

Jesus isn't going to race after us and beg us to follow him as King and receive his perfect peace.

Each of must do what they will with that commentary's comment.

Jesus' lament, honestly felt and honestly expressed to God, now prompts Jesus into courageous righteous action. Our focus for today. His lament, his empathy leads him to do a notable thing in the Temple.

We read in the final verses...“When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling and said. ⁴⁶“**My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers’.**”

Jesus's actions cleaned out the corruption that had taken root in the Temple. And simultaneously he re-instated the purpose of the Temple...to help people connect to God, which is the heart of prayer.

It is no small thing when Jesus rebukes them for making the Temple a “den of robbers”.

Somehow over time, the leaders of the Temple had allowed the Temple to stray away from being a place to pray, drifted away from keeping God at the center of life.

They allowed the Temple to slide into corruption, ignoring God's rightful place in their hearts.

They wandered on to a path of self-destruction. And Jesus could see they were quietly heading away from God.

Jesus's lament, his weeping and sorrow led him to strong actions. He drove people and cattle out, and overturned tables. He cleansed the Temple.

Jesus, with only days to live, took action to restore their spiritual focus, keep God in their hearts and lives, to re-ignite their prayer lives, re-ignite their relationship with God.

Jesus envisioned a better future; a future marked by honoring Jesus as King, experiencing true peace and deeper prayer and intimacy with God.

Lament to God-honoring action.

There are times we don't want to address situations that are destructive in our world. Like the kidnapping of Jacob Wetterling or destructive in our churches like the lack of prayer or lack of spiritual hunger for God.

Where have we drifted off course?

Are there areas in our lives in which our prayer lives, our relationships with God or others have grown lukewarm? We often don't even see these destructive shifts in our church or our own hearts.

How can we shift to act like Jesus...to lament and then take action?

How can we shift to hear these truths he makes clear to us? To be working on, to ensure we keep moving together towards God, growing in experiencing deeper peace and a deeper prayerful spiritual vitality?

Let us now move into a time of reflection.

Time of reflection: Have you accepted Jesus as your King? Today is that day. Maybe re-affirm your commitment to following him in silent prayer.

Or can you discern places where you are looking for peace other than God? Draw near to God, receive peace.

Or has your spiritual hunger for God waned, become lukewarm? As God for renewal and help to get back on track.