Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

A very common view of God and human beings today is that God is only patient and kind and that we humans are basically good and we do not deserve to suffer. Well, last Sunday we began to see that those two assumptions are false with the help of a woman we called **Lady Zion**. In Lamentations we hear the city of Jerusalem speak to us as though she is a noble woman. And in the Bible Jerusalem is sometimes called Zion so we called her Lady Zion. The other person we hear from in Lamentations is a narrator who tells us *about* Lady Zion. And the three main lessons of the poems of Lamentations are:

1. that man is really, really bad,

2. that God is really, really angry with sin,

3. And that grace is really, really powerful.

And last Sunday, as we considered the first chapter of Lamentations, we read about the destruction of Jerusalem. And we saw that the destruction was fully deserved because of the great wickedness of the people, over many generations, and because they had either ignored or killed the many prophets that the Lord sent to warn the people.

And the lesson of that chapter is that every human being is by nature a guilty law-breaker, both in terms of *what we do and what we do not do*. In God’s eyes, we are not basically good; we are actually really, really bad. And this means that we do not deserve good from God; we actually deserve judgment and death. And that is why the news that we can be saved by believing in Jesus is such good news!

Well, as we come to chapter 2, we will again see that man is really, really bad, but as we read again about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people, the main truth explored in this chapter is that God is really, really angry with sin.

So in the second poem of Lamentations, a **Retold Tale of Destruction Reveals the Extent of God’s Wrath**.

Chapter 1 divided into two main sections: The Narrator described Lady Zion’s grief and then Lady Zion cried out in response. Well, chapter 2 begins and ends the same way but in the middle the Narrator calls on Lady Zion to repent. So our three headings today are **the Narrator’s description of Lady Zion’s Grief**, **the Narrator’s Grief-Stricken call for repentance**, and then **Lady Zion’s** **Grief-Stricken Accusation**.

1. So first of all, we see that God is really, really angry with sin, as we consider **the** **Narrator’s description of Lady Zion’s grief**.
   1. And the first 10 verses of ch. 2 are basically a repeat and a summary of what we read in ch. 1 – they are a **description of destruction** **and devastation**.
      1. In vv1-5 we read about the “kingdom and its rulers,” and habitations and strongholds and palaces. So vv1-5 are about the royal palaces that had been smashed to smithereens.
      2. vv6-7 speak about the “*meeting place*,” the “*festival and Sabbath*,” and the “*sanctuary*” and the “*house of the Lord*.” So vv6-7 describe the templeand worship life of Jerusalem, which had been “*laid in ruins*.”
      3. vv8-9a focus on the wall and the gates that once surrounded Jerusalem, which were now pulled down and destroyed.
      4. In vv9b-10 we read about kings and princes and prophets and “*the elders of the daughter of Zion*.” Those whose calling it was to teach the people and lead the people were either dead or taken into exile, and so there was “*no vision from the Lord*.”
         1. And it’s worth pausing here to think about this a little more. You see, one of the main reasons for the destruction and exile was the fact that the people had rejected the warnings of the Lord’s prophets for many years before the Babylonian invasion.
         2. We see an example of this in **Jeremiah 18** where Jeremiah warned the people that disaster would surely come i they did not repent. And their response? “*They said, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says."”* And I know that some of you boys and girls studied Jeremiah at the recent church camp. He was actually put into prison for a long time because of what he had said. So because the people didn’t like what Jeremiah was saying, they told themselves they could ignore his words because there were other prophets and there would always be prophets. But now, when it was too late, the people are sad because there are no prophets.
         3. And there is a warning here for churches and individuals.
            1. In **Revelation 2**, the Lord Jesus warns churches that if they tolerate wickedness and fail to preach the truth, He will remove His lampstand from its place, which means He will take away the pure preaching of the word. And sadly, there are churches like this here in Auckland where the word of God used to be faithfully preached but now they are concert venues and social clubs and ‘all faith communities.’
            2. But each one of us must pay careful attention when our elders come to us with the Word of God to challenge us about our sins. I have seen many people whose response to the reproof of the elders was move to another church ‘to escape the grief.’ But that is no different than how Israel responded to Jeremiah. And the outcome, for us, will likely be the same.
         4. But the main point here is that godly wisdom in Judah was as much a pile of rubble as the palaces and temple and walls.
   2. And the fact that all of this came about because God was really, really angry with the sin is plainly and repeatedly stated in black and white by our Narrator.
      1. Just look at the very first line of the very first verse: “How the Lord in His anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud.” And you can picture Jerusalem with a dark cloud of God’s furious anger hanging overhead.
      2. And we can imagine lightening bolts and thunder pouring from the cloud as we walk through vv1-10 and the Narrator hammers home **the** **fierceness and furiousness** of God’s wrath and judgment at Jerusalem’s sin.
         * We see it at the end of v1 where we are told that all this happened “*in the day of His anger*,” in the middle of v2 – “*His wrath*,” in the beginning of v3 – His *“fierce anger*,” at the end of v3 where He is described as “*burning like a* *flaming fire* *and* *consuming all around*,” in the beginning of v4 He is “*like an enemy*,” in the middle of v4, “*He has killed*,” and the end of v4 speaks of how “*He has poured out His fury like fire*,” in the beginning of v5 he is “*like an enemy*,” again, in the middle of v5 He has “*laid in ruins*,” in the beginning of v6, “*He has laid waste*,” and at the end of v6 – “*His fierce indignation*,” and in the middle of v8, He “*did* *not restrain His hand from destroying*…”
         * God is really, really angry with the sin of the people of Judah and Jerusalem.
   3. But of course, if we know our Bibles, none of this should surprise us. When God first entered into covenant relationship with Israel, He gave them His covenant law. And He very carefully spelled out or them the blessings that would follow obedience and the curses that would follow their disobedience. You can read it in **Leviticus 26 and Deut. 27-28**.
      1. And if you know the history of Israel, you will know how **patient** God was with the people, beginning with the journey to the Promised Land and through the time of the Judges and the Kings. He was *unbelievably* patient with their sin.
      2. But **Psalm 5:4-5** says, “*For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers*.” Congregation, God is not a cosmic teddy bear who just loves everyone and who sees evil and says, “Whatever!” He is really, really angry with sin. And He *has* to be because He is a holy God.
      3. And the idea that you often hear modern Christians put forward that the God of the NT is a gentler and kinder God than the God of the OT is irresponsible. God does not change. And that’s why we read **Hebrews 12** earlier, “*Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire*.” God was and God *is* really, really angry with sin.
   4. So the destruction of Jerusalem teaches us that God is a righteous judge who will not leave the guilty unpunished.
      * **Romans 6:23** tells us that the wages of sin is death; what guilty sinners deserve is the punishment of hell. **Hebrews 9:27** says, “*It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*.” One day, Jesus is going to return to this earth to judge all mankind. And all those who are stubborn and unrepentant sinners are going to be banished from God’s presence to the place of fire and darkness and agony and loneliness that is hell, for all eternity.
      * Jesus spoke of this in **Matthew 25** when He said that on that Day “*He will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*.”

