

A City Weeps

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[0 : 00] Now that was footage of the terrible Beirut explosion that happened not too long ago. But as you watch that, especially at the moment of the actual explosion, how did it make you feel?

Were you shocked? Spooked? Frightened? There's another unnerving video, not shown here, of a bride on her wedding day, happily posing for photos outside when the huge blast comes out of nowhere.

The first 15 seconds are like a scene out of a romantic movie before it suddenly becomes that of an apocalyptic one. The landscape changes immediately from idyllic streets and vast shady trees to those of shattered windows, smoky air and blaring sirens.

And you can probably feel the sense of panic even if you're just watching it through a screen. It shakes you because you recognise that you're watching an eyewitness account of an unspeakable tragedy.

But it's also true that although you feel momentarily shocked, the moment soon passes. You compose yourself. And eventually you could so easily forget it.

[1 : 21] After all, you see things like this in the movies all the time. You see things like this on the news all the time. And although you might not realise it, there's a thought that remains at the back of your head.

It could never happen here. It could never happen to us. But come with me now in your mind's eye to see another eyewitness account of an unspeakable tragedy.

Come with me to another Middle Eastern city. The year is no longer 2020, but 587 BC. For years and years, Babylon has been on the rise.

The Assyrians have been the main superpower together with their ally, Egypt. Indeed, Egypt even had temporary control over a major key road in the region known as the Way of the Sea, as well as influence in the city that we're interested in, Jerusalem.

But it was short-lived. 2 Kings 24 verse 7 tells us quite simply that the king of Egypt did not march from his country again because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory from the wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

[2 : 38] And so Egypt is on the decline. And by 605 BC, Assyria itself disappears from the historical records. And all we hear is about the new kid in town, Babylon, led by their charismatic king, Nebuchadnezzar.

And Babylon, which once seemed so far away from the affairs of Jerusalem, is certainly closer than they think.

The way China's presence in the South China Sea means that they're actually closer than we think. And about 10 to 15 years before the events of Lamentations, the king of Judah makes a momentous decision.

He decides to rebel against Babylon. It doesn't end well for him. In fact, the prophet Jeremiah famously predicted that he would have the burial of a donkey.

And so before you know it, the whole city of Jerusalem is under siege. And so the next king, King Jehoiachin, makes the sensible decision. He gives up Jerusalem.

[3 : 44] He surrenders it. And so Babylon gains control of the city with King Nebuchadnezzar installing a puppet king, Zedekiah, to rule over it.

And this arrangement works for a while, at least until 587 BC. For this puppet king, Zedekiah, also makes a momentous decision. He decides to rebel against Babylon too.

And once again, Jerusalem is under siege. Except this time, King Nebuchadnezzar decides that he better finish the job.

And so the horror story begins. You can read all about it in 2 Kings 25. There is no food. The city war is broken through. The king is captured. His son's executed. He himself is blinded. And taken to Babylon, never to be seen or heard from again. The houses and the king's palace itself are burned down.

[4 : 45] The people are taken away. And finally, the temple of the Lord, the very thing that made Jerusalem special, is looted, defiled, and destroyed.

All of it is gone. This is the most traumatic event in the entire Old Testament. So traumatic that it is recorded not just once, not twice, not thrice, but four times in the Old Testament.

In 2 Kings 25, Jeremiah 39, Jeremiah 52, and 2 Chronicles 36. You see, Jerusalem was a major city, like London or New York or Shanghai today.

And so any major incident there is a major event. But that wasn't why this was so incredible. It was incredible because this wasn't just any major city.

This was the city of God. This was the city summed for the eight cores, the joy of the whole earth, and the seat of the great king.

[5 : 53] The temple, the very dwelling place of God, has been reduced to rubble. And the king, who comes from the line of David, whose kingdom is supposed to be eternal, whose relationship with God is supposed to be that of father and son, has been captured and deposed.

We need to understand, this is not just a city falling apart. This is nothing less than Israel's entire world coming apart.

Everything God had established, gone in an instant. No king, no temple, no Jerusalem. Everything that was core to their identity was being ripped from them.

You know, during this time of COVID-19, we've all lost some things, haven't we? We've lost certain freedoms, certain support structures, maybe even our jobs.

But now imagine you lost all that, as well as your home, your most important relationships, your religion, and your cultural heritage, all in one go.

[7 : 01] And most importantly, imagine that you lost all that, and felt like you lost any sense of the presence of God himself, as well.

You had been thinking, it could never happen here. It could never happen to us. But, it did. Well, maybe they captured something of the depth of the loss here.

And that's what the book of Lamentations captures. On one level, it's written to explain. Why? Why has this happened? Why has Jerusalem fallen?

It's written to showcase sin and suffering, the holiness and the mercy of God. Lamentations is about theology. But it isn't just written to explain.

The book isn't called Explanations, after all. It is a lament. It is an expression of pain. It is drenched in tears.

[8 : 05] It emerges from broken hearts. There is a raw grief about it. One that can only come true from someone who lived through the events, who was an eyewitness to what has happened.

