

Come Follow Me
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Week 43
Jeremiah 30-36, Lamentations

They had been warned time and time again. Since they were delivered out of Egypt with Moses till the last prophet Jeremiah, the children of Israel were told again and again to repent and return to God. They had times of peace and prosperity but in the end they just couldn't stay true and this week we read about their complete overthrow. There was actually 3 times that the Israelites were conquered; first in 605 B.C. Babylon took many of them captive including Daniel the prophet. Then again in 597 B.C. they took many of their leaders captive. Then in 586 B.C. they took the rest and burned the city including the temple. What is interesting is that this last event took place on the 9th of Av. The Jewish calendar is different from the Gregorian calendar that we use today. When they say a date it is always the day first and the month second. For the Jews this was a day of terror. It was on the 9th of Av that the spies returned back to Moses to report that there were giants in the land and that they had no hope of defeating them. On the 9th of Av the temple was destroyed...twice. And a list of other horrible things. Their 9th of Av is to them what 9/11 is to us.

The book of Lamentations is a poetic book written by Jeremiah about their destruction. It is similar to the book of Job or proverbs. But there is an order or theme to this book. There are 5 chapters. Each chapter has 22 verses except for 3 which has 66 verses. What is interesting is that the Hebrew alphabet has 22 characters. And in these chapters each verse begins with the sequential letter of their alphabet. Except chapter five, and chapter 3 repeats it 3 times. These are poems or verses and each chapter has a voice. What I mean by that is each chapter, though written by the same person, is a voice from a different perspective. For example: Chapter one is written a mourning or wailing from the perspective of or the voice of the city. Chapter two: The Lord's voice. Chapter 3: the prophet's voice. Chapter 4: the voice of their possessions. And chapter 5: The voice of the captives. So as you read these chapters you will notice who it is that is speaking and from what perspective they are seeing the events or the destruction of the people and the city, the chosen city.

Now. Instead of reading some of these depressing verses related as mournings or wailings. I'd like to focus on why this happened. I believe that over the hundreds of years these people struggled it was because they didn't understand one principle. I'll illustrate it with a personal story:

The other day I was driving down the canyon from Heber Utah in the middle of the day. As I entered a construction zone I passed a car broken down on the side of the road. As I passed I saw a flash of a young family exiting the car. The spirit said quickly and quietly "Stop and help". The conversation then started in my mind; Was that the spirit that just spoke? I've already passed them, someone else will help. What can I do to help them? I then had this profound statement burn in my heart: "If I knew that God was speaking, I would listen every time!" At that moment I realized I did know when God spoke and that I would indeed listen. I quickly flipped the car around at the next opening and went back to offer assistance to the stranded family.

This thought remained with me for several days. I pondered the power and blessings that come as we do respond to and obey His voice. Some in the church believe that if they keep all the commandments that they will be saved in the Celestial kingdom. This idea is false. The

Children of Israel are a perfect example of this. During all the warnings of the prophets to the Jews that the judgment of God is coming they were keeping the laws of sacrifice. Jeremiah himself was sent to the stocks to be beaten, torched and tormented by the temple president in that day. They were keeping the physical commandments but were rejecting the laws that God was speaking into their hearts. They had become very good at keeping the laws and ignoring God. And this is what led to their destruction. Now I am not saying that we shouldn't keep the commandments and laws. What I am saying is that it is not enough. When we focus on following His voice and obeying His promptings we will find that THEN, our feet are on the path to His promised land. Even though we have a right to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, the spirit of the Lord will only dwell with us when we are keeping the commandments in body and spirit. He will withdraw when we offend him not only with our outward action but more so because of our inward thoughts and desires. If you are daily receiving revelation and promptings of the spirit then you can be sure that you are on the right path. If it has been a while since you have felt the spirit, or the joy of His peace. Then perhaps it's time to do some soul searching as to the contents of your thoughts and desires.

This inward evaluation is essential to our progression and the key to hearing His voice. Doctrine and Covenants 88 says this:

“11 And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your **understandings**;
12 Which **light** proceedeth forth from the presence of God to **fill** the immensity of space—
13 The **light** which is in all things, which giveth **life** to all things, which is the **law** by which all things are governed, even the **power** of God who **sitteth** upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.
14 Now, verily I say unto you, that through the **redemption** which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead.
15 And the **spirit** and the **body** are the **soul** of man.”

I used to believe that when God spoke that the voice I was seeking would come from an outside source. Almost like a tiny angel sitting on my shoulder. Quiet and small, hard to hear. I would often say, “could you speak louder?” This scripture teaches us that the voice which we seek is not heard with the mortal ear, but the voice is felt with the heart because it comes from within. His light which gives us breath and life day to day, which lighteneth our eyes comes from the light of Christ within us. Thus the brighter His light within us the clearer the message is received when He speaks.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says:

“16 Know ye not that ye are the **temple** of God, and *that* the **Spirit** of God dwelleth **in** you?

17 If any man **defile** the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is **holy**, which *temple* ye are.”

This was the problem that the children of Israel faced. They defiled their temple, the building and the body. They no longer would hearken unto the voice of Him who saved them. This is the lesson we can learn as we study the events that destroyed their beautiful promised land. And we must not let that happen to us. If each of us will take those steps to hear His voice and feel of His spirit daily then there is nothing that could come our way that could dissuade us from a righteous cause.

This process is easier said than done. Sure, all we have to do is feel His spirit daily and follow every prompting and whisper with exactness. These practices take time and patience and constant effort. Each of us are at a different spot in our path to returning to Him. Here are some tips I have found that have helped me in this journey.

