



Tues 7th/ Wed 8th March 2023 ~ Lamentations 4 & 5

The Lament – the hardening of our hearts:

- On Sunday morning Jamie reminded us of some dire statistics in Lambeth – the extremely high rates of poverty and unemployment and the astonishing crime rates for drugs and weapons. Coupled with this is the statistic that 98.3% of people in Lambeth don't attend a church... we are a borough in need of a reset, a renewal, restoration a- revival!
 - **What is a revival?** Take a few minutes to discuss what a revival is and if you think that it is possible to have one here in Clapham in this generation? Where and how do you think that would start?
(Making alive again, supernatural refreshing of faith, coming back to life. A current example of this is the revival happening in Asbury Christian campus in the USA)
- Lamentations 4v3 speaks of God's people (both leaders and followers of God) becoming heartless towards God, because of their sin.
 - **In what ways do you see this being true in your own life?** What does that look like? Why do we become heartless?
(Disappointments of this life / everyone else behaves in these ways / we are more interested in furthering our own comforts and kingdoms than that of God / replacing God's place in our lives with ourselves and other idols).
- We realise that our lives / community / world are in dire need of a reset/restoration/revival but where do we look for help? Lam 4vs17 speaks of looking in vain for help – watching from our towers for a nation that will help...
 - **When we consider the dark space that our society is in, where do we (individually or even as a society) look for help to come from?** Where does our culture encourage us to look for help?

The Truth:

- In Ezekiel 36:26 God says: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh".
 - **How does God give us a new heart and spirit?** What does it look like?
(When we turn to Jesus in an attitude of humility and repentance, he promises that the spirit of God comes to reside in us, and that heart posture that has been cold and dark and stubborn becomes instead a presence that starts to look more like the fruit of the spirit we read about in Galatians 5:22 – 23)
- Lamentations 4:2 gives us a powerful image of us being clay in the potters hand – 2 Corinthians 4:7 gives purpose to these clay vessels: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." As we have allowed God to restore and renew us, by His all-surpassing power we become people who hold a treasure (that of the presence of the Spirit in us) that makes us people of light in the places in our lives and world that are being defined by darkness.
 - **What are some ways that our "clay vessels" are shaped as we are held by God – the transforming Potter?**
- Many generations later, we read in the New Testament, that this heart for us to be reconciled to God is a constant theme – indeed one could argue that the whole purpose of the New Testament is how we can be reconciled to God. Acts 3:19 says: Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Repenting is a bittersweet invitation – it is so humbling to admit our sin and our need for God, but results in life to the full as we are reconciled to God and refreshed and renewed in Him.

But what does repenting look like? Personally and as a community?

The Practice

- The worship song "Hosannah" that we sung this last Sunday and at prayer meeting last week has a line that goes: "break my heart for what breaks yours"
 - **What do we think breaks God's heart?** What do you think would happen if we really did allow God to break our hearts for what breaks His? What would our response and effect in our homes and places of work be if our hearts broke for what breaks His heart?

- **The book of Lamentations invites us to a practice of lamenting... what does it mean to lament?** How does that look as an individual or as a church? Has this been something that us as individuals or you in some kind of collective environment have ever experienced? What was the lament over? How did others care for you, or you care for others as they lamented?

(Lament is a passionate expression of grief. It doesn't end with the expression of our grief; it propels us towards reflection on how we have actively or passively contributed to that which we are grieving... this leads to repentance and ultimately restoration).

- Lamentations teaches that even more important than lamenting is repenting... with the aim of being restored to God.
 - **Is repenting a practice that we are familiar with?** What does that look like – really? Are we as children of God in a rhythm of regular repentance? What are ways that we can encourage one another on to be a people of repentance – both in our private lives but also as a community of believers?
- The opening question was about how we think revival might be possible in Lambeth... we have seen that in the time of any great revival, the posture of those in the middle of it all was that of repentance – a willingness to be restored to God, to lift Jesus up above all the darkness and ask Him to renew lives and communities.



Pray a prayer of lament with one another: some options for this are below:

“Gracious and loving God, open our hearts so that we are able to admit to you the fullness of our lives – that which is beautiful and good, and that which is hurtful and hateful.

We confess that we do not follow Jesus in all that we do.

We love with condition.

We judge and condemn.

We cast the first stone, and keep the logs in our own eyes.

We do not turn to You as the source of our healing.

Forgive us, we pray. Forgive our sin, and empower us to be imitators of Christ in love and service. Amen.”

OR

“Holy God, we open our hearts to you this day, and offer the truth of our lives:

The fear that stifles us,

The prejudice that blinds us,

The ignorance that hobbles us,

The doubt that plagues us.

Help us, we pray, that we will

Find courage in unlikely place,

See the world with new and gracious eyes,

Move to those places where love is needed,

Have faith that you are with us.

This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”



In what practical ways can we create awareness in our lives and champion one another to come to Jesus in repentance – asking Him to renew us and restore us to Him and in so doing, to bring revival in our community in this generation?