Lamentations 1:1-12  
A Solemn Question and the Proper Response  
*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? – v. 12*

Perhaps no book in the Bible conveys the kind of solemnity that the book of Lamentations conveys. The book certainly reinforces the truth that God’s warnings of judgment are not mere idle threats. The Lord had been very longsuffering with Judah and with Jerusalem. But at long last as the warnings went unheeded the time of Jerusalem’s destruction came with an awful ferocity and what we have in this book is Jeremiah’s tour, so to speak, of the ruins of the city.

Pitiable are the sights and the sounds that he describes as he makes mention of the elders sitting silently on the ground casting up dust upon their heads in their lamentation (2:10); children and sucklings swooning in the streets saying to their mothers where is corn and wine? (2:12); It’s as if you can hear the devil’s hiss of delight when you read in 2:15 *All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?* Among the sounds, you see, there is heard the gloating of Jerusalem’s enemies *All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it* (2:16).

All of these sights and sounds have a profound emotional impact on the prophet, so much so that we find him saying in v. 16 *For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed*. I never realized before I embarked on this study that the case for Jeremiah being the author of this book is not made through any direct and positive identification of the prophet, but rather through the emotions found in this book with a statement that you find by comparing the verse I just read with Jer. 9:1 *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!* These verses along with the historical setting of the book are what point to Jeremiah being the author of Lamentations.

Of all the prophets that ministered during the Old Testament dispensation, certainly Jeremiah’s ministry would have been the most daunting and difficult. He preached a message of judgment that no one wanted to hear especially if it was suggested that the message applied directly to them. You’ll find on at least one occasion that they would be willing to hear the prophet as long as they could conclude that the message he preached didn’t pertain to them but pertained instead to some distant future generation (cf. Jer. 26:18ff). They preferred to hear soothing words and words to the effect that the captivity that was already underway for a portion of the Jews would be for a very short time.

Because Jeremiah’s message ran counter to what the false prophets were saying, his patriotism was challenged and he was accused of favoring the Babylonians when they besieged the city. All of these difficult circumstances along with the destruction of
Jerusalem that had now come, just as the prophet foretold, would lead the weeping prophet to exclaim with reference to himself, the words of our text in v. 12 *behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.*

Although the words make reference to Jeremiah and the destruction of Jerusalem, it’s not hard to see a spiritual counterpart in the words pertaining to Christ Himself. We may well ask – was there any sorrow like Christ’s sorrow? Was there any suffering like His? But what I want to do this morning in preparation for the remembrance of Christ is to look at the first part of v. 12. Here we find a heart searching question. Notice what it says: *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?* What I’d like you to consider this morning is what gives rise to such a question? And what should be the proper response to such a question?

**Is It Nothing to You, All Ye That Pass By?**

Two things give rise to the question and then there’s one thing that pertains to our response. Consider with me first of all then that:

I. Awful Sorrow Gives Rise to Such a Question

*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?* The question that naturally arises out of this question would be *what exactly were the spectators that Jeremiah refers to passing by?* And the answer is that they were passing by a city that lay in ruins. They were passing by a temple that had once been glorious in its time which was now nothing but a pile of charred rubble. They were passing by the corpses in the street, those that had been slain with the sword and as the prophet says in 4:9 *They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field.*

But in addition to these terrible sights, the spectators would be passing by the weeping prophet himself for it’s with reference to himself that he goes on to say *behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.*

The word *sorrow* could be translated and in some other English versions is translated by the word *pain.* The lexicon that defines the word that way makes reference to two kinds of pain – mental and physical. Very often the two things go hand in hand. I’ve already described for you the painful sights and sounds that Jeremiah beheld. He saw the physical destruction of the city. He heard the cries of starving children in the streets. These sights and sounds certainly brought great anguish to the prophet’s soul. He undoubtedly felt some of the same physical pangs of hunger that his countrymen felt. There’s certainly nothing to indicate that he was treated any better or any differently than anyone else in the besieged city. If anything he was treated worse because he was deemed by his countrymen to be a traitor.
Now if we see in this text an allusion to Christ’s sufferings then we would do well to ask the same question. *Is it nothing to you, all ye that that pass by?* What are you passing by when you pass by the cross? Christ never quoted these words from Jeremiah. He never directed attention to Himself by exhorting the spectators to behold and see if there was any sorrow like His sorrow. But on the other hand we know that He was a man of sorrows and we are called upon to remember not just His body but His broken body. And we can certainly conclude, based on what we know of His character and His mission of atonement that there was never such sorrow or such pain as what our Savior experienced.

