

Cry Out In Remembrance

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Date: 27 September 2020

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[0 : 00] Good morning to all of you. Good to see a few more people in the hall today and also good morning to those who are joining us online. Again, if you are new or you're joining us for the first time, my name is Brian. I serve as the pastor of this church.

Over the last two weeks, we have been spending time in this book of Lamentations and today we're going to finish off in chapter 4 and 5. If you've missed any of the sermons from the last couple of weeks, they're also available online and I'll encourage you to listen to them as that will help you to make more sense actually of today's sermon.

So if you listen to today's sermon and you think, oh, that doesn't make sense, go back and listen to some of the previous sermons and then hopefully that would help you to make sense. But let us now turn to the scriptures and we're going to read Lamentations chapter 4 and 5 this morning.

Lamentations chapter 4. How the gold has lost its luster. The fine gold become dull. The sacred gems are scattered at every street corner.

How the precious children of Zion, once worth their way in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands.

[1 : 25] Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young. But my people have become heartless, like ostriches in the desert. Because of thirst, the infant's tongue sticks to the roof of its mouth.

The children beg for bread, but no one gives it to them. Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets.

Those brought up in royal purple now lie on ash heaps. The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her.

Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk. Their bodies more ruddy than rubies. Their appearance like lapis lazuli.

But now they are blacker than soot. They are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones. It has become as dry as a stick.

[2 : 28] Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine. Wrecked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from their field.

With their own hands, compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.

The Lord has given full vent to his wrath. He has poured out his fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion that consumed her foundations.

The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the peoples of the world, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem. But it happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed within her the blood of the righteous.

Now they grope through the streets as if they were blind. They are so devout with blood that no one dares to touch their garments. Go away! You are unclean!

[3 : 42] People cry to them. Away! Away! Don't touch us! When they flee and wander about, people among the nations say, they can stay here no longer.

The Lord himself has scattered them. He no longer watches over them. The priests are shown no honour, the elders no favour.

Moreover, our eyes fail, looking in vain for help. From our towers we watch for a nation that could not save us. People stalk us at every step, so we could not walk in our streets.

Our end was near, our days were numbered, for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the sky. They chased us over the mountains and lay in wait for us in the desert.

The Lord's anointed, our very live breath, was caught in their traps. We thought that under his shadow, we would live among the nations.

[4 : 50] Rejoice and be glad, daughter Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup will be passed.

You will be drunk and stripped naked. Your punishment will end, daughter Zion. He will not prolong your exile. But he will punish your sin, daughter Edom, and expose your wickedness.

Remember, Lord, what has happened to us. Look and see our disgrace. Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.

We have become fatherless. Our mothers are widows. We must buy the water we drink. Our wood can be only had at a price. Those who pursue us are at our heels.

We are weary and find no rest. We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread. Our ancestors sin and are no more, and we bear their punishment.

[6 : 00] Slaves rule over us, and there is no one to free us from their hands. We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.

Our skin is hot as an oven. We are weary and feverish from hunger. Women have been violated in Zion and virgins in the towns of Judah. Princes have been hung up by their hands.

Elders are shown no respect. Young men twirl at the milestones. Boys stagger under loads of wood. The elders are gone from the city gate.

The young men have stopped their music. Joy is gone from our hearts. Our dancing has turned to mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned.

Because of this, our hearts are faint. Because of these things, our eyes grow dim. For Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling all over it.

[7 : 03] You, Lord, reign forever. Your throne endures from generation to generation. Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return. Renew our days as of old. Unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

This is the word of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, I just pray now that as we keep your word open before us, as we allow your word to marinate in our hearts, to soak in into our souls, we pray, Lord, that you would indeed please let your word do its work.

Indeed, that you would point our hearts in the right direction, in the direction of you, our living God, and not away from you. That we might truly listen and truly act on what you want to say to us.

And so, Father, will you again fix our gaze on you? And will you help me to preach with clarity and with faithfulness? In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.

