In this session we are taking a final look at Jeremiah’s confessions that are scattered and spread throughout Jeremiah chapter 11-20. In the first section where we looked at the confessions we saw how they stand within the prayer and the worship tradition of the Old Testament that Jeremiah’s prayers represent the same kinds of righteous prayers we see other people in the Old Testament presenting. In our last session we talked about how the confessions of Jeremiah are not just the cries of a prophet, but in a sense are an expression of revelation about God’s character as God is responding to the destruction of his people and the judgment that he’s bringing upon them. The confession reflects both God’s anger and God’s grief. We saw how those two emotions mingle with each other.

Jeremiah in a sense has become the word of God not just by the things that he says when he proclaims, “Thus says the Lord,” Jeremiah has become the word of God by his very life and his very person. Andrew Shead talks about this in his book *A Mouth Full of Fire*, one of my favorite books on the theology of the book of Jeremiah and on page 138 of that book Shead makes this statement: “In the life of Jeremiah God’s word his message is made concrete and immediate to those who hear and see it, and in so far as God conveys himself, his character, his will, his inmost thoughts by his word we might say that in the life of his prophet God makes himself present to his people. It is the word of God, not Jeremiah, that we hear when Jeremiah speaks. It is the word of God, not Jeremiah that we see when Jeremiah acts. Jeremiah’s life itself is one great acts of divine self-communication. So, in a sense, Jeremiah as an expression of God’s word prefigures Jesus as the incarnate word of God who in a full way exegetes and explains to us who God is.”
A few pages later on page 141, Shead also says this, “Were Jeremiah simply to stand over against the people and address them from the divine council as God’s emissary, his message could be perfectly understood. However, it turns out that this cannot do justice to the word of God in its particularity. This is because God does not stop loving his people in order to judge them but suffers through their suffering through the suffering of Jeremiah.” We saw that in the last lesson. “Despite Jeremiah relegation to the status of one the nations, God never stops addressing her as bride and daughter, and by refusing to withhold his love the reverse also is allowed to happened we see Jeremiah suffering with God’s own suffering and his rejection by the people that he loves.” And so Jeremiah is, in his confessions and really in his prophetic ministry as a whole, representing God before the people.

I want to remind us that Jeremiah is also representing the people before God, Jeremiah is also representing himself as an individual who is a part of that people before God. We have to understand Jeremiah’s laments and confessions in light of that, the difficulties that Jeremiah is experiencing as a prophet and then through the suffering and the anguish of the people, the prophet is trying to express that to God so that God can understand what his people feel. I saw a cartoon about prayer in the church where a women stands up to pray in the church service and she says this: “Lord I lay before you all of the prayer concerns that have been voiced by the brothers this morning even though most of them sound like whining to me.”

Our reaction is that we look at the prayers of a Jeremiah and it sounds like whining. Jeremiah grow up, what’s up with Jeremiah being the weeping prophet? Is he just a sensitive guy who needs to get over this? Jeremiah is expressing the deep hurt and anger of God in his confessions but he’s also expressing his own deep hurt and the deep hurt of the people as they suffered through the experiences of exile. Jeremiah is a mediator between God and the people. In one direction, in that mediatorial role, Jeremiah is helping the people to see the anger and the hurt
of God. Coming at it from another direction as a mediator Jeremiah is trying to help God see the hurt and suffering of the people. Jeremiah is standing between God and Israel. As we said, a couple of sessions ago that is a dangerous place to be. If you have ever been in a difficult counseling situation where there is a badly fragmented relationship or marriage and are trying to mediate, that is a dangerous place to be. Whatever you say to try to help the husband may offend the wife and whatever your say to help the wife may offend the husband. Everyone wants you to take their side. Jeremiah in a sense is almost in the counseling room with God and Israel. He’s standing between them, so we need to sympathize with Jeremiah and the struggles he’s going through. So let’s think about the confessions as Jeremiah is expressing his own part, and his pain and his own grief towards God. It is a reminder that in ministry, ministry is not a career, ministry is a calling and ministry can often involve some very difficult things.