And the same thing can be said of Christ that is said of Jeremiah with regard to His pain that it was both physical and mental or emotional. We know, of course, about the physical pain of Christ. Crucifixion was brutally painful physically. It was designed to be that way. It brought on death only after a prolonged period of extreme physical torture. And in Christ’s case, His crucifixion was the culmination of a long night of physical abuse as He had been buffeted and whipped and was so weakened, physically, in the course of His torture, that when it came time to bear His cross, it took another man to carry it for Him.

Has there ever been sorrow, or pain, like our Savior’s sorrow and pain? His sorrow is all the more magnified by the fact that He didn’t deserve any of what He received. Jeremiah could say in v. 14 *The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck.* But Christ could make no reference to any personal sins He had committed. No, rather, He was *wounded for our transgressions and He was bruised for our iniquities* (Isa. 53:5).

We can, however, certainly say that just as Jeremiah was keenly aware that it was the Lord Himself that afflicted Him in the day of His fierce anger, so Christ could indeed make that claim. Like Jerusalem, the forces of earth and hell were against Him but the thing He felt most keenly was His Father being against Him. *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* That’s the only complaint we hear from our Savior’s lips. When you and I pass by the cross, then, we behold One who suffered as no man ever suffered. And we do well to remember that we contributed to the weight of His sorrow. Our sins subjected Him to the affliction of God in the day of His fierce anger.

And His bearing of that affliction and that fierce anger that might be equated to hell itself, that’s our salvation – that’s our hope and peace – that’s the condemnation of your sins and mine. And it’s the testimony of what God thinks of sin. Don’t pass by it too quickly, therefore, - but stop and behold Him bearing shame and scoffing rude being condemned in your place. You’re called to the remembrance of His broken body and shed blood that you might be impressed and humbled by what sin deserves and that you might be comforted and assured that your sins have been forgiven because they’ve been atoned for. *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto Christ’s sorrow.* Those sorrows are what give rise the question.
But there’s something else that gives rise to the question also. We’ve seen the substance of what it is that we pass by when we pass by the sorrows of Christ. In the case of Jeremiah and by way of application to us we recognize next that:

II. Astonishing Indifference Gives Rise to the Question

And here we must focus on the first part of v. 12 – Is it nothing? Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Do you count it to be insignificant? Can you view it lightly? Can you treat the sorrows that you behold so casually as a thing of little consequence?

Reference is made in the next chapter to the enemies of Jerusalem and to the way they gloated over Jerusalem’s downfall. So we read in 2:15,16 All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.

Christ was treated the same way. Reference is made specifically to those that passed Him by in Mt. 27:39 Listen to that verse and the verses that follow: And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save.

So in answer to Jeremiah’s question Is it nothing? The enemies of Jerusalem certainly wouldn’t have found it to be anything in terms of what Jeremiah was asking. And what Jeremiah was asking was whether or not those that passed by felt any kind of a sympathetic pang in their hearts toward those that had been subjected to such fierce affliction. In that respect it was indeed nothing to those that passed by. Not only was there no sympathy toward the prophet himself or the ruined city in which he sat, so to speak, but on the contrary there was positive antipathy toward the city. There was gloating over the city’s destruction.

And in similar fashion there was gloating over Christ’s destruction. He was scorned and He was mocked and the confidence of His enemies was strengthened for surely had Christ really been the Messiah, as He claimed, there was no way that the Jewish council could have gotten away with nailing Him to a cross. And so in their pride and confidence they challenge Him - If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross (Mt. 27:40).

But where I find the question Is it nothing? to be particularly heart searching is when such a question confronts Christian indifference to the sufferings of Christ. Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Is it nothing to you who treat sin so casually as if it’s no big deal? Is it nothing to you that your sins drove the nails into His hands and feet? Is it nothing to you that such a price had to paid for your salvation? Is it nothing to you that Christ redeemed you through His broken body and shed blood?
Has your heart become so hard toward the sorrows of Christ, who suffered as no man has ever suffered, that you can sin with impunity? Is that why Christ suffered – so you might treat His sufferings with calloused indifference when it comes to how you live? We know that a part of God’s judgment that came upon Jerusalem in the days of Christ was a giving over of the Jews to hard hearts.