[8 : 29] Amen. Now, it has been said that there are three ways in which we can read the Bible. We can read it as an airbrush reflection in which we simply let the Bible mirror back to us our own preconceptions and prejudices.

We pick verses and read into them what we already believe. Or, we can read it like an x-ray. We analyze the text, we discuss the text, we dissect the text the way a doctor scrutinizes an x-ray. But we never ever see the person behind the text. You know, we never even see the face. Or, and this should be the way we read our Bibles, we can read it like a spotlight.

We don't ignore the text, but we read it in such a way that it shines a light and helps us see the person who is spotlighted. In other words, we should read the Bible in such a way that it helps us to come face to face with our God, to know Him, His character, and His actions.

And one of the benefits of going through Lamentations is that this book makes it difficult for us to read the Bible like an airbrush reflection or an x-ray.

[9 : 43] It's difficult for us to read it like a reflection because Lamentations forces us to see ourselves in ways that we would normally prefer to ignore or disregard.

It challenges our assumptions about ourselves throughout. And it's difficult to read it like an x-ray simply because it's almost overwhelming in its emotional language.

Lamentations refuses to let us observe things dispassionately from a distance, but sweeps us into its world and asks us to feel, feel the pain, take it personally, hope against hope.

Indeed, Lamentations relentlessly shines the spotlight on our God. It forces us to come face to face with a God who is more holy, more majestic, more startling than we could ever imagine.

Lamentations forces us to face up to a God who is gracious and compassionate and yet who does not leave the guilty unpunished. Lamentations helps us understand who the God of Exodus 34

verses 6 and 7 is.

[11:01] But we don't just read the Bible as a spotlight. We also read the Bible as if it's personal correspondence. By that, I don't mean that we read the Bible as if it's a personalized message for you and you alone and no one else.

What I mean is that we read the Bible as coming from a person whom you and I have a relationship with and whose message to us now invites a response.

But how are we to respond to an Exodus 34 verses 6 and 7 God? When we hit the reply button, what should follow next? Well, Lamentations 4 and 5 is here to help us today in that regard.

They will help us respond to the God of Exodus 34 verses 6 and 7. Now, how we respond to certain correspondence can sometimes depend on which grouping we fall into.

So, for example, just imagine that you receive a letter from the Inland Revenue Board. In this letter, there's a stern warning against tax evasion along with a list of the stiff penalties that you will face should you be found guilty of such an offence.

[12:22] Now, how would you respond? If you are indeed guilty of tax evasion, then in theory at least you should be worried.

You'll respond in fear. But if you are a law-abiding citizen, then you wouldn't be worried at all. It all depends on which group you fall into.

And so God has in mind today two groupings. On the one hand, he has a word for the complacent. That's Lamentations 4. On the other hand, he also has a word for the convicted.

And that's Lamentations 5. And Lamentations 4 is a warning. It's there to tell us if you are complacent and if you are happy to stay in that state, then get ready to cry out in terror.

But Lamentations 5 tells us if you become convicted by Lamentations 4, if you are willing to listen, then here's what you can do.

[13:30] Cry out in remembrance. You can either cry out in terror or cry out in remembrance. And so which way will you respond?

Well, if your Bibles are closed, then do make sure that they're open in front of you to hear God's word to us. So first of all, a word to the complacent.

And God says, if you stay complacent, you will cry out in terror. Why? Because degeneration and disgrace are your lot.

Degeneration and disgrace are your lot. That's the consistent thread that we find throughout this chapter. Now think about how God's people are normally described in the Old Testament.

They are God's treasured possession. They are his firstborn. They are his beloved bride. They are as precious as the sacred gems that you would find on the breastplate of the high priest.

[14:40] So valuable and precious are God's people. The poet says in verse 2 that they are worth their weight in gold. But now, verse 1, how the gold has lost its luster the fine gold become dull.

