

Message for Grieving Families in Times of Tragedy

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Bible Text: Jeremiah 50:4,5
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As I said a little earlier, we are departing from the scheduled service this morning and that means I will not be at this time continuing the series of studies in the life of Christ in this service. However, this evening we will, God willing, return to the scheduled services and in the Lord's will we will continue with the studies in the book of Romans as we assemble for the evening service.

I want today to read two verses in the book of Jeremiah chapter 50 verses four and five.

In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.¹

These words of Jeremiah the prophet describe the feelings and attitudes of the Jews returning from their bondage, from their captivity to Zion. But in these few moments I have no intention or desire to talk to you about the Jews and their burden and their bondage and their return. The words that describe those things are equally appropriate for all who in times of bitter bondage, heavy burdens and severe afflictions turn their hearts unto the Lord.

In those days of burden and affliction, in that time of sorrow, of suffering and of need:

“...they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”²

In these few words of these two verses in Jeremiah chapter 50 we have three very simple descriptions of those who seek the Lord in the time of suffering and of sorrow. They are

¹ Jeremiah 50:3-4.

² Ibid.

obviously first described as mourners, as going and weeping. And as they go and as they weep we are told they shall go and seek the Lord.

We have families in the church this morning, two family circles, but more than two families, who are feeling a deep burden of mourning and I think that anyone who knows these families must mourn with them.

Going and weeping we mourn with those who mourn. Unless you have actually been in the place where you have lost a child or a husband in some tragic circumstance, then it would be facile to say that you feel their pain.

It is easy to say, "I know how you feel," but in actual fact we don't.

Till you have been there you don't know how anybody feels in a situation like that.

But though we can't feel as they feel and though we can't feel what they feel, we should be able to feel for them because they feel and we should be able to feel with them.

The sympathy of the people of God, the support of the people of God, the tears of the people of God are in themselves, by God's kindness, very often made a means of grace to sorrowing saints when the world will be against them, when Satan will be against them. And I have to remind people in days of deep burden and deep loss when they are already suffering, I often have to remind them that Satan will use that very occasion to accuse them, to seek to bring them down and to make every accusation, every suggestion, every foul thing that he can say to hurt them, he will do it. He will bring thoughts to their minds. He will bring bitterness to their souls. He will seek to make them hate themselves. He will seek to make them hate their God. He will seek to make them rebels. He will seek to do anything. There is no mercy with Satan.

We ought never to forget that.

He is a relentless foe who uses every situation and never backs off. In times like those, God's people are greatly helped to know that they have, in their brethren and sisters, those who mourn with them, who feel for them and who uphold them.

As I said, there is an ongoing murder investigation. There are circumstances here also that will be investigated as criminal investigations aside from murder. And in those circumstances, those sorrowing families are going to need the ongoing, unrestricted and unconditional support of God's people.

I shouldn't have to say to born again Christians, but I will. Let your speech be seasoned with salt, let your thoughts be with those who mourn and let your heart be one with them. Neither by word, by deed, by neglect, by oversight, by lack of prayer or lack of friendship or anything else, add one gram of weight to the sorrow that already burdens their souls. We weep and mourn with those who mourn.

We must mourn over lives that have been lost and cut short. Thirty is a very young age to die. Thirty brief years and then all of God's eternity. It is a very young age to die.

I think it is a misconstruction of Scripture that says that the 90th Psalm intends us to understand that the median for life is 70 years. I don't think that is what it is saying at all. I am not going to expound that at the moment, but whatever men may normally seek in this day and age this is certainly a case of life cut short and we mourn over that. We mourn over broken hearts and broken homes devastated homes, homes that ... and hearts that will never be the same again.

There is an awful lot of nonsense talked at the time of death. The jargon word is closure, one of the most abominable terms ever invented. You will never close a thing like this.

I think of a family member of ours who lost her little boy at four years old. She had to pick up and go on and people said, "How wonderfully well you are doing, how you have been able to handle this."

And little did they know. You don't handle that except by the grace of God. You don't close the book on that. You don't close the book of memory on that. We have parents. You are lamenting the loss of sons today. We have young widows who just a few hours ago were wives. We mourn over those lives cut short.

We mourn over the curse of sin that so ravages the world that murder is a solution to everything. People get killed for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes for no reason at all. We mourn the curse that ravages the world and ravages America and that now has touched us all so personally and has brought the violence of the age right to our own doorstep.

We mourn, as the text suggests, because we do not see the Lord or know him as we ought to know him especially in times like these.

The hymn writer said, "In times like these you need the Savior. In times like these you need an anchor."

And here in the text they are going and weeping and they are going to seek the Lord. That is good, but oh how much better in the time of tragedy and trouble that you have already sought the Lord and you already know the Lord in a deep and real way.

