

Tell It Like It Is

Six studies in the book of Lamentations

-- to aid personal contemplation and small group Bible study, as well as teaching and preaching.

By Elizabeth Kendal

Preface

When did you last read Lamentations?

What did you gain from it?

Does the book of Lamentations have anything to offer the 21st century Christian?

Illumination

Lamentations provides us with eye witness accounts and personal testimonies of survivors struggling to endure and make sense of military invasion, occupation, siege, massacre, famine and violent persecution. While Lamentations presents us with a portrait of Jerusalem in the wake of its fall to Babylonian forces in 586 BC, the scene of utter devastation, like the cry of utter despair, is one that would be familiar to multitudes of contemporary Christians.



When you read in Lamentations of the devastation of the city, think of Aleppo (*photo*). Think of demolished churches – bulldozed, bombed and burned – in Vietnam, China, Kosovo, Iraq, Egypt and Northern Nigeria. Think of Christian colonies and villages razed to the ground in anti-Christian pogroms in Pakistan, Egypt and India.

When you read in Lamentations of terror, pursuit and famine, think of the Christians facing genocide in Sudan's Nuba Mountains, at the hands of regime that routinely uses starvation as a weapon of mass destruction. Think of the church North Korea that lives not only with perpetual hunger, but with the threat of incarceration and execution as well. Think of Christians left destitute after being expelled from their villages in Laos; ethnically cleansed off their lands in Burma or displaced by rebels in Central Africa Republic.

When you read of tears and loss and sickening grief, think of Christians of Pakistan -- from All Saints Peshawar (bombed by the Taliban) to Joseph Colony (razed by local Muslims). Think of the church in Somalia, where news rarely consists of anything but martyrdom. Think of Christians in Syria and Iraq where members of the oldest Christian communities in the world are faced with the end of life as they have known it.

When you read of the killing of priests and prophets, and of the humiliation, torture and execution of leaders, think of the church in Iran and Eritrea where leading Christians are routinely incarcerated. Think of the church in Syria and Iraq where numerous pastors and Christian leaders

have been kidnapped, tortured, beheaded and dismembered before being dumped back on the street to be found by their loved ones.

Confrontation

Rather than hide or deny it, Lamentations confronts the raging inner conflict and desperate spiritual struggle of the sufferer who cries, "Why Lord?" or "How long, O Lord?" or who pleads, "Don't ignore me Lord" or "Don't forget me Lord" while clinging to faith by their fingernails. (*photo: All Saints, Peshawar, Pakistan, Sept 2013*)



Lamentations confronts the dilemma of what to do when we are so confused, hurt and angry with God that we feel we are no longer on speaking terms with him.

In the face of escalating violent persecution, sectarian war, suffering and hardship, Lamentations forces us to examine ourselves: are we mere on-lookers and passers-by or are we those who will extend themselves for the Lord's beloved: step closer and listen, *see* the pain, *feel* the pain, *earn* a hearing and be the comforter, advocate and spiritual support God expects us to be?

Comfort and healing

For those who are devastated and for whom no comforter is in sight, Lamentations says, "Pray! Talk to your faithful God, even if all you can do is lament and complain – that's ok, just ***tell it like it is***. Don't let confusion or anger stop you. Don't tell tears hold you back and don't hold back your tears – *pour out your heart like water before the Lord* (Lam 2:19). Remember who he is: he is Yahweh, *your* faithful sovereign God (Isaiah 40:1 and 27-31). Remember who you are: you are the beloved of his soul, redeemed at great price. Cling to his promises – and pray, just pray -- and let the healing begin."

Is Lamentations relevant to the 21st century church?

Absolutely!

And the more persecution and insecurity escalate, the more relevant it will be.