Listen to the explanation Christ gives in Mt. 13 as to why He spoke to them in parables: *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people’s heart is waxed gross, (or “grown dull”) and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed.*

There was nothing wrong with their physical seeing and hearing. They heard the words that Christ spoke and they saw the miracles that He performed but their hearts weren’t impacted by the Word of God. And that’s a fear you and I should have for ourselves and for our children. We know, don’t we, that this nation is under judgment. The rise of all manner of perversity and wickedness certainly indicates that in judgment God has given this nation over to its sin. The choice between two candidates for our nation’s highest office that are entirely lacking in character and integrity is a sure indication that our nation is under judgment.

But there’s more to God’s judgment than that. A part of judgment takes the form of giving a people over to hearts that are no longer impacted by the truth of God’s Word or by the sufferings of Christ. If people of such hard hearts were honest they would have to say in answer to the question of our text – *It is nothing to me. It means very little to me that One has suffered as no man has ever suffered.*

I don’t find it nearly so compelling as I use to. It hasn’t driven me to prayer and worship. It doesn’t compel me to pursue holiness the way I know I should. I’m not able to sing the way I once did *That man of Calvary, has won my heart from me, and died to set me free, blessed man of Calvary.*

Let us this morning invite God to search our hearts and if you find yourself in the condition I’ve described as one who would answer the question *Is it nothing to you?* – by saying, *Oh Lord, I must painfully but truly answer that it hasn’t meant nearly enough to me as it should, that One would suffer for me as no man has ever suffered* – Let us confess even that sin and beg God for deliverance from it, for the broken body and shed blood of Christ is sufficient to cover all our sins including the sin of astonishing indifference.

So two things give rise to the question *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?* The condition of awful sorrow gives rise to the question and the matter of astonishing indifference gives rise to the question. It remains for us to consider finally what the proper response to the question should be:

III. Awe-Inspired Remembrance Should be Our Response to the Question
Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? The proper response is to fall on our knees and bow our heads and raise our hands to heaven and proclaim – Oh Lord the sorrows of thy Son who suffered as no man has ever suffered is everything to me. It’s at the core of all I am and all I do and all I refrain from doing. I am lost and undone without the sufferings of thy Son.

We are helpless and hopeless apart from Christ’s atoning death. We are worthy candidates for hell and our hope is entirely in the One who suffered for us as no man suffered. Let us this morning utilize the reasoning process of Paul when he writes in 2Cor. 5:14 that The love of Christ constraineth us.

We thus judge, he goes on to write. In other words we put ourselves through this reasoning process – We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. And we were dead. We come to that conclusion. We were dead spiritually and would be dead eternally were it not for One who died in my place. We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.

And that he died for all – We affirm the truth of it. Blessed and glorious truth that Christ really did come and He died. He died in accordance with God’s plan for the ages. He died in order to accomplish redemption. He died in order to save those that would come to Him and trust in Him. But He did this with a definitive aim in view. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (2Cor. 5:15).

Here’s what it means, then, to us, who pass by the cross this morning. It means that we perceive no greater love than God could possibly show – the sending of His Son to die in our place. It means that we in turn love Him and in that love we live not for unto ourselves – that’s how we use to live. That’s how the natural man lives. That’s how Christ-rejecters live. That’s how they live who show astonishing indifference toward that man who suffered like no man has ever suffered. But for our part, for the part of those who see their need and believe in who Christ is what Christ has done. We come to a different conclusion. We conclude that since we we’re dead and One died in our place, we, in turn live for Him.

This communion feast presents us with a wonderful opportunity this morning. By partaking of these elements you are able to say to Christ – Oh Lord your sorrows mean everything to me. No one has suffered, Lord, the way you have suffered. You are that Man of Sorrows who was wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities. Forgive me, Lord, for astonishing indifference and save me, Lord, from becoming hard in heart. May the remembrance of Christ’s broken body and shed blood be made effectual to my heart this day in such a way that I will follow hard after Christ in the obedience of faith.

Let’s remember Christ along those lines this morning.