We have that inclusio in Jeremiah chapter 1 where God says, “I have called you from the womb,” Jeremiah 1:5. Then we have the close or the end of that inclusio with chapter 20:18, “Lord, I wish that I had never been born, I wish I had never come forth from my mothers womb.” Maybe that’s something we need to read to people at the end of seminary graduation. The slogan of some of our seminaries may be at some point, “we’re training people who will wish they had never been born.” Ministry at times can become very toxic.

The difficulty and something we need to be aware of in our own spiritual lives is that as we are trying to help people in their relationship with God we’re going to see things, experience things, go through things that at times will fragment our own relationship with the Lord. We are going to have to work hard at keeping that. Ministry can be a toxic thing. This is a common experience of prophets and messengers of God in the Old Testament. I want to talk about a prime example of this, Moses represents this, in Numbers chapter 11 Moses expresses something that I can imagine if I was the leader of the people of Israel that this might have been my thought at least at one time or another as I was
leading the people through the wilderness. Numbers says, “Moses heard the people weeping through their clans, everyone at the door of his tent and the anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased because they are complaining and griping about not having food and provisions.” And Moses says this to the Lord, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant, and why have I not found favor in your sight that you lay the burden of all of these people on me? Did I deceive all of these people? Did I give them birth that you should say to me carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing child to the land that you swore to give to their fathers?” Lord did I give birth to all these people that now I am responsible for them? And what had happened that Moses in his role of being a deliverer for the people had imperiled in some sense his own relationship with God and there’s a fracture. Lord why did you put this on me?

I remember as we move forward in the story of Moses through chapter 20 and again its one of those situations where the people are complaining about not having water God tells Moses to speak to the rock. Moses strikes the rock and God says because you did this you are not going to be allowed to go into the promise land. I have read that story many times and its one of those times where I’d like to argue with God and say, “Can I stand in on Moses’ behalf? Moses got a raw deal here deal here. Moses had to put up with people who griped and complained and moaned and whined for 40 years and then he hit a rock and your not going to let him go into the promise land? In some sense Moses had improperly displayed to the people what God was like in his own anger. Moses perhaps in some sense has taken glory away from God by striking the rock rather than speaking to it, indicating that he was the one who had brought the water out, but Moses in some sense got a raw deal and it reminds us of the difficulties and toxicity of ministry at times.

In Deuteronomy chapter 3 verse 26 Moses talks to the people and he says, “the Lord was angry with me because of you and that’s the reason I’m not going to be able to go into the promised land.” Now you say, “Well, Moses is just blaming
the people.” In a sense what Moses is saying is right. I think Jeremiah in his confession as he’s pouring out his heart to God he’s saying the same kind of things Moses is saying: “God did I give birth to all these people?”

Ezekiel at the end of Israel’s history says, “Lord why did you appoint us to be the watchmen why did we have to stand on the city walls? We’ve tried to tell the people and they won’t listen to us. God had told Jeremiah you are not to marry or to have children, why, so I can get across a message to people who aren’t going to listen to you anyway? Ezekiel you are going to lose your wife and that’s going to be a sign to the people of the grief they are going to experience and they are going to be too busy to even mourn. Yet I’m going to send that message to the people and they aren’t going to listen any way but I’m going to take your wife away from you.

As they think of those difficulties, and as Jeremiah is dealing with those difficulties, that is a part of why he’s crying out to God in these confessions. “Lord you have been like a deceptive brook to me. Lord you have deceived me and have overpowered me. I didn’t have any choice in the matter, I had to preach your word.

When I think of the difficulties and the people struggling with God in ministry as they try to help lead others to God I’m also reminded of the prophet Elijah. After the great victory on Mount Carmel, the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the fire that comes down from heaven and consumes the sacrifice and the altar, Jezebel in chapter 19 wants to put Elijah to death for putting to death her prophets to Baal. It says out of fear for his life Elijah ran and fled. He goes the length of the land and he comes to the place where he says to God, “Lord take my life I’ve had enough, I’m ready to die.” Well, someone has said if that’s really what Elijah had wanted he could have stayed there and allowed Jezebel to do God’s work for him. But it’s a reminder to us of the struggles of ministry and the realities of ministry. Jeremiah is going through that as well as he’s thrown into cisterns. He’s put into prison as he’s accused of being a traitor as he’s called a liar
as he’s kidnapped and taken away as there are people who say Jeremiah needs to
die as a false prophet because of the things he’s said about God’s house. He’s
living through the days of exile. Jeremiah is expressing the hurt of a Moses or the
hurt of an Elijah, that’s what ministry’s like.