The sacred gems are scattered at every street corner. They no longer shine. The fact that gold in reality cannot actually become tarnished only makes this image even more striking.

It highlights just how far they've gone. That the people who could call God their father and their husband can now be so spiritually tarnished.

Once they were fine gold, now they are broken pottery. Now, whenever archaeologists stumble upon the ancient equivalent of our rubbish dumps, that's what they inevitably find.

Crack jars of clay, tossed aside, treated as garbage. Well, that's how much the people of God has degenerated, and that's how much the gold has degenerated.

[15:56] At the end of verse 2, the poet highlights the irony. Israel was originally the work of the divine potter's hands, lovingly crafted, tenderly shaped.

But thanks to their sin, what was once precious has now become worthless. They are simply like broken pots of clay, the work of an inferior human potter.

Sin's degenerative effects are formidable indeed. Well, so far, that's gold. But what happens when it's human beings themselves who degenerate?

Well, that's what the poet has been preparing us for. That's what he's going to show us next. You see, what are human beings? We are the works of the potter's hands.

We alone are made in the image of God to rule over creation. We're at the top of the hierarchy of creation, below only God. We are like royalty. And when we're doing well, we look good.

[17:06] Look at verse 7. Their princesses were brighter than snow and whiter than milk. Their bodies more ruddy than rubies. Their appearance like lapis lazuli.

But watch what happens when sin enters the system. The pure and healthy skin now become as black as soot. Verse 8. The bones stick out like malnourished children.

The skin dries out like leather. Those who were once compared to precious jewels, that's what lapis lapusi is, is now compared to worthless wood.

We become unrecognisable. For the result of judgment falling is increasing famine, because we gave in when sin came calling.

It's so bad that a speedy death by sword, verse 9, is preferable to slowly wasting away from hunger. And this physical degeneration is actually indicative of something worse.

[18 : 14] It's indicative of what's actually happening to the people on the inside. We're meant to be better than animals. We're supposed to be ruling over them.

But look what happens, look what we're reduced to. Verse 3. Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young, but my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert.

You see, jackals are detestable creatures in the Old Testament, but even they nourish their young ones. But now God's people are like ostriches, animals that abandon their young, it was believed.

Verse 4 shows us the plight of these children. They were hungry and thirsty, but not even their own parents will give them food or water.

And these images of dehumanisation reach their bottom in verse 10. It is absolutely shocking. The children aren't just being given no food, they have become the food themselves.

[19 : 25] The poet makes clear that the people feeding on them are not horrible, insane monsters. These are ordinary mothers. people who are normally compassionate women.

But in these conditions, they did the unthinkable. The carers became cannibals. But here's the thing.

God had already warned that this would be what happened should Israel decide that they know better than God. Back in Deuteronomy 28, verses 56 to 57, we read this, it should be on the screen.

The most gentle and sensitive woman among you, so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot, will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter, the afterbirth from her womb, and the children she bears.

for in her dire need she intends to eat them secretly because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of your cities.

[20 : 36] It's shocking, isn't it? You see, this is God's word to the complacent. If you aren't willing to take God seriously, if you aren't willing to take sin seriously, well, this is the end result.

Sin deforms you and I into something less than human. In the words of verse 3, you become heartless. This is the corrosive effect of sin.

Most of us are used to thinking of sin as a failure to keep the law. And we understand that law-breaking leads to punishment. And that is certainly one way the Bible describes sin and its consequences.

But here is another less familiar way that the Bible describes it. Sin is a failure to live up to what we're meant to be.

We're meant to be images of God reflecting his character. But when we fail to live up to that role, when we fall short of the glory of God, what happens?

[21 : 43] We become less than authentically human. Abdication leads to degeneration. Instead of ruling over the animals, we become worse than them.

And so here's a favorite lie of the devil. He will whisper to you, you know, if you follow God, if you live for him, if you take him seriously, you're denying yourself lots and lots of freedom.