In many ways we can rejoice that these families have been somewhat prepared by the grace of God to be able to turn things over to the Lord, to see in our sister Betty Walsh and in the Sandlins the immediate reaction to turn to the Lord, to cry to the Lord. Simply, broken heartedly to plead with the Lord for grace and for mercy.

I must say I was greatly touched that in neither home did I find a questioning bitterness. In neither home did I find a rebellious spirit. In neither home did I find anyone flying in the face of God and demanding why he would allow such a thing. I found people seeking unto him. Let that be our continual seeking.

Where can I find the Lord in all this? The text that I left with the Sandlins in the middle of the night, Friday night, Saturday morning from the 90th Psalm.

“Let thy work appear unto thy servants.”³

In all this, let us see God at work. And Harry’s prayer, I hope you will join him in it. Harry’s prayer is that God would use the death of his son to bring others to Jesus Christ.

We have very dear friends in Northern Ireland who were saved in 1966 through John Douglas’ ministry and became foundation members of our church in [?]. Mrs. Heron was greatly burdened about the spiritual state of many of the young people in the congregation and as she was burdened to pray for them in prayer meeting, she cried to the Lord to save everyone of them, to get those who professed to be saved to a place where they would serve Christ with all of their hearts. And as she prayed—and she was a mighty woman and still is a mighty woman of prayer—she cried to the Lord to do this in whatever way he would, whatever the cost may be.

And God heard her prayer. The cost was a very great cost. Her 20, I think 21 year old son was killed in a freak motorcycle accident, not the usual kind of motorcycle accident, killed. And through that death God worked and God answered her prayer. When I visited with her she was not in tears. She just found God. If that is what it took for God to get hold of lives and save a great number of souls, then as Tim prayed, the Lord gave, the Lord took away, blessed be the name of the Lord.

We will pray. How can we find the Lord in all this? How can we glorify the Lord in this? They were mourners.

But the second picture of them is inquirers. They asked the way to Zion. And it follows on exactly from what I am saying. How can we find the way to Zion? Zion is associated with praise. Zion is associated with power to overcome. Zion is the city of David, the city of the great king. How can I find my way to Zion?

Through all this we need first of the families that they will find their way to that place of praise, to that place of worship, to that place of spiritual power, to that place where they are overcomers, to that place where they are sitting in the presence of the great king. We have got to pray for that. We have got to pray that as a congregation, through this we will afresh find the way to Zion, that we will be inquirers of the Lord, asking the way to Zion that we will be brought to a place of praise and of worship and of power and of really fellowshiping with the great king.

Already one young man that I spoke of has expressed this, that this has hit his own heart, that he must walk with God.

³ Psalm 90:16.

If we get nothing else at this time, I trust we will get this, that there will be a host of inquirers inquiring the way to Zion, that those in this congregation, those of our young people, those in our families who are not saved will be inquiring the way to Zion, the way to life, the way to Christ, the way to heaven, the way to salvation, that those how profess to be saved will realize that live is serious, that they realize that death is certain and that they will understand that eternity is forever and that they will begin to realize that if they are saved, there is only one way to live and it is not trying to live with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. It is not trying to live with a mask of Christianity. It is living flat out for God in the light of his glory and in the light of his eternity.

And, oh, if there will be even in our families and in our church this morning people who will be brought face to face with death and eternity to cry to God, “Lord, show me grace that I may live for Christ. Show me the way to Zion, to live in the praise and power of the gospel, to live in the presence of the great King.”

I never get used to death. I have been visiting the dead and the dying, the bereaved and the afflicted for well over 40 years now and I never get used to it. I hope you don’t either. This is real. And I hope that there will be in some heart today, in every heart today the cry to God, “Show me the way to Zion. I must know the way.”

Jesus said, “I am the way.”⁴

Then I must take that way. This is not an inquiry out of some intellectual exercise. This is not an inquiry what is the way so that I may decide is it the way for me or is it not? This is an inquiry. Show me the way to Zion of there is no other way that I want to take. I must know the way because I must go the way. I must go home by the way of the cross. There is no other way but this.

They are mourners. They are inquirers, but there is a beautiful ending to the verse. They are covenanters.

Let us join ourselves in perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten. Covenanters.

Let us join ourselves in covenant with god.

You know, trials and troubles are terrible things. And I don’t want to be sounding unnecessarily gloomy, but if this Bible is true you and I are staking our whole eternity on the fact that it is. Then trouble is just an eye blink away from any one of us.

“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”⁵

While it may not be a replica of the trouble that the Walsh and the Sandlin homes have found in these last days, yet its effects will be very similar. Death is going to hit your home, too.

⁴ John 14:6.

⁵ Job 5:7.

I would to God that I could be sure this is the last time I will have to mourn with a family that loses a young person. I would to God that I could be sure that I will never again stand at a grave with a little two foot white coffin put in the ground. I would to God that I would never again have to stand with a wife and see a husband receive a death sentence and be told you will be gone in a few days or months.