And the abject destruction and devastation of Jerusalem, which came about because of the anger of the Lord at Israel’s unrepentant sin, gives us a hint of the total despair that awaits unrepentant sinners in hell.

But Jesus ended His sermon in Matthew 25 with these words: He said, “***But the righteous [will go] into eternal life***.” So it is possible to escape the hell that we deserve. By nature we are really, really bad and God is really, really angry with sin, but God has made it possible for us to have eternal life. And this is by believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

1. And we see more about this as we continue in the second place to **the Narrator’s grief-stricken call for repentance** in vv11-19.
   1. I mentioned last week that occasionally a news reporter is so upset by what they are reporting on that they just break down and cry, and in v11 we see that our Narrator has been weeping and has vomited. And the two reasons for this are that the Narrator is talking about His **own people**, as can be seen in his reference to “my *people*” in the middle of v11, and the plight of the children. He says, “*Infants and babies faint in the streets of the city*” and *“their* *life* *is* *poured out on their mother’s bosom*,” in v12.
      1. A couple of years ago, when vast numbers of people were trying to migrate from Middle-Eastern and African countries to Europe, a photo of a little 3 year old boy whose drowned body lay on a beach grabbed the attention of the whole world. Why? People had been drowning for weeks! But this was a child!
      2. And pretty much every year there are TV appeals for famine relief in African countries. And what pictures do they show us? Malnourished infants pressed to the empty breasts of their skin and bone mothers. The children basically die at the very place where they are supposed to be fed.
      3. And it is seeing these same horrors that has brought our Narrator to tears.
   2. vv13-19 are a **sorrowful lament** at the destruction that has come upon Lady Zion.
      * In v14, the Narrator recognizes the damage caused to lady Zion by false prophets who said that all was well when the opposite was the case.
      * vv15-16 describe the mocking and scorn of the surrounding nations.
      * In v17 he acknowledges that all this has come about exactly as the Lord said it would to generation after generation after generation. “*The LORD has done what He purposed; He has carried out His word, which He commanded long ago*.” So the Narrator knew about Lev 26 and Deut 27; God had just done what He warned He would do if Israel refused to repent.
   3. But you know what? **Lev 26 & Deut 27** end with these words: “*But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers … so that I … brought them into the land of their enemies--if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity … I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the LORD their God*.”
      * And the Narrator knew this part of Lev 26 & Deut27as well!
      * And he also knew what God said in **Ezekiel 33:11**, “*As surely as I live … I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from his way and live*.”

So knowing all this, the Narrator now calls on Lady Zion to repent.

* Notice his question at the end of v13, “***Who can heal you***?” It is just a brief sentence; just a few words expressed as a question. But it directs Lady Zion’s attention to the only one who can restore her and bring rescue – the Lord.
* So from v18, the Narrator appeals to Lady Zion, “*Arise, cry out at night … pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord. Lift your hands to Him for the lives of your children*.”

