

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 4
WEEK OF JUNE 28



Growth Group Summer 2020

No Balm in Gilead?

Week 4 – June 28, 2020 - Jeremiah 7:1-8, 21-26

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

Today’s text takes up the issue of lament. Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet.” We see Jeremiah lamenting, we see the people of Israel lamenting, and we also see God lamenting. Jeremiah is not doing well. Jeremiah joins prophets like Ezekiel and Amos who had also suffered alongside their own people. The people of Judah continue to refuse to listen to Jeremiah’s call to reform their lives.

There is not going to be a harvest to offset the famine that has overtaken the land. There will be no prophets who will be able to bring the people back. The harvest usually lasted from April through June. It began with the wheat being brought in. People knew that if the wheat failed then you had to hope that the grapes, figs and olives would produce. If not, there was going to be a famine. Jeremiah is saying that there will be no harvest. Famine is on the way. There is no hope on the horizon.

We read about Gilead, in Genesis 37:25. It was known for its healing balm or resin and was located on the east side of the Jordan River. If only healing would come. If only there was a physician who could bring help and hope. If only there was healing for the wound of his people. Yet, as Jeremiah looks around, there is no hope to be found. The balm, that is mentioned in Jeremiah 8, will eventually find its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who brings salvation and redemption.

Jeremiah begins to weep. He knows that God is not going to bring restoration. He not only weeps, but we also witness the reality of what he feels. He not only feels sorrow, he wants out! If you look at Jeremiah 9:2, you see him wishing that he had a place in the desert or wilderness to simply get away from what was going to happen to Jerusalem. Jeremiah is burdened by sadness and grief and just wants to get away from it all. Yet, God will not let him go. Jeremiah must continue to proclaim God’s message to a stubborn group of people who refuse to listen.

Note also, that in 8:19 and 9:3, God laments. God asks why have they done this? He laments that they go from one sin to the next and choose not to acknowledge Him. This whole situation not only saddens Jeremiah, it also saddens God.

Lament allows us to acknowledge our frustration and sadness to God. Over forty percent of the Psalms are considered to be lament. It is the prayer language of God’s people in a world that has been fractured by sin. In lament we pray for help and acknowledge our own pain, but we also place our trust in God. We might ask like Jeremiah if there is no balm in Gilead, but deep down we know the truth. There is a balm in Gilead! There is healing and hope found in Jesus Christ.



Exploring the Text

Read Jeremiah 8:18-9:3

¹⁸ You who are my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. ¹⁹ Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: “Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?”

“Why have they aroused my anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?”

²⁰ “The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved.”

²¹ Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. ²² Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

¹ Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. ² Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people.

³ “They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me,” declares the Lord.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) This text helped to form the title of the spiritual, known as “There is a Balm in Gilead.” Do you have a favorite worship song/hymn?
- 2) Share about a time when God or a friend/family member has comforted you.
- 3) What is the significance that the King is no longer in Zion?
- 4) How would you define lament?
- 5) Jeremiah feels an extreme amount of sorrow for the people of Judah. Have you ever felt the kind of lament that he describes? (9:1)
- 6) What do you think of the idea that not only Jeremiah and the people of Judah lament, but so does God. Have you ever thought about the idea that God might lament as well?
- 7) The people of Judah refuse to listen to Jeremiah. Has there ever been a time in your life when you have chosen not to acknowledge the Lord?
- 8) Jeremiah asks, “Is there is no balm in Gilead?” What is this in reference to? What have you found that keeps you hopeful in the midst of adversity?