You're denying what will make you feel most human, most alive. But actually, it's the opposite. It is when we give in to sin, that we actually become less human.

And it is when we follow Jesus, the very image of God himself, and yet one who was also 100% human, that we become truly human.

We are living as we are made to be. And think, for example, what happens when we get sinfully angry. Think of how we lose control, we get irrational, we harden ourselves.

[22 : 56] Think of how we become more like a grizzly bear or a ferocious wolf, you know, an animal rather than a human. When we're sinfully angry, we often treat people not as people, but as obstacles.

We treat them as less than human. But when we do, we ourselves become inhumane. You know, God has turned us over to the dehumanizing effects of our sin.

Or think of when we get addicted to something bad like alcohol or pornography. Again, under the influence, we end up treating people not as people, but as objects and are led to behave in ways that are anti-relational.

And this in turn leads us to be like the people here in Lamentations 4, consuming others, becoming less than what God means for us to be, and having a degenerative effect on human society as a whole.

You see, this is where sin leads us to. And in turn, it leads us to disgrace. That's another major note sounded throughout this chapter.

[24 : 14] Look closely and you will notice that the word streets is repeated in verses 1, 5, 8, 14, and 17.

It's as if the degeneration of the people are put on public display in the streets to their shame. We've already seen in verses 7 to 8 how the princes turn from white to black.

They can't hide. They are disfigurement. But let's look to verses 11 and 12. The Lord has given full vent to his wrath.

He has poured out his fierce anger. He kindled the fire in Zion that consumed her foundations. The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the peoples of the world that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem.

God's people had for many, many, many years believed that Jerusalem was invulnerable. They boasted India's special status. God will protect us.

[25 : 25] Haven't we seen wave after wave of attack even from the Assyrians who were the superpower before Babylon and we survived? But pride comes before a fall.

And what a public fall it is. It happened. And everyone from pagan kings to the ordinary men and women in the streets are amazed as they watch Jerusalem burn.

No one can miss the thick smoke. No one can ignore the fact that the temple no longer stands. As Jeremiah 51 puts it, we are disgraced for we have been insulted and shame covers our faces because foreigners have entered the holy places of the Lord's house.

And no one can miss the shame of their prophets and priests. Verse 14. Now they grope through the streets as if they were blind.

they are so defiled with blood that no one dares touches their garments. They are ritually unclean.

So much so that it's not just God's people who shout at them to get away.

[26 : 45] But verse 15, even the unclean, unbelieving nations tell them to go away. You can't stay here any longer.

Their disgrace is complete. You see, that's what happens when we decide that God's way is not for us. We are put to shame.

So whatever you choose that doesn't come from God will inevitably pull you down in the end, even if it promises to exult and lift you up.

In the Old Testament, the psalm is frequently caused for God's enemies to receive shame as punishment. But if we are God's enemies, that is our lot as well.

Shame is a horrible feeling, isn't it? It's that pain we feel as if there's something wrong with ourselves. It's that sense of feeling naked, exposed, despised, as if all life is sucked out of us, and we just want to hide and disappear.

[27 : 57] It is that sense of exclusion when we want most of all to be included, and yet knowing that sense of exclusion to actually be justified.

This is God's warning, word of warning to the complacent. This is where we find ourselves if we ignore God. But now God gets more specific.

It seems to me that although this word of warning is for everyone, it is especially for the leaders here. Notice how particular attention is paid to them in verse 13.

All this happened, God declared, because of the sin of her prophets and priests. Down in verse 16, it is the priests and the elders who bear the brunt of the punishment.

The poet of course doesn't mean to excuse all God's people. That is made clear throughout lamentations. For instance, in 1 verse 8, where he declares Jerusalem has sinned greatly.

[29 : 06] But leaders especially will be held accountable. After all, by their very position, they exercise more influence. And look at the two ways that the leaders of Jerusalem have been complacent.

