

WHAT THE CHURCH CAN LEARN FROM LAMENTATIONS



Before the seminar

Read:

1. Lamentations 5
2. Review previous seminars

SEMINAR 4: COMMUNITY OF LAMENT

Introduction

1. Review of previous seminars:
 - a. Crying/grieving (seminar 1)
 - b. Complaint against God (seminar 2)
 - c. Continuing suffering and faithfulness (seminar 3)
2. Focus of seminar 4 – importance of community
3. Movement from individual to community in Lamentations
4. “Community of lament” in Lamentations 5

WHAT IS A “COMMUNITY OF LAMENT”?

A. A community that grieves with the suffering individual

1. Similarities between Lamentations and earlier chapters
 - a. Petition – compare: Lam 5:1 and Lam 1:11c
 - b. Experience of shame – compare: Lam 5:1 and Lam 2:15
 - c. Subjugation – compare: Lam 5:2 and Lam 1:10
 - d. Experience of hunger – compare: Lam 5:9-10 and Lam 1:11
2. What the repetitions signify:
 - a. The community is one with the suffering of the individual
 - b. The community weeps with the one who weeps
3. Lament (vv. 43-66)
 - a. Communal lament (vv. 43-47)
 - b. Individual lament (vv. 48-66)

B. A community that laments with the suffering individual

1. Focus of the earlier complaints – the fate of the children (read: Lam 1:5; 2:20)
2. Community in Lamentations – “We have become orphans” (Lam 5:3)

C. A community that persists in faith with the suffering individual

1. The individual’s persistent faith – read: Lam 3:49-50
2. The community’s persistent faith – read: Lam 5:21

3. The book of Lamentations ended with uncertainty. The last verse reads: Despite the uncertainty: “unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.” (Lam 5:22).
4. Modern Christianity tendency to emphasise certainty: Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote in his book, *Spiritual Depression*: “As we face the modern world with all its trouble and turmoil and with all its difficulties and sadness, nothing is more important than that we who call ourselves Christian ... should be representing our faith in such a way before others, as to give them the **impression** that here is the **solution**, and here is the **answer**. In a world where everything has gone so sadly astray, we should be standing out as men and women apart, people characterized by a **fundamental joy** and **certainty** in spite of conditions, in spite of adversity. Now that, I think you will agree, is the picture which is given of **God’s people everywhere in the Scriptures**, whether it is Old Testament or New.”¹

Reflection questions:

1. How do you feel about the ending of the book of Lamentations?
2. Is there no more place for the sense of the tragic for Christians in the light of the resurrection?

¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, 23, emphasis mine.