* 1. And congregation, what we have here is **a lesson in evangelism**.
* The Narrator knows that Lady Zion is a sinner. He knows that God is really, really angry with Lady Zion’s sin. He knows that Lady Zion deserved God’s judgment. But He also knows that God is a forgiving and merciful and compassionate and loving God who delights to forgive the repentant sinner!
* And such is the Narrator’s love for Lady Zion in her misery, he comes to her with the solution – confess your sins! Repent of your sins! Look to the Lord for deliverance!
* But sadly, the ‘evangelism’ of many professing Christians today is God loves you and He has a perfect plan for your life if you will just accept Jesus into your life. You will be healthy and wealthy and all will be well with your marriage and then after that you get to go to heaven!
* But that is not the message of the Bible – OT or NT. The message of Jesus was repent. The message of the Apostle Paul in Acts 17 was God “*commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by [Jesus]; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead*.”
* What we have to tell people is that they are really, really bad, and that God is really, really angry with sin, but that there is forgiveness of sins in Jesus – repent and believe and you will be saved! Turn away from sin and trust in the work of Jesus on the cross and you will be saved!

Brothers and sisters, you know that your unbelieving neighbour or workmate or teammate is a sinner. And you know that God is really, really angry with sin. And you know where they will go if they do not repent and believe in Jesus.

The question is: **Do you love them enough to tell them how they can be saved**? Do you love them enough to cry out to them, Please, look to Jesus and repent? Because that is the only message that will help unbelievers and that is the message that the Holy Spirit delights to use to bring people to faith!

1. So the grief-stricken cry of the Narrator is a call to tell sinners the truth about sin, judgment, and salvation in Jesus Christ. But lastly and very briefly, we must look also at **Lady Zion’s grief-stricken cry Accusation**.

* 1. And as we consider her response to the appeal of the Narrator, we can only conclude that Lady Zion has **not yet come to the place of true repentance**.
     1. Yes, she calls on the Lord, as we see in v20, but it is only to draw His attention to her suffering and to ask the Lord why He has done all this to her: *Should women eat the fruit of their womb? … Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord*?
     2. And in v21 her words have a ring of **accusation** to them. We can picture waving an angry arm toward heaven: “*You have killed them in the day of your anger, slaughtering without pity*.”
     3. And what this means is that her reference to “her enemy” at the end of v22, while obviously aimed at Babylon, is also aimed at God! She is accusing God of being her enemy.
     4. So her response to the Narrator who has called on her to pray to the Lord and repent, is to say, How can I pray to my enemy who has done this to my people?
     5. Lady Zion has not yet come to see that her only hope is God’s really, really powerful grace.
  2. In **Ephesians 6:2, Fathers are warned not to exasperate their children**. And one of the ways we fathers and mothers can be guilty of this is inconsistency – we let something go one day and then we punish it the next, or we punish one child for doing something but not the other. But sometimes we also make the mistake of handing out a big punishment for what really is a small misbehaviour, or a child gets punished for something they did not even know was wrong, or worse, that they did not even do. These are some of the ways that parents can exasperate their children, which means that the children feel themselves to be the victims of a huge injustice! Have you ever felt like this, boys and girls? I am sure we all have. Well, at the moment, Lady Zion feels exasperated by God. She thinks God has been unfair with her. She cannot yet see that she deserves the angry judgment of God.

But what about you? If some sorrow or tragedy or injury or illness were to come into your life today, would you be upset with God? Would you think it unfair of God to treat you like this? And do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that every sickness or sorrow we endure is a direct punishment of God. The story of Job makes that very plain. My point is that it is wrong for us to think that we do not deserve suffering or judgment. We are all sinners who deserve God’s judgment in this life and the next.

What we ought to do is to recognize that we deserve the wrath of God, confess our sin, and call on the Lord to deliver us as our Saviour. Jesus went to the cross and took all our sins on Himself and endured God’s awful wrath so that we do not need to. What we have to do is to believe that He did this for us. And we are going to do that now as **we** **Remain seated** and sing **453** (Remember Not, O God).

Congregation, one day we will all stand before the Lord Jesus on the throne of Judgment. And on that day there will be no exasperation! There will be no one who thinks God is unfair and unjust. Everyone will know that they are really, really bad and that God has every right to be really, really angry with them because of their sins. But one group of people will have recognized this *before the return of Jesus* and repented of their sins and believed in Him for the forgiveness of their sins. So He will stand before them as their beloved Saviour. The other group will have recognized this after Jesus has returned which is too late. And He will stand before them only as their Judge. So please call on Jesus today. Do not put Him off. Repent and believe!

**Sing 338** – (Day of Judgment, Day of Wonders) – Unrepentant sinners should fear that day as a terrible day. But if we have repented and believed in Jesus as our Saviour we long for that day! For that is when Jesus will say to us, “*Come near, ye blessed, see the kingdom I bestow, you forever shall my love and glory know*.” Amen.