We developed in chapter one that in the time of Jeremiah’s call that in a
sense he is a second Moses. Remember in chapter 1, “but Lord I don’t know how
to speak, I’m but a child. Don’t worry Jeremiah I will put my words within you”
Moses says, “Lord I don’t know how to speak I don’t know what to say I’m not
gifted; I’m not elegant. The Lord says, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll put my words in you.’”
Jeremiah is a second Moses. In the same way that Moses was forbidden to enter
the promise land and he lived primarily with the generation that would experience
God’s judgment those 40 years in the wilderness, Jeremiah is going to end up his
life is going to be spent in its last days outside the land in Egypt in the place where
God had delivered the people in the days of Moses. Just like Moses he would be
part of a generation where all of them but two select individuals would die and not
be allowed to enter in the promise land. Jeremiah says its going to be 70 years
before the exile is over and the return from exile is going to be after I’m dead and
gone. He’s a second Moses and that’s behind these prayers as Jeremiah is
struggling with God.

What I’d like to do is to walk through these prayers where they are in there
context in Jeremiah and just how they reflect the difficulties that Jeremiah is
having with God and with his circumstances. The first prayer chapter 11, verse 18
is: “The Lord made it known to me and I have known that you showed me their
deeds but I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was
against me they devised schemes saying let us destroy the tree with the fruit, let us
cut him off from the land of the living so that his name might be remembered no
more. Lord I didn’t know what I was getting into” I didn’t know that the people
were going to want to put me to death.” So he says to the Lord, verse 20 “O Lord,
of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your
vengeance upon them, for to you I committed my cause.” Lord, I believe that you are just. I didn’t know I was going to have to go through all of this.” So he prays for God to judge the people.

God is going to respond back to him in his confession in verse 21 chapter 11, here is the response of God to the prayer of Jeremiah. He doesn’t say, “Well, Jeremiah you need to love your enemies and forgive them and practice a little more Christian love here. The Lord says this to Jeremiah, “Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life and who say do not prophesy in the name of the Lord or you will die by our hand.” Some of the people who were persecuting Jeremiah were his own family members in the tiny village of Anathoth. “We don’t like your message either.” Therefore, thus says the Lord “I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters will die by famine, and none of them shall be left. For I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.” So here we have Jeremiah says, “Lord, I’m being persecuted; I’m being oppressed. Let me see your vengeance on them.” It turns out that God is announcing judgment on are the very people in Jeremiah’s own home town. Jesus said “a prophet is without honor” the only place a prophet doesn’t get honor is in their own town. And that’s true of Jeremiah as well. God’s going to deal with this problem. The Lord gives him an answer.

However, the next thing we read in the book chapter 12 verse 1 is Jeremiah’s next lament there is nothing in between. We have Jeremiah’s complaint; we have Gods response. But then chapter 12 verse 1 comes right back at God: “Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? You plant them, and they take root; they grow and produce fruit.” Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? I want to know. Someone has suggested that literarily by the second lament coming immediately right after the first lament it almost conveys the sense that Jeremiah’s
gotten an answer from God that the Lord’s going to judge the people.

Jeremiah’s not happy that God is not doing it fast enough. So he wants God to act. So “I know you said you were going to deal with this, do it now.” How long with the land mourn, O Lord, and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away.” Look at what the wickedness of the land is doing to the land itself, God do something about this.

Again, the Lord is going to immediately answer Jeremiah’s prayers. Wouldn’t it be nice if we immediately would get an answer to our prayers but again Jeremiah prays and God answers chapter 11, that’s what’s also going to take place here in verse 5. Here’s his response, “If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? For even the your brothers and the house of your father, even though they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; do not believe them.” The Lord now instead of simply saying look Jeremiah understand I’m going to deal with this problem I’m going to avenge you and deal with the people, the Lord’s going to say back to him, “Jeremiah do you understand what you’re asking? You’re praying for me to help you through this and your circumstances and your situation is unbearable but in a sense in your ministry you’ve been running with men on foot, your about to get into a race with horses, are you going to be able to withstand? The difficulties that you’ve experienced up to this point in your ministry, are nothing compared to what you’re about to experience. Now there is almost a hint of rebuke in what the Lord is saying to him, the first passage I’m in trouble the wicked are evil God’s response he is going to judge them. Immediately the second lament, God your not acting fast enough, wait a minute Jeremiah you don’t know how bad things are going to get.