But those are only vain and wishful thoughts. It is going to hit your home. This is going to hit my home. Time and time and time again we will be called to pass through the veil of suffering. And let me tell you something worse than the suffering, something worse than the trouble is that during it all you should not be in covenant with God. To face trouble without the Lord to me is incredible. To face trouble, to face death, to face eternity and not know that there is that covenant bond between your soul and your Savior, is something that I would never, never, never, for all the money in the world want to face. To face eternity without Christ, trouble without the Savior, to know nothing that God has bound himself to me in a covenant promise and that he can cease to exist as easily as he can cease to fulfill his word to me, to face things without that knowledge would be the greatest trouble indeed, especially in the light of the insecurity of the brevity of the life in which we live. Therefore, let us join ourselves in a perpetual covenant.

Now let me warn you here. There are times at funerals, there are times in great distress and trouble. People make all sorts of decisions, make all sorts of professions out of surface emotion and that never saved a soul from hell.

Let us join ourselves in a perpetual covenant. Let us today stop and take stock before God and in the light of all that we have come to know in the past days, let us commit ourselves to him in a covenant relationship vowing away our lives to him in the knowledge that he has vowed his faithful grace to us.

That is the call. To bind ourselves in a covenant of salvation whereby we trust Christ who has commanded us to trust him, that we take Christ who has commanded us to take him and we commit ourselves to him to be his children, his disciples, his servants in the knowledge that he has promised to receive all who come.

The old Scottish people were mostly, the good ones anyway, were Covenanters. They always spoke in terms of a covenant.

Mr. Spurgeon tells the story of an old Scottish crofter and his little cottage way in the country starting every morning as every good Scotsman did with his bowl of porridge and he prayed the prayer of grace. He thanked the Lord.

He said, "I thank you, Lord, for this porridge. I thank you, Lord, for an appetite to eat it. And I thank you most of all for the covenant right to it even in the every day things of life. I have a covenant right to the blessings of God."

When they came to Christ for salvation they always spoke of it as entering into covenant with Christ.

Oh I trust there will be those entering the covenant of salvation and for every Christian let us enter in to a perpetual covenant of dedicated service.

Let me ask you. If you believed that 48 hours from now we would be announcing your funeral arrangements, how would you live? What changes would you make? That is how you ought to be living now. Those are the changes that need to be made now.

May God give us grace to take this great text and be mourners and inquirers, covenanters in a perpetual covenant that shall never be forgotten.

Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Our loving God and our Father in heaven, we thank thee for the Word that we have read this morning and we thank thee that thy Word is truth. We pray that thou would write it in every heart and, oh God, we pray that thou would produce fruit for its preaching and for its reading. We ask thee, oh Lord our God, that thou would graciously make us mourners with those who mourn. Make us mourners over our own sin. Make us inquirers and make us covenanters. God, grant that there will be those seeking the way to Zion and there will be those who are by grace led to enter into covenant with God. We pray again that thou will bless all who are going through the vale of tears and, oh Lord, minister great grace and peace to their troubled hearts. For Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled," not because the circumstances are easy, not because life is a bed of roses, not because trouble stays away, but let not your heart be troubled, because ye believe in God and ye believe in me. Lord, grant thy people that supernatural grace that comes from faith in Jesus Christ. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are going to close this morning by turning back to our Psalters to Psalm number 90 and the first version of the psalm.

We are going to sing the first two verse and the last two verses. This is a psalm written under the shadow of death.

LORD, thou hast been our dwelling-place
In generations all.
Before thou ever hadst brought forth
The mountains great or small;
Ere ever thou hadst formed the earth,
And all the world abroad;
Thou even from everlasting art
To everlasting God.

And then verse 16, the verse to which I referred.

O let thy work and power appear
Thy servants' face before;
And show unto their children dear
Thy glory evermore:
And let the beauty of the Lord
Our God be us upon;
And our hands' works establish thou,
Establish them each one.

Verses one and two, 16 and 17, Psalm 90, the first version. We sing it to the tune 94.
The tune is 94. Psalm 90. Let's stand to sing it.

LORD, thou hast been our dwelling-place
In generations all.
Before thou ever hadst brought forth
The mountains great or small;
Ere ever thou hadst formed the earth,
And all the world abroad;
Thou even from everlasting art
To everlasting God.

Sixteen.

O let thy work and power appear
Thy servants' face before;
And show unto their children dear
Thy glory evermore:
And let the beauty of the Lord
Our God be us upon;
And our hands' works establish thou,
Establish them each one.

Let's bow together in a closing word of prayer.

*Our God and Father, answer the petition of our heart. Spread thy covering wings
around till all our wandering cease and grant that at our Father's blessed abode we shall
all arrive in peace.*

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father and the fellowship of
the Holy Ghost our comforter be the abiding portion of all thy blood bought people today
and in these days to come and evermore. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.