

Myron Penner: The Lord be with you.

Speaker 1: And also with you.

Myron Penner: The holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke.

Speaker 1: Glory to you, Oh Lord Jesus Christ.

Myron Penner: Our gospel reading this morning is from the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke's gospel beginning at verse 5 and ending at verse 10. That's found on page 741 of your pew bible. Luke 17:5:

"The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mulberry tree; "be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it will obey you. Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep, would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now, and sit down to eat." Would he rather not say, "Prepare my supper. Get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink? After that, you may eat and drink." Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also when you have done everything you were told to do should say, "We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty."

The gospel of Christ.

Speaker 1: Praise be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Myron Penner: Please be seated.

It feels irresponsible not to preach on that gospel text but I'm not going to. That might be something you have to work out with God if you don't like that text. Might spur you on to greater bible study, I don't know.

Let's pray together. Gracious, God, we acknowledge your presence here among us. We know you're here through your spirit and we ask that by that spirit you would work in us. That these spoken words of mine might be faithful to the written words of Holy Scripture. And that they would lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ, our Lord and the author of our faith. Amen.

How many of you began cheering for the Oilers when they first came to the Edmonton in the '80s? So you've been Oiler fans since then?

You probably cheered for the Edmonton Eskimos through the '70s and the '80s, didn't you?

You see, I live just outside Calgary.

And we had season tickets to the St. Peters for a while, my dad and I, after I got older. My hatred of Edmonton was forged by Hugh Campbell, and Wayne Gretzky, and Glen Sader, and Mark Besiae, and I could list the whole team; Yuri Curie, Mark Mesiae, Gret Fugher. Steve Smith was our Trojan horse. He was our secret agent. But you get what I'm saying, right?

I grew up with this mentality that Calgary is the best. Even though they weren't. And of course, you grew up with the City of Champions. I'm going to resist all of the things inside of me that want to comment on the last 10 years of those two teams. Let's just say, I think that dynamic that we're talking about testifies to something that I think we see in our Jeremiah reading.

The readings from Lamentations, if not at all clear that Jeremiah actually wrote it except that that's the tradition. It certainly fits with Jeremiah because it's a piece of literature, poetry really, prayers. It's an acrostic, by the way, did you know that? It goes through the Greek alphabet line by line starting with the next letter of the alphabet all the way through. It's a really incredible piece of poetry. But it's from the period of exile. So it's written when Jerusalem has fallen and the people have been taken into captivity.

What I want to suggest – let me back up – no, I'll tell you what I'm going to suggest. One of the things I'm going to suggest is that our salvation in Jesus Christ has a lot to do with our location. It has everything to say about how we live, where we live, and our physical circumstances.

Maybe another way to say this is; our faith is nothing like an abstract pie in the sky. As Johnny Cash says in one of his songs written for Dead Man Walking; "Your fundamentalist pie, but just a piece, you understand the rest is in the sky." That's not the vision of salvation that we have; that salvation is intimately concerned with our lives here in this space.

In fact, it doesn't even understand the distinction between physical and non-physical, spiritual and material, because they are one thing – reality. And that there's something deeply spiritual about that reality that is involving matter, and time, and space, and relationships.

So this is the thing I was going to interrupt myself with earlier, this is important to me although I'm not sure I've stressed it enough. And it's been an underlying current through all of us; what is – and I mentioned it once before, and I'll not blame you for not remembering this but this is a rhetorical tool, a pedagogical tool to help you asking a rhetorical question – what is the bottom-line for Jeremiah's message? Or his condemnation? What has his real "done" that he's so upset about and that he's voicing his – God's judgement? What is his real, "done?"

“They’ve turned from Him,” that is absolutely correct.

I said it in a different way. What have they forgotten?

Repent is the refusal to turn around. What does he appeal to constantly? Their story. They’ve forgotten their story. I want us to remember that all the time because it should be running through here as a sub-text.

And so the Word should always be to us; remember the story. And see, there is a story that God is telling. And it all centers in Jesus Christ. And he’s telling it to us through Jesus Christ.

But let’s look at this text. It is a profound lament. A very deep, deep cry. And what does it cry about?

Look at the opening verse. It’s an incredibly articulate and beautiful lament; “How deserted lies the city once so full of people?” The city of course is Jerusalem. And Jerusalem, well, what do we know of Jerusalem?

It’s the center of Hebrew life. It’s where the temple was – is – was – is it or is that?

Those are absolutely correct. Anything else that we know about Jerusalem? It’s where the king sat.

What are some other names for it? The City of David. The City of David; how come it’s called “The City of David?” Did David found that city?

He conquered it.

Sometimes we also call it, “The Holy City.” And there are many faiths that call it “The Holy City.”

Has anyone been to Jerusalem?

I have not. But I’ve been told many time. One of the things I’m told is that first of all, it isn’t nearly as big as you might think it is. It’s really quite small. And everybody’s living on top of each other. Another thing is that there’s constant religion everywhere, all the time and these religious forces playing off each other all the time.

Christians love it, that city, and consider it holy. The Jews, of course, love that city and consider it holy. The Muslims love that city and consider it holy.

If we look at scripture – well, let me go back to this; what we see is that this text is a lament over the judgment that has fallen on Jerusalem. And another thing that I want to suggest, that’s related to the other thing I suggested, is that the judgment that’s fallen on Jerusalem is one of those double vision things.

And we see when it says, "How deserted lies the city," I think that means both Jerusalem the city, and "the city" as a category – as the heart of civilization. Because the judgment again, that comes on Israel is not just because of Israel. It is a double vision judgment. It's a judgment that comes on all of us as we rebel against God and walk away from God.