So we go to the third lament in chapter 15. This is our passage where Jeremiah is going to say in verse 18. This is the verse that in all of these laments that stands out to me: “Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing
to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?” Now we saw a couple of lessons ago that there’s accusatory language toward God in 60 different psalms in the book of Psalms. We saw that Jeremiah’s words in some sense are not that different than what Job says. He doesn’t curse God but he gets awful close. And we wonder here, how close is Jeremiah to crossing the line? I’m not sure I can answer that. God allows the prophet an answer to the prayer but the Lord does respond to the statement with a rebuke to Jeremiah. Here’s what he says in verse 19, “Therefore thus says the Lord: If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them.”

There are a couple of things that I want to notice in that chapter in that verse there is a word of rebuke here a prophet can come to him can vent his frustrations. He can express his accusations. He complained and argued but at this point God steps in and there is a word of rebuke. The word of rebuke that is found there is the word shuv and its prominent that’s the word Jeremiah tells the people all throughout the book. You need to shuv, you need to return; you need to repent; you need to come back to God. Well, what happens here is that in this particular situation God says to the prophet, “you are the one who needs to shuv. If you will return [shuv] then I will restore you. If you return, Jeremiah, it’s ok if you want to come to me and express feeling that I have been a deceitful brook. That’s ok I can handle that but if you stay at this place in your spiritual life; if you stay in this place on this perspective on my calling that I’ve placed before you then you are not going to be able to serve as my messenger. If you want to stand before me as a prophet shuv and come back and realize what I have called you to do.

Then the word shuv is used again at the end of the verse remember Jeremiah’s role he’s standing between the people and God. He’s representing God to the people and the people to God but as a prophet always as it comes down to it he always sides with God rather than the people.

So the Lord says to him, “they shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to
them. In this mediatorial thing you are doing you can’t simply go over to the side of the people and side with them and accuse me of being an empty brook. You ultimately need to continue your ministry so they will turn to you and I will ultimately make you strong, make you like the bronze wall and the fortified wall of bronze. They will fight against you, but I will prevail.” The Lord is going to do the things that he promised to do for Jeremiah in chapter 1

What I want us to understand is that the laments and confessions are an expression in some ways of even the broken relationship between God and the prophet or the relationship that’s about to be broken because of all this covenantal upheaval going on in Jeremiah’s life and times. This is a serious thing. So chapter 15, verse 20, the Lord promises him, “I will make you to these people a fortified wall of bronze they will fight against you but they will not prevail over you, for I am with you, to save you and deliver you,’ declares the Lord.” There’s a promise.

In the first lament chapters 18 to 23 there is an immediate promise the Lord is going to deal with the men of Anathoth that are seeking your life, the Lord knows what’s going on. Chapter 12 Jeremiah comes right back to God this time Jeremiah you’ve run with men, your about to run with horses its going to get worse. Jeremiah 15 another answer from God that is both a rebuke and promise, “Jeremiah you have got to return to me and remember I’ve made some promises I’m going to deliver you. Verse 21 closing out this lament “I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked and I will redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.” Look, I know what your going through. When we come to the prayers that are in chapter 17, and chapters 18 and 20, I want you to notice that there is something missing. First of all chapter 17 verses 14 to 18 says this “Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” Jeremiah in these confessions has not abandoned his faith. He’s not praying out these negative things because he has turned his back. He’s asking God to act in accordance to his covenant in a sense he’s asking because he believes not because he doesn’t believe.