1st: Each of us has one or more addictions that keep us from God. Large or small these are all stumbling blocks placed in our path in order to keep us from Him. These could be Sugar, shopping, alcohol, drugs, caffeine or cars, or an infinite number of other things that occupy our minds. Your first step is to identify them and come up with a plan to conquer them.

2nd: Find that thing or things that work for you that bring the spirit into your heart. For me it is listening to some of the great speakers in the church. Jeffrey R. Holland, Brad Wilcox, Henry B. Ering, or a host of others that speak with power and conviction. Another thing that helps me to feel the spirit when I can't focus on a talk is I have a playlist of powerful Jesus music that moves my soul and thoughts towards God and Jesus. Whatever your go-tos are, use them daily to keep yourself in-tuned to His voice.

3rd: Identify the 3 voices in your head, learn to recognize them and label them when they speak. John Ponitus in his book "following the light of Christ into His presents teaches about the 3 voices and what they sound like. He says:

"There are three main sources of voices in a healthy mind. The first is the voice of your own mind. You hear yourself think. You talk with yourself, discuss things with yourself, argue with yourself, berate, praise and jabber with yourself all day long. This voice is distinguishable because it is unsure, or in other words it questions things, and is seldom definite or decisive. It almost always asks questions. "What was that?" Who said that? Why did you say that? What does it mean? Do you suppose? what would happen if? I wonder? Even when it is emphatic it leaves open the possibility of change. "I'm definitely going to bed now-okay? "I'm going into town-if the car will start" you will notice that this voice usually take the persal case"I think I should fast today" the Holy spirit would have said" fast today."

The second voice comes from Satan's realm. These beings have been in the business of tempting mankind as long as the earth has existed. They are very skilled and highly motivated. Each has probably tempted thousands of people like us. They know the subtleties of and tricks necessary to entice and trick us into failing; they undoubtedly specialize in their work.

When you hear the voice from this source, it will be cleverly disguised and enticing. It will appeal to the natural man, carnal, sensual and devilish side of us. There is real intelligence in the message and malice aforethought. They plan and plot against us, and their messages are carefully chosen.

The adversary tries to smother the voice [of the Holy Spirit] with a multitude of loud, persistent, persuasive, and appealing voices. A prompt from this source will nearly always be stated as an absolute. "Don't let him get away with that. You're too tired to pray. You deserve better. No one will notice. It should be your anyway-just take it. She's your wife-not your mother.

Football only happens once a year. The church can get along with you for one Sunday. She wants you—it's only natural. He loves you more than your husband, how can you not love him back?

These promptings will always lead us away from the truth. They prompt us to disobey, to not pray, to abandon church assignments and family responsibilities. To commit sin and walk in forbidden paths. They do not limit themselves to voices alone. They can draw from the trash stored in our minds and dredge up memories that will lure us away from purity and virtue or keep our minds harrowed up with vivid memories of our sins—even after we have repented of them.

The evil ones can not read our minds or hear our silent prayers. Yet it seems they hear what the Holy Spirit says to us. For they respond immediately. When The Holy Spirit prompts, “say your prayers,” you immediately hear something like “don't say prayers, you're too tired”

They can not force us to do anything, unless we yield to them. And they value our inability to see them. They can tell when a temptation excites or repels us. They are most successful in half-light, half-truths, and half-hearted people. Their tools are limited, but they use them with great effect.

They are engaged in an all-out war against us. Our perspective barely includes a realization they exist. And certainly no thought of a war with them. It is no wonder they win so frequently. Yielding to the enticings of Satan's minions will have the opposite effect of yielding to the enticings of the Holy Spirit. Anytime we receive a prompting to do wrong, or disobey it comes from Satan's realm.

One of their weaknesses is that they can rarely voice just one lie. While the Holy Spirit generally prompts us only once. The tempters often voice many objections to each prompting. The Holy Spirit may prompt us to call everyone to family prayers, thereafter; the evil ones suggest many reasons why we should not obey “everyone is tired. They will complain. You don't feel like it. The wife is already in bed. It's late, it's useless. You can do it tomorrow.” This is actually one of the ways we may discern the voices. The Holy Spirit whispers truth, and thereafter the opposition tirades against it.

The third source of information in our minds is the voice of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. It begins as the conscience. In its most rudimentary stages it is a quiet urging to choose right, to abandon wrong choices and to seek greater truth. This voice grows in content and quality as one heeds its direction until it becomes a significant guide and measure of truth.

This voice always entices us to do good, to believe, serve, pray, and repent. It often prompts contrary to where you were headed. If you were just settling into the Super Bowl on Sunday morning, it would tell you to go to church. If you were already on your way to church, it would prompt nothing. But would give a feeling of comfort and satisfaction.

The voice of the conscience is easy to recognize because it is the only one of the three that prompts to do good. These promptings come as absolute statements. The Holy Spirit would say, “fast today”, your mind would have said “I wonder if I should fast today,” or “perhaps I should fast today.” Any time you have a prompting to do good, it has come from God. “

(Following the Light of Christ into His Presents, by John Pontius; pages 37-40)

I love how I feel when I read or hear Gospel truths taught in a way that I can see and apply to my life. These truths can change the course of our lives if we ponder them often and constantly seek for His help as we strive to change and become more as He would have us be. I pray that the Spirit of the Lord will be with you, and that you might hear and heed His words.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, Amen.