What makes Jerusalem the holy city? Well, as Marcel just said, it's a holy city because it has the temple. Somebody said it. I don't know if Marcel did – Marcel didn't say it. You said that it was a temple. It has a temple. It's holy because of the temple, and because of the Ark. And more important, it's a city that's adopted by God. But it is a city that's been founded on blood and on violence, on sacrifice.

And what's interesting if you go back and look at 2 Samuel: 7, David is longing to build God a city. And God doesn't want to be in the city. David says; "I'm going to build you a city," sorry, "I'm going to build you a temple. And I'm going to put you in a city."

And God says, "I don't want to be in a city." Essentially, what God says is, "You want to build me a city and house," sorry, "You want to build me a house and put me in a city but it's I who built you a house." And God adopts the city. And if we look at this a little bit more deeply in scripture, does anyone know where the first city appears in the story of scripture? I can't quite hear you, Carol. I see you saying something.

Sorry, a city. The first city that appears in the story. Babel is a very important city but it's not the first one. This is a bit of a trick question. You really have to know Genesis well. Genesis 4. I heard it.

Cain? Yes!

Cain. Who's Cain? One of Adam and Eve's sons, and what does Cain do, he's famous for? He murders his brother Abel. And after he murders his brother Abel in chapter 4, what does God say to him?

He says, "Well, there's a curse that's going to be on you now." And that curse is going to be sort of defined by two things; it's going to be defined by scarcity and ruthlessness. He's going to be a wanderer and he will not be able – the ground would not give its life to him, to sustain him the way it did before.

And immediately it says, "Cain went out from the presence of God and he had a son and he built a city. And he called that city the same name as his son, which is "Enoch." And that word means, "Initiation."

There's a man named Jack Alul. And he's written a book called, "The meaning of the city." And it's an incredible book. And what he draws out from this story is essentially that what we see happening here with Cain is that Cain, in building the city Enoch, he is trying to cope with the curse

on his own. He wants to avoid the scarcity. He wants to make this curse bearable for himself.

And in the end what we see is this actually is the place where of course human industry, and economy, and all of these things in civilization that are the engines that run our lives, they create the conditions in which we live now – that's what comes out of this. It's this attempt to make this curse bearable for him.

And here's how Alul puts it, he calls this humanity's high-handed piracy of creation because he takes a look at how God created the world and created Eden and it's all sustained directly by God but what we see with Cain is he creates a set of conditions that he now calls a new beginning.

The first beginning wasn't the real beginning, according to Cain. Now we're going to have our own way. And we're going to have our way of providing for ourselves, which is what cities are all about, right? It's not just about houses and stones – and Cain then bends all of creation to his will. And he forces creation to follow his destiny. And that's of course the beginning of human civilization, or that's how the scriptures tell the story of the beginning of human civilization.

So we find really interesting in this exile period is that God has taken and adopted Jerusalem to be a new kind of city, to be a light to the nations, to be a different kind of place that which was borne in the same kind of sin, and blood, and murder, and violence, corruption, abuse, oppression – was then adopted by God and he wants to create a new place.

And we saw as we looked in revelation that there is the new Jerusalem that will come. And so Jerusalem because it has become like all the other cities. It's forgotten who she is, and whose she is. And she sold herself, as we see in our text, to these other lovers, these other powers. She is who is queen among the provinces now become a slave. And among all her lovers there is none that comfort her. She is trying to find her sustenance in other places than her God.

And if I want to leave you with just one thing today, it's that God does not leave us. You see, we've got this picture of the abandoned city, how desolate lies the city once so full of people. God does not leave us, it is us that leaves God. You know the saying; "If God seems absent, guess who moved?"

That's kind of the message that I think we're getting here in Lamentations. See, the abandonment that we experience, by God, is never because God leaves us but because God – because we leave God and we try to make the curse bearable somehow.

And we do this on an individual level. We have a whole set of strategies that I use to sort of make the curse bearable. A very simple one is War Craft. I play War Craft incessantly. It's a way for me to distract myself from the things that are pressing in on my mind or whatever. But we have deeper ones too.

But it's not just me, it's us. You see, the city has a way of living that forces us to adapt to it. But the

good news is, that God has not left us alone, that God is with us in the city, and that the life that we now live, we live in faith. You see, there is a real sense in which we live in the middle of this text.

And with the kinds of things that we're experiencing now with how we have, through our cities, treated the climate. The way our strategies, the effects that they're having on the very earth – we're in exile! "How desolate lies the city that once was so full of people."

These are real things. It's not just about Jerusalem. But thanks be to God in Jesus Christ that he doesn't leave us alone. But this life that we now live, we live by faith. Just as Timothy was describing, just as the very first part of our gospel lecture was describing that even though we don't have the full reconciliation, we do have the knowledge that in Christ we belong to the new creation.

So God is redeeming that we have a hope and that out of all of this we can be a witness to that in the middle of the city. "How deserted lies the city that once was so full of people!" But thanks be to God, He has not left us alone. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that your grace is sufficient to us in Jesus Christ, and for us. And that you do not leave us alone but that you pursue us, you stay with us, if we will just but turn to you.

Turn our hearts to You, Father. Tell us how to live in a different mode of life – one that is not self-sufficient, and self-righteous, but one that is humble, and patient, and kind, and loving, and that seeks to love you and love our neighbors in all that we do. And my Your kingdom come in this place, and Your will be done. We ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Speaker 3: Please joining me standing. And let's confess. And let us confess the uniform format of as we say; "We believe the Father- let's try the faith of our baptism together as we say, "We believe in God the Father; infinite in wisdom, power, and love, whose mercy is over all creation And whose will is ever directed to the good of children who creates, loves and redeems us. We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son Man. The gift of the father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death who will come again in glory.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who brings God's presence in our lives whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and through whom we find strength and help in time of need. We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that his faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of blessed Lord. To the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth, Amen.

Please be seated or stand.

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