“Behold, they say to me, ‘Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come!’
They’re challenging, “if you say God going to bring judgment let it fall.” “I have not run away from being your shepherd, nor have I desired the day of sickness you know what came out of your lips it was before your face. Be not a terror to me. You are my refuge in the day of disaster. Let those be put to shame who persecute me but me not be put to shame. Let them be dismayed but let me not be dismayed. Bring upon them the day of disaster destroy them with double destruction.” He’s praying for the judgment of the people but what I want us to notice is what he’s saying about God. In one part of this prayer, heal me, save me, deliver me, and you are my praise. In another part of the prayer, Lord you are a terror to me, because of this calling when I represent God to the people and represent the people to God. Here’s the interesting thing in the confession of chapter 17 that isn’t in the three that came before it, we come to verse 18, “bring upon them the day of disaster, destroy them with double destruction.” There is no response from God. The next thing we read is: “Thus says the Lord, go and stand in the Peoples’ Gate. Time to go preach another sermon there is no direct response to the prayer of Jeremiah.

Chapter 18, verses 19 to 23, let me read this lament “Hear me, O Lord, and listen to the voice of my adversaries. Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life.” It is the same thing we’ve seen before. Look at what these people have done to me. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them to turn them away from your wrath. God I did what you wanted me to do I came to shuv them, to help them to turn away from your wrath and to turn back to God.” Therefore deliver up their children to famine give them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widowed.”

All these terrible things are going to come upon them verse 23: “Yet you, O Lord, know all of their plotting to me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.” What do you think God is going to say to that? Just like in chapter 17 there is no direct response to Jeremiah’s prayer. Chapter 19, verse 1,
“Thus says the Lord, ‘Go, buy a potter’s earthenware flask,’’ I’ve got another sermon for you to preach. There is no answer to Jeremiah’s prayer.

Chapter 20, verses 7-8 “O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I am, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.” It’s all about the calling that’s the source of his suffering. He’s not suffering because he disobeyed God; he’s suffering because he obeyed God directly. Jeremiah wants to stop preaching and it looks like is he going to end his ministry.

But then comes to a place in verse 11 here as often happens in the psalms in the midst of lament he expresses his confidence and his trust in the Lord. He says in verse 11, “But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. O Lord of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.” Here he’s confident that God’s going to help him, Lord you’re the warrior that goes out in front of me. You fight my battles. If you’re going into misery knowing that God is going out with you as a dread warrior to fight your battles that’s a good thing to know. Being reminded that the Lord of hosts is the Lord of armies who does what is just and righteous and tests the hearts and minds that is a good thing to know.

For Jeremiah, there is finally this word of praise where we haven’t seen too much of this. Jeremiah says, “Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.” We think great! The relationship between God and the prophet has finally been healed. We’ve got this great word of praise that’s the end of the confessions! However, listen to verse 14, “Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day that my mother bore me, let is let it not be blessed!” Alright, “Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord!” in verse 13. Yet verse 14 is: “Curse the day that I was born.” We are right back to lament in the last words Jeremiah prays in his confessions.” Why did I come out from the
womb to see toil and sorrow and to spend all of my days in shame.” What’s God’s reaction, what’s God’s response and again there is no response by God in chapter 20.

Next thing we read chapter 21, verse 1, this is the word that Jeremiah got from the Lord, time to go preach another sermon. In the last three of the five laments there is no answer from God, no response from God. Have you ever prayed a prayer and not gotten an answer or not gotten a response from God? We all have. Lord why are you silent. There are times we all sense, my prayers have not gone any higher than the ceiling God where are you, Lord where are you. Jeremiah is going through those things. Jeremiah is wondering at times did I make the right vocational choice when he called me. I think God was like a deceptive brook and he overwhelmed me, I made a choice I wish I could have done something else. There has been a fragmented relationship not just between God and the people but the relationship between God and Jeremiah is frayed at the edges as well.