That's why most people continue to be convinced that this is the prophet Jeremiah himself speaking, although some cast doubt on it. I think it is Jeremiah. And this is him writing from a well of immediate impressions, of deep emotion.

And this is important because for lamentations to touch us today, we must be willing to let its emotion touch us and get inside of us.

That's the way to get at the meaning. It is a book written not just to be heard, but to be felt. This is no abstract philosophy. These are heartfelt cries which force you and me to face its reality.

At the beginning of the video we watched just now, there was a warning. This video contains images that some viewers might find upsetting. But like it or not, those upsetting images are real whether we chose to watch it or not.

[9 : 25] And so it is with lamentations. There are upsetting images in there. But it is real life. It is reality. And so to engage with the theology and emotion of lamentations, we need to have a sense of how it's written.

There are five poems, one per chapter. And except for the last poem, each one is an acrostic. Now, what is an acrostic? Well, in English we have 26 alphabets, but in Hebrew they have 22.

And each verse starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So the first verse starts with the first letter, Aleph. The second verse starts with the second letter and so on.

That's why in chapters 1 and 2 and 4 you have 22 verses. One for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. But in chapter 3 you have a triple acrostic.

So 66 verses in all, which suggests that the heart of the book lies there. And so the effect of the poetry is that although you have deep emotion and grief and anguish, there is still an underlying order to it.

[10:41] There is a certain comprehensiveness, as if the poet is expressing the full range of his suffering, the A to Z of his pain, if you like.

And there is a certain movement to the poetry, as if the poet cannot bear to dwell too much on one thing, but he needs to keep talking, to tell his story, to give voice to what is inside of him, as many trauma victims have to.

And so this is where we must begin. This morning I'll take you through four movements in Lamentations 1 and 2, so that by the end we will grasp what God wants to say to us through these God-breathed words of his.

But our starting point must be this. Feel the pain. Feel the pain. And verse 1 plunges us straight away into what kind of pain this is.

Verse 1, How deserted lies the city once so full of people. Think back to April and you begin to get the picture. The Bonio Post, I think, had pictures of Jalan Tugu up to Raman and Padungan on a Friday night, you know, where the waterfront and Hilton and Riverside Majestic are, and it's all empty.

[12:02] Jalan Laksamana Cheng Ho, right outside our church, was eerily empty on those Thursday evenings. And my brother sent me photos of London looking so strange without the normal crowds.

But the inhabitants of Jerusalem aren't just looking to do the rumah and practice social distancing. No, the poet is introducing us to the pain of isolation.

Look at verse 2. Bitterly she weeps at night. Tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers, there is no one to comfort her.

Again and again, the poet stresses this. Think about what Jerusalem has become back in verse 1. She is a widow. She has lost her husband. She has been bereaved.

And at the moment when she needs somebody, there is nobody. Not even her lovers. In the English, the word lovers can have a negative connotation, making this sound like her adulterous partners.

[13:04] And it could be what the poet means, that those whom she inappropriately courted turn out not to be pillars of support. But in the Hebrew, the connotation is more neutral.

For these could simply be people who love her, like her friends and her family. But either way, the point is clear. She is alone at a time of greatest need.

When you've lost a family member, you appreciate people quietly present with you. You appreciate people saying a prayer for you. You appreciate people giving practical help to you.

Now imagine all that taken away. Or imagine the moment of your greatest failure and you just needed someone to pick you up. But no one is there.

Verse 9, her fall was astounding. There was none to comfort her. Helping hands are not forthcoming. In verse 17, Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her.

[14:13] And so that's why verse 16, she says, this is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one, no one is near to comfort me. No one to restore my spirit.

And so verse 21, people have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. Over and over again, the sense of isolation is reinforced.

It's that feeling when you exist, but you're not seen, you are not heard, you're not even taught about. You may as well not exist at all. And even if you die, you die an anonymous death.

So there's the pain of isolation. But then there's also the pain of humiliation. Come back again to verse 1. How like a widow is she who once was great among the nations.

She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. I wonder, can you spot the downward descent, the great reversal? Jerusalem was like a queen.

[15:23] Everyone wanted her. She was right up there, seated on a throne. But now she's just like a desolate widow. In fact, even worse, her status doesn't just get downgraded to a widow but that of a slave.

And in verse 2, there is another great reversal. Friends betray her. And it's not just that they leave her, they actually become her enemies. And so can you see, your status and your relationships have all been turned upside down.

But more humiliation is in store, verse 3. After affliction and harsh labour, Judah has gone into exile. It's like history in reverse for the people of God.

You know, God had rescued them out of conditions of affliction and harsh labour in the Exodus. They were slaves who had been set free. But as the commentator, Chris Wright, puts it, whereas in that story of the Exodus, suffering was followed by deliverance, now the opposite has happened. Judah has not gone free, but gone into exile. Or take verse 6. All the splendour has departed from daughter Zion. Her princesses are like deer that find no pasture, in weakness that have fled before the pursuer.