Firstly, by their perverted practices. Look again at verse 13. They are guilty of shedding the blood of the righteous.

Of all people, the priests and the prophets are the ones who should be holding up before the people the paths of righteousness. They should have been highlighting the beauty of righteousness, forgiveness. But they did the exact opposite. What they did could very well be literal. They might very well have ordered the murder of those whom they didn't like.

It's not beyond the imagination. Jeremiah himself was the victim of violence. But, and this is quite sobering, as one commentator puts it, it may also refer to the fact that their sinful policies and their lack of positive guidance towards repentance and restoration of the relationship with God resulted in the fall to Babylon.

[30 : 31] They might not have literally murdered, but their passivity, their lack of zeal, their very complacency, and willingness to tolerate what was wrong was just as bad.

And secondly, notice how they were complacent through their false faith. In verse 17, they looked in vain for help, most likely to Egypt, whom they had a political alliance with.

That's who they put their hope in. But Egypt never came. In verse 20, they presume that having the Lord's anointed, the king from David's line, meant an unconditional guarantee of protection.

But that was wrong too. And so what is God saying? God is saying leaders who abdicate their responsibilities and abuse the flock instead will be judged strictly.

Now, when we hear the word abuse, we often think that it refers to some kind of violent event. But abuse is broader than that. In its most basic form, it is basically using someone or something wrongly to satisfy your own ends.

[31 : 59] sadly, over the past few years, stories have come out of some famous pastors and ministries where abuse of power did occur.

These are often people whose doctrine was fine on paper, whose preaching truly benefited many, whose ministries even changed lives. I have personally sat under the teaching of one of these pastors at the camp once.

And one common theme of these stories, is that the leaders who engage in such behaviour often sincerely believe and justify their behaviour because they saw it as advancing the kingdom of God. And so they might make very unreasonable demands of their staff or manipulate relationships to get their way or create unhealthy dependency on them in the name of making disciples of Jesus Christ. The ends justified the means. But sadly, although they are not literally shedding blood, they are certainly causing damage to the spiritual lives of people.

[33 : 15] Now, none of us who are leaders today would even dream that we could be abusers. but it is good to check ourselves. Are we using people to serve our own ends, even if we believe those ends to be good?

And if we are not leaders today, it's still good to check. Is there any point where the leadership culture is trending in an unhealthy way? A classmate of mine at Bible College has developed these three ways to check ourselves, especially if we are leaders.

Number one, ask, does it pass the HWJDI test? Does it pass the how would Jesus do it test?

In other words, are we behaving as Jesus behaves and not merely using his words? Jesus is holy and yet gentle.

Jesus always told the truth, but he doesn't crush the vulnerable with the truth. Is that us? Number two, remind yourselves of the commands of the episodes for how we are to relate to one another.

[34 : 35] Remember the character requirements of leaders in the pastoral episodes in 1 and 2 Timothy and remind ourselves of the fruit of the spirit. Do we line up with those expectations?

And number three, get some outside perspective from a godly, trusted source. And if we are leaders ourselves, could someone help us spot our blind spots in our relational patterns?

And so don't get complacent. And if we are leaders, then remember this too. Leaders who ally themselves with worldly values will be strictly judged.

The leaders of Jerusalem led the people to put their hope in things other than God, in this case in Egypt. And that can be a danger for us as well.

If as leaders, we get more excited about political solutions than the word of God, if we only lead our people to see the sins of others and not the sin in ourselves, if we think that programs without prayer changes people, well, people pick that up.

[35 : 51] They'll get excited about the things that we get excited about and indifferent to the things we're indifferent about. And so if we're excited about something other than God and indifferent to God himself and his word, well, we're teaching people not to put their hope in God.

And so make sure the values we live by are not worldly ones. But Lamentations 4 is not just a word to leaders, although it has some pointed applications for them.