This prayer where Jeremiah is praying for God to save him and is God is going to answer that prayer, absolutely, in chapter 39 and in chapter 40 where the city of Jerusalem is captured and when Jerusalem is destroyed. Jeremiah has been kept in prison and the Babylonians come into town. They are the ones that deliver him out of prison. So Jeremiah is praying for deliverance in chapter 11 and chapter 12, chapter 15, chapter 17, chapter 18, chapter 20, but there is no direct answer to that prayer however until chapter 39. There is a lot of stuff between chapter 20 and chapter 39. There’s going to be prison; there’s going to be accusations; he’s going to be thrown in the dungeon; there’s going to be the reality of the exile; there’s going to be the horrors of an enemy siege; there are going to be false prophets that call Jeremiah a liar; there will be people that stand at the temple and say that he should be put to death; there’s a king name Jehoiakim that wants to kill him and cut up his skull and all of that stuff. “Lord save me and deliver me” is that going to happen? Yes. But will it happen right away? No.
In all of these difficulties and the struggle of ministry there’s some good pastoral theology to work through as we do this. Jeremiah in his confessions is speaking from God to the people, but he’s also speaking from himself as an individual to God. Then finally, the last piece of this as we look at the confessions he’s representing himself before God and all of the unfairness and the injustices. But remember that Jeremiah is also representing the people as a whole. There’s no question he’s on God’s side, he’s God’s messenger, but Jeremiah is a human being. Jeremiah is one of the people. Jeremiah as a human being is going to live through the condition of siege and exile, being a righteous person doesn’t give him an exemption from that.

So sometimes as part of this group of people this nation, that is experiencing God’s wrath and God’s judgment, Jeremiah is going to cry out to God and say, “Lord, I’ve done my job of telling the people what you feel about this. Let me do my job of also telling you what the people are going through as a result of this.” And sometimes we think of the people of Judah at this time and we think they deserved what they got. They worshipped idols, they sacrificed their children, they set up Tophets, they followed after the Baals, they did all of these things. They were hard hearted; they did not listen to the Lord. It said in one place they didn’t even blush when confronted with their sin. They got what they deserved.

But another part of this is that we see the story of this as a graphic tragedy in all of the Bible the destruction of a nation of people and even though they would not repent and even though they would not mourn over their sin they are going to come to a place where they mourn over their suffering. We’ve seen the mourning and the suffering of the prophet for God, let me talk about the weeping of the people throughout the book. Jeremiah is picturing the invasion of the land in chapter 4-6. In chapter 4, verse 31, here’s the weeping and the mourning, here’s what Judah is going to experience as they’re going through this exile. Jeremiah says, “I have heard a cry as of a women in labor, anguish as of one giving birth to
her first child, the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, ‘Woe is me I am fainting before murderers.’” So think about Jerusalem in this way. They are God’s virgin daughter and they are about to give birth to a child and the pains of childbirth is ceasing. The city of Jerusalem we should feel compassion for them. Yes, they are sinners they’re rebels, they’ve broken the covenant but they’re going through a terrible tragedy. So Jeremiah’s weeping often is for what the people themselves are experiencing and going through. He’s expressing that grief to God as much as he’s expressing the Lord’s grief to Israel.

Chapter 6, verse 26, “O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes; make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.” This is going to be a terrible thing. Chapter 8, verses 18-22 is more about the mourning of the people, Jeremiah says, “My joy is gone, grief is upon me my heart is sick within me.” He is talking about God’s anger here in verse 19 he says, “Behold, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land: ‘Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not in her?’” Jeremiah says I’m grieving for the people because they thought God’s in the land, God’s going to save us, and God’s going to protect us. We might look at this and say you know what, they got what they deserved, they’ve presumed on God’s grace but Jeremiah says they were looking for God’s deliverance and it never came. The people say in verse 20, “The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved.” What happened? “For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded; I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.”

Look, these people are grieving over the fact they thought he was going to deliver them. Jeremiah doesn’t laugh at them and say look you got what you deserve because of your bad theology or because of your evil lifestyle. Jeremiah grieves over that. I’m reminded as a pastor that when I talk to people about God’s judgment I need that same heart and that same attitude. Chapter 9, verse 17 describes the degree of Judah’s mourning, the Lord says to the people, “Consider, and call for the mourning women to come; send for the skillful women to come;
let them make haste and raise a wailing over us, that our eyes may run down with
ears and raise a wailing over us, that our eyes may run down with tears and our
eyelids flow with water. For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: ‘How we are
ruined! We are utterly shamed, because we have left the land, because they have
cast down our dwellings.’ They wouldn’t come to a place where they would weep
over their sin but even as sinful rebels they would weep over their exile. Jeremiah
says you know what, as God’s messenger I weep with them. He calls for the
professional mourning women and this was a custom that sometimes in times of
grief or lament people would actually come and they were professionals at this.
It’s time for that in Judah because of the natural disaster and calamity they are
experiencing.