[16:51] Jerusalem once was marvellous at, full of splendour, and now people just shake their heads at her uncleanness. Even her own rulers are ashamed to associate with her and run away.

They are like deers or ostars, creatures that should represent elegance and swiftness, but who are now in a weak and sorry state.

But perhaps the pain of humiliation is seen nowhere more clearly than in verses 8 to 11. Jerusalem is unclean, she is filthy, and now she is even seen naked.

The humiliation is complete. In the ancient world, and of course even still today, to be seen publicly naked and exposed is an utter disgrace.

Well, that's Jerusalem. This, after all, is a city that has been stripped of its wars, its palaces, and its riches. It's been stripped of all its protection and achievements.

[18:01] In verse 10, the language becomes disturbing. It's almost as if Jerusalem is sexually assaulted. And paradoxically, the pain is amplified because if Jerusalem is in disgrace, God's name is in disgrace.

Well, that's what lies behind the cries of verses 9 and 11. Look, Lord, see my pain. Doesn't it bring you pain too? Because you too are disgraced?

And I want you to feel one more aspect of the pain. It's the pain of covenant rebellion. We've gotten hints of it already. But we need to realise that going into exile is no accident of history.

Rather, it is the promised curse if Israel broke covenant. In verse 3, we are told that Jerusalem finds no resting place.

Well, that's the exact language used in Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 64 and 65. God had already warned his people in his word that if they chased after other gods, there would be no resting place for them.

[19:18] God himself was their rest and so to abandon him is to find yourselves homeless. And so, verse 4, the roads to Zion mourn for no one comes to her appointed festivals.

There's no one there. No more coming together. No more making memories. No more opportunities for worship and thanksgiving. You've abandoned your father.

You've left home. So, you've cut off the covenant relationship. Now, you may be wondering, where are we going with this?

Let me ask for your patience. I hope it will start to become clearer soon. But let me ask, how does all this make you feel?

That's what the poet himself is asking you. Look at verse 12. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? So, is it nothing?

[20:24] Or are you beginning to feel the pain, the anguish, the grief, the confusion? because to really get lamentations, you and I must feel the pain.

Otherwise, you and I won't really get what God wants to say to us. That is the key to understanding chapter 1. Five times in this chapter, we hear groaning from the priests, the city, the people, and Lady Zion herself.

you and I must feel it. Otherwise, if it is simply nothing to us, then the message of lamentations will be nothing to you.

Because as we sit with the pain of the poet, as we feel his isolation and his humiliation, as we grasp the impact of covenant rebellion, we should be moved to ask, how did we get to this point?

How did God's people get to this point? You see, as the Christian counsellor Diane Langeberg so insightfully observes, pain is the only protest in the human constitution that something is wrong.

[21 : 46] It's a signal. It indicates danger. But we're often scared to sit with pain. Even if the pain belongs to others, we don't like to watch.

Because to do so means our own comfortable world gets disturbed. And yet sitting with pain forces us to ask questions, to deal with our own assumptions and to bring our own wounds into the open. Whenever you choose not to feel the pain, you are actually choosing numbness. Now, that can be an attractive option, especially in this pandemic age, where isolation and humiliation are stark realities.

But if you choose numbness, you are numbing yourself not just to pain, but to everything else, including God. And that's not what the poet wants.

He doesn't want us to shut ourselves to God. And so the book of Lamentations wants us to feel the pain so that we'll ask the right questions. How did we get to this point?

[22 : 59] Well, that takes us to our second movement. And the poet says to us, we need to take it personally. Take it personally. I'll explain what that means in a moment.

You see, who is behind this pain? On one level, the answer seems obvious. Surely, it's Babylon. It's the human enemies.

Reference more than once in places like verse 7 and verse 9 and verse 17 and 19 and 21. They're the ones who inflicted all this. But is it really?

Look at verse 12 again. Is there any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?

Now, here is the big shock. The pain was not finally brought about by the human superpower of the day. No, it's more personal than that.

[24 : 00] It is brought about by God himself. If you look at verse 5, 1 verse 5, at the beginning and at the end, it talks about Jerusalem's enemies taking her captive.

But right in the middle of that verse, it tells us the bitter truth. It is ultimately the Lord who has brought her grief. This is personal.

But how can it be? How can the God who rescued them and nurtured them and look after them be the one who has brought calamity on them? And again, the answer is found in the middle of verse 5.

The Lord has brought on her grief because of her many sins. Why has this happened?

Why is there so much pain and suffering? Well, verse 5 tells us this is not simply suffering that was brought about because we live in a fallen world. This is judgment.

[25 : 05] This is what happens when people persistently turn their backs on God. You see, this is what the poet wants us to understand. Sin can taste sweet.

Idolatry can be intoxicating. But they all finally lead to one place, the judgment of God. And that makes sense, doesn't it?

If sin is by definition anti-God, that means any and every indulgence in any and every sin puts us at odds with the living God himself.

Now, that's not how we always think about sin. We tend to think of it only in terms of the temporary pleasure it gives us or the