It is a word to the church as a whole. And Lamentations 4 asks us, are we being presumptuous? Jerusalem thought that they would never suffer the effects of God's wrath.

wrath. How wrong they were. And similarly, in verse 21, Edom, who are Jerusalem's historic enemies, thought that they too would never suffer the effects of God's wrath as they laugh at Jerusalem's current plight.

And how wrong they are going to be as well. They too are going to fall. Well, what about us? Does our church presume on our past?

[37 : 10] Look at the number of churches we've planted, look at the number of disciples we've made, look at the past blessing we enjoyed. Do we presume in such a way so as to that we find it easy to excuse any indifference to God himself, to excuse any laziness to seek God's glory, to excuse any unresponsiveness to God's call to return to him with our heart and mind and soul?

Well, God says, be careful. I've warned you about the destructiveness and the seriousness of sin in Lamentations 1 to 3 and now I'm warning you about the repercussions of sin.

This is a word to the complacent. But what have we been hearing Lamentations 4 and the Holy Spirit has been convicting us?

What if we are ready to accept God's assessment of us? What then? Well, thank God he has another word and this time he has a word for the convicted.

A word for the convicted. If that's you, he says, well, this is what you can do. Cry out in remembrance. When we come to Lamentations 5, we find many familiar themes.

[38 : 33] Once again, there's plenty of talk of reversals. The effects of judgment are shown again. There is economic deprivation, there is social shame.

You probably feel a little exhausted encountering all these once more. Isn't it enough? You might want to tell the poet. Ah, but there is a difference.

The themes are familiar, but the context is different. In Lamentations 4, did you notice that God is never addressed directly? Not even once.

But Lamentations 5 is basically one long, heartfelt prayer. And that's what sets chapter 5 apart. The poet is no longer speaking as an onlooker or as a sufferer, but as a prayer warrior.

And there are three basic pleas that he makes. Lord remember, that's verse 1. And then Lord reign, that's verse 19.

[39 : 40] And then Lord restore, that's verse 21. So let's begin exploring this prayer. See our disgrace, the poet says.

We have become strangers in our own land, verse 2. We have lost our families and our economic independence, verses 3 and 4. We are still being threatened, verse 5.

And we have to bear humiliation, verse 8. We understand that we are under the hand of your discipline, verse 7. I won't go into any more detail, because I know that by this stage, you get the idea.

But here's the incredible thing. The poet isn't just crying out, he's crying out to God about all these things.

And God invites us to do the same. Lament feels deeply uncomfortable to us. Perhaps we think that lamenting shows a lack of faith.

[40 : 46] It sounds like we are complaining to God. Or perhaps we are by nature non-confrontational, and so to lament sounds like we're confronting God and disrespecting him.

But if we are truly feeling the weight of both our sin and our suffering, to not groan is to be dishonest.

When we don't groan to God, it might show that perhaps we don't trust him as much as we think we do. Because we are not bringing our whole heart honestly before the face of God.

Lament, you see, when verbalized at the right time, is deeply biblical. When we lament, we are actually holding God accountable to who he says he is, a good and gracious God.

Jesus himself is not afraid to lament on the cross as he feels the weight of sin upon him. Ah, but that's Jesus, you might say.

[42 : 02] You know, he's sinless, but we're sinful. So it just feels wrong. But lamentation shows us that even sinners may lament in the presence of God.

Yes, as sinners, we might feel unworthy. But as humans, we also can't help but feel hurt about our afflictions. And lament is the bridge that can bring us back to God.

After all, you know, if you think about it, we are closest with the people we are most open with, isn't it? And as we remain open with God about our current suffering, we develop intimacy.

Indeed, it is God's way of empowering us that he allows us to stand before him and pour out our emotions and our confusion and our questions.

But the poet doesn't just cry out. His exact plea is, Lord, remember. Lord, remember. Now, that is a powerful plea.