Verse 21 says, “For death has come into our windows; it is entered into our
palaces, it is cutting off the children from the streets and the young men from the
quares and the young men from the squares. Speak: ‘Thus declares the Lord, ‘The
dead bodies of men shall fall like dung on the open field, like sheaves after the
reaper and none will gather them.’” Imagine the dead bodies that are scattered
through the land. What’s the response? Grief. Not simply the idea, well they were
sinners they got what they deserved, Jeremiah is expressing the grief, the sadness,
the mourning, the hurt of the people. He’s presenting that and putting that for God,
so God can be reminded and so God will act in accordance with that.

Now here’s another complicating factor in all of this Jeremiah as he’s
praying, is not simply representing the people as a whole but think about a specific
group of people that are going through the horrors of the exile there are righteous
people in Jerusalem that are going to be affected by the invading army just as
much as the wicked. Now Ezekiel chapter 9 says that before the judgment comes
the Lord goes out into the city with an angel and he puts a mark on the head of
those who mourn over their sin, and who know him. In some sense, there is a kind
of protection here. We see protection in the book of Jeremiah given to people like
Baruch and Jeremiah and Ebed Melek and others who go through the exile and
believe and God says I’m going to preserve your life. That promise wasn’t necessarily true for all of the righteous, there were righteous people who died in the streets of Jerusalem. There were righteous people who died in battle with the Babylonians there were righteous women who lost their sons and daughters, or who perhaps were taken as prisoners of war. What about them?

In a sense the prayer of Jeremiah as he’s praying for God to deliver him as a righteous person are prayers that are being expressed for the righteous people in general. I believe that last function and the last section of the laments of Jeremiah is that these prayers will become models of prayer for the Jewish exiles themselves as they pray for God to deliver them. Jeremiah’s confidence in the Lord that he would deliver them that can be their confidence. Jeremiah’s prayers that the Lord would avenge the wicked who have mistreated him are the prayers of the people in Psalm 137 “O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, blessed are those who take your babies and dash them against the rocks.” They’re praying the prayers of Jeremiah. Psalm 74 and Psalm 79, look at what these people have done to the Lord’s sanctuary and to the Lord’s people, God deal with them. The words that Jeremiah prayed heal me, save me, be a refuge for me, were the words that the exiles themselves could pray. Chapter 30 in the Book of Consolation the Lord is going to heal the wound of the people of Israel. So these are not just Jeremiah’s prayers. As the people are sent away into exile as righteous people suffer injustice themselves they can begin to pray these prayers to God as the exiles begin to seek God with their whole heart how do we come back to him? What do we say? Here’s a model the prayers of Jeremiah himself. The deliverance of Jeremiah as he prayed in chapter 20 and then went through all of the adversity leading to the deliverance that came in chapter 40 it’s a reminder to Israel, you may go through terrible suffering but I will deliver you in the same way that I have delivered my prophet.

A last example of this is I think in many ways in the prayers of Jeremiah we see an echo of them in the prayers of Lamentations. Jewish tradition has attributed
this book to Jeremiah whether Jeremiah’s the author or not I’m not sure that we can be confident about that but as you hear the prayers of Lamentations you hear the echo’s of Jeremiah’s confessions. We acknowledge our sin but Lord look at how much we’ve suffered. It’s time for it to end. Jeremiah prays, “Lord you’re a dread warrior with me, the people say great is your faithfulness, O Lord we know that you are going to deliver us.” Jeremiah’s prayers become a model for the exiles themselves so that they will be able to pray. As they call out to God as they pray for deliverance and the promise is ultimately they will experience deliverance in the same way that Jeremiah has.

We’ve spent some time over the last three sessions on Jeremiah’s confessions looking at them as model prayers, looking at them at revelation of God’s heart for the people, looking at them as reflections of Jeremiah’s struggles in ministry, and then finally looking at them as expressions of what the people can say to God in their difficulty and in their suffering. These are not just prayers that reflect Jeremiah and God they are prayers that represent Jeremiah’s role and standing between God representing God to Israel and representing Israel to God.

Transcribed by Danielle Kunis
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt