

THE CHURCH IS THE FAMILY OF GOD

Jesus revealed that God's family is superior to all the families of the earth, including His own natural kinsmen. The Gospel of Mark records:

"And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:31-35).

While our family members may or may not be Christians, one thing we know for sure is that any individual may be part of God's family. Jesus states, *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). Simply because those in our family may not obey the gospel, does not mean that we should not, once we learn the truth. In fact, God may use you to teach them. Why is God's family superior to all others? The family of God is superior to every other family, including the one Jesus had, because it is immense, exclusive, and everlasting.

First, Jesus describes the immensity of the blessings in God's family when he states, *"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life"* (Mark 10:29-30). What family on earth can boast such? How long would it take for the natural family on earth to accumulate hundreds of brothers, sisters, and mothers? Sometimes we see pictures of five generations within one family, but even in those families there are not hundreds of mothers, sisters, and brothers. Ponder what Jesus is saying. Did you know that you may become a part of God's immense family in one day? God is able to do what no group of men and women could ever do in a hundred years! As Jesus states, *"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."*

Second, God's family is superior, because it is only one of its kind. It is exclusive. We live in a world that frowns on any one church claiming to be God's exclusive family, but this is exactly what the Bible teaches. Catholicism and Protestant Denominations developed 600 to 1500 years later than the church of Christ (Romans 16:16). Notice in the following passage how men's opinion's of Jesus' identity in His day was as confusing then as all the different churches scattered across America are today: *"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:13-18). What Jesus wanted His disciples to know is that God's word is right and not the opinions of men. Friend, the Bible teaches that Jesus built only one church nearly 2,000

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

- Text: _____
- I. It _____ Amazement
- A. Amazed at its _____
- B. Amazed at its _____
- II. It _____ Strength
- A. Strong in _____
- B. Strong in _____
- C. Strong in _____
- III. It _____ You and Me
- A. We're Included in _____
- B. We're Included in _____
- C. We're Included in _____

EMOTION OVER THE INIQUITOUS

- Text: _____
- I. The _____ of _____
- A. Jerusalem's _____
- B. Jerusalem's _____
- II. The _____ of _____
- A. The _____ of God's _____
- B. The _____ of God's _____
- III. The _____ of _____
- A. It was too _____ to _____
- B. It was too _____ to _____
- C. It was too _____ to _____
- IV. The _____ of _____
- A. Judah's _____
- B. Judah's _____
- V. The _____ of _____
- A. The _____ of the _____
- B. The _____ of the _____

years ago. Around A.D. 30 Jesus said, “*my church*” (Matthew 16:18). The Apostle Paul says, “*There is one body, the church*” (Ephesians 4:4; cf. Colossians 1:18). Don’t you want to be part of God’s immense and exclusive family? Don’t you want your family members to be a part of it, too? The reason I ask is because every family on earth, besides God’s family, will not last forever.

Third, God’s family is everlasting, but my family, and your family is not. How do I know this? Because Jesus says no one will be married in heaven. When people in His day assumed marriage would be in Heaven, He told them, “*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven*” (Matthew 22:29-30). When Jesus returns, then all the members of His church will go to live in Heaven with him forever as children of God (John 14:1-6). If you recall from Mark 10:29-30 above, Jesus said “persecutions” would accompany those blessed with a hundredfold of mothers, sisters, and brothers. It may be that your family will not understand until you can teach them the truth about God’s one church. If you don’t who will? You may be treated differently, or made to feel badly, because you understand the Bible and want to become a child in God’s family. Notice how Jesus demands that we choose Him over our families if such a tragic situation occurs: “*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*” (Matthew 10:34-47). Would Jesus tell us to do something that ultimately was not in our best interest? No, He would not. Jesus is telling us to put God first. He says, “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...*” (Matthew 6:33). If you would like to become a part of God’s family, and you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then repent of your sins, confess Jesus before witnesses, and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32-33; Acts 2:38). Then get ready to meet all of your new brothers, sisters, and mothers in God’s family—the church of Christ!

-Scott Perry

THE BOOK OF GREAT LAMENT

With Jeremiah's depiction as "the weeping prophet," is his book of lamentations. In fact in English Bibles the title given to it is "The Lamentations of Jeremiah." In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures) this preface was given along with the title "Tears of Jeremiah": "And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with lamentation over Jerusalem." As the book of Jeremiah pictures, he wept over Judah's continual submission to sin, the extent of that sin, and the consequences that would come as the result of their iniquity. Wherein the book of Jeremiah deals mostly with biographical history of Judah's apostasy and exile in addition to Jeremiah's prophetic work among them, Lamentations is written mainly from the standpoint of Judah's current state as they are in exile and separated from their God. It was written after the final carrying away and the destruction of Jerusalem, probably between 586-583 B. C.

There is no internal reference to whom the author of this book is, but many evidences and testimonies point to Jeremiah as the obvious choice. Of course, the first piece would be the strong connection of emotion between Jeremiah's prophetic book and Lamentations in addition to the fact that they discuss the same events and were written in the same period. However, included would be the fact that "Jewish tradition, as far back as we can go, ascribes the authorship to him" (J. Sidlow Baxter). A final great explanation was provided by Stan Crowley when he wrote:

"Perhaps the strongest repudiation of the suggestion of another author or other authors is the challenge of "Who else?" What other known or inferred historical figure but Jeremiah would have felt such strong personal affiliation with and sympathy for Jerusalem that would have been poured forth with such sorrow, lament, and motion? So intimately is his own spirit identified with the afflictions of the nation that in some verses it is difficult to determine if it is the prophet himself or the nation personified that is speaking. C.J. Ellicott states, "There is absolutely no other writer living at the time to whom it can be ascribed with the slightest shadow of probability."

The book itself is described as "poems of grief over the destruction of the city and the captivity of the Jews" (Dunn). It has a similar structure in the original Hebrew language as that of Psalm 119, which is comprised of twenty-two equal sections of eight verses each. Each of those "stanzas" begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in ascending order through that alphabet. Similarly, the book of Lamentations has been described in the following way:

"Lamentations differs in that chapters 1, 2, and 4 are written in acrostic form using the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in succession—verse 1 begins with *aleph*, verse 2 begins with *beth*, etc. Thus, chapters 1, 2, and 4 contain 22 verses each (chapter 5 also contains 22 verses but in irregular arrangement). However, chapter 3 contains the style in triplicate, so there are 66 verses in the chapter" (Todd Clippard).

Each chapter of the book contains an individual, unique lamentation with a special emphasis. Dunn divided them up as:

1. Chapter 1—the **way** of wickedness;
2. Chapter 2—the **wrath** of God;
3. Chapter 3—the **weight** of sorrow;
4. Chapter 4—the **want** of help;
5. Chapter 5—the **wreck** of iniquity.

Obviously, though, the central theme of Lamentations is the same as the central theme of the Old Testament and that is the Messiah to come. He is pictured in Lamentations as Jeremiah who weeps over the city, for six centuries later, it was Christ who wept over the same city in an equally emotional way: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gather thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*" The people, in general, has gotten no better as accepting God's will over the centuries that divided them, and thus as He prophesied in Matthew 24, they received the same end—destruction.

The book of Lamentations is a much neglected book, many times lost amongst the size of the other of the major prophetic books. However, its message is still pertinent today as Christians, like Jeremiah, weep over the state of their brethren, nationally and spiritually.