[43 : 15] You see, the poet isn't asking God to recall something that he's forgotten. And so, what is he calling on God to do? He's calling on God to act on the basis of his covenant relationship with his people.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's remembering means well-being for his people. In Genesis 8, verse 1, when God remembers, the floodwaters that surround Noah begin to go down.

In Exodus 2, verse 24, when God remembers, the beginnings of his plan to redeem his people out of slavery through Moses is initiated.

In 1 Samuel 1, verse 19 to 20, when God remembers, Hannah's tears over her barrenness cease, and she miraculously bears Samuel.

When God remembers, God's people are the beneficiaries, for God puts into motion his gracious plan. When God remembers, he acts.

[44 : 20] You see, this is their only hope, for God to remember and to act. And when we are convicted of our sin, that too is our only hope.

God's gracious character and his gracious plan is our only way out. Have you ever been in that position? God, I've done wrong again.

God, I've cried so much. God, I know I shouldn't have done that, but I was in so much pain. And in that position, what other choice do we have but to cry out, God, remember.

And you know what? God does know what it feels like to have everything against you, like the poet in Lamentations 4 and 5.

You know, if you're in a bad marriage, if you've been alienated from family, if you're struggling financially, he knows. He knows what it feels like to bear shame and disgrace.

[45 : 31] In Christ, he lifted. And so God says, cry out to him in remembrance. And this 22-verse prayer has been recorded for us to use as our own.

And so if this is where you're at now, then God says, don't stay silent. By all means, take the words of Lamentations 5 as your own. But this is not his only plea.

The poet doesn't just cry out, Lord, remember? He cries out, Lord, reign! Verse 19, you, Lord, reign forever. Your throne and dears from generation to generation.

And the poet now comes close to the essence of what it means to be a Christian. What does it mean to be a Christian? It means that first of all that we believe in verses 1 to 18.

We believe in sin. We believe that sin is destructive. We believe sin is serious, that it has repercussions. But it also means that we believe that verses 1 to 18 does not have the final say.

[46 : 41] We believe that God is the sovereign king and that his great big purpose is to finally bring about a state of affairs that is different from the one we currently experience.

A world without sin and suffering. We believe, to use the language of the New Testament, that God is bringing all things in heaven and on earth to their fulfilment to be under Christ.

And when we pray in the way that Lamentations 5 asks us to, we are simply saying we believe this. Otherwise, we wouldn't pray, but simply resign ourselves that this is our fate in life.

But when we pray, Lord, reign, we are saying to God, Lord, I know that the world is not the way it was meant to be, so please exercise your control over this universe.

I know you can do it. It is a plea and it is also an expression of trust. We are saying to God, Lord, I know you are on your throne and I know you will do what you set out to do for the best of everyone.

[48 : 00] You see, in seasons of difficulty, this is when the doctrine of God's sovereignty gets really practical. This doctrine is our anchor that when things are beyond our control, God is still in control.

And if he is indeed the gracious and compassionate God, he will direct things in such a way so as to show his grace and compassion. But there is one more plea.

Lord, restore. Look at verse 20. Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? Restore to us yourself, Lord, that we may return.

Renew our days as of old unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure. You see, this is what God has done.

He knows that when things are going well, we tend to forget our dependence on him. We become proud. And so God begins to humble us. He brings changes to our circumstances.

[49 : 10] In 2020, he's used a little virus that we can't even see to do this. He starts taking away things that expose us where our hope really lies.

And he gives us glimpses of what life without him really looks like. He brings us to breaking point. All so that we will cry out to him, Lord, restore.

And notice, it isn't Lord restore us to our old dreams. It isn't Lord restore us to our old circumstances, restore us to what it was like before March 2020.

No, it's restore us to yourself, O Lord. Is that our prayer? Is that our prayer for ourselves?

Is that our prayer for our family? Is that our prayer for other believers? Is that our prayer for those who do not yet know God? Restore us to yourself.

[50 : 19] Well, if that isn't your prayer, then let's make it so. You see, we are in a more privileged position than Israel. At the end of the book of Lamentations, there is still so much uncertainty.

The end of chapter four sounded a note of hope. Your punishment will end, daughter Zion. But it is unfulfilled hope. Not so with us.

For we already know Jesus, the Lord's anointed, our very life breath, who has restored and renewed us in the very image of our Creator, the one whose shadow we live under, as we live now among the nations.

Lamentations says to us, your sin is deep, but we now also know Jesus' love is far deeper.

Lamentations says to us, your sin is dark, but now we also know Jesus' grace is far brighter.

Lamentations says to us, your sin is strong, but we now also know Jesus' power is far stronger.

[51 : 34] God's God's love is God's God's word to restore us to him. This is God's word to the convicted.

When you see judgment, indeed when you feel judgment, turn to him, pray to him, return to him. In the Bible reading that opened this morning's service, the Apostle Peter reminded us that judgment in this present age actually begins with God's household.

It begins with Christians. But it is a purifying judgment designed to refine God's people and make clear who really belongs to him.

It is characterized by suffering and used by God to ensure that we will make it to the end. And that is how we should respond. And so, as we finish our three weeks in Lamentations, how should this book affect us?

I think it should do so in at least these ways. Firstly, we should listen to the Lord. We should listen to what he tells us in the book of Lamentations.

[52 : 51] We should listen as he makes clear how much he takes seriously our sin. We should listen as he makes clear the devastation of judgment. We should listen when he says he does not leave the guilty unpunished.

And then secondly, we should lament our losses. We should be honest about what we have lost, especially when we turn against him.

We should lament how we have sometimes allowed sin to break up our relationships and to mess us up. And we should lament the fact that even when we have not gone against God, we still live in a fallen world under judgment.

And sometimes we suffer from its effects. And then thirdly, we should learn the lesson. Not learn the lesson as in just take things on an intellectual level, but learn as in when we have nearly gotten into a car accident because of our carelessness, and then we say, I've learned my lesson.

I'm not doing that dangerous driving maneuver again. That's how we should learn the lesson. And especially, we should learn the lesson of who God is right at the heart of this book.

[54 : 15] Remember Lamentations chapter 3 verses 32? Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love, for he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.

That's who God is. And then after that, well, this is where the words of 1 Peter 4 verse 19 is appropriate. So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

So we should then trust ourselves into the hands of the sovereign God, who is also faithful to his character to be the gracious and compassionate God. We should express our trust in him as we seek to do good.

And as we do that, while we can hang on to these words and to these promises of 1 Peter 5 verses 10 and 11, and the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

To him be power forever and ever. Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[55 : 46] Amen. Amen. I'll just give us a few seconds to be silent before God or to speak to him in your mind and then I'll lead us in prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, as we come before you and as we've been hearing your word in the book of Lamentations over these three weeks Father we pray indeed that your word will pierce to the centre of our hearts, will strike us at the core of our being will you indeed help us to listen to pay attention to consider carefully what you are saying to take seriously the magnitude of sin and the devastation of judgment Father help us to see how corrosive sin's effects are the way that it makes us less than human the way that it puts us in a position of shame and yet Father we thank you that you have provided for us the Lord's anointed, you have provided for us Jesus our very life breath who was indeed caught in the traps but who did so voluntarily as he went to the cross and that in him we now live under his shadow so Father we just pray that as we take refuge in Jesus will you help us to cry out to you as well and Lord right now indeed as a church we do say Lord remember Lord remember Lord act act for the sake of your glory's name for the sake of your for the sake of people knowing you for the sake of people knowing that your throne and yours and indeed we cry out Lord too will you restore us to yourself that we might return to you that we would come again to you not seeking just your gifts but you alone and so Lord we just want to comment ourselves again to you our faithful creator and as we go out in this week would we come and live as your people faithfully in this present age in the name of Jesus Christ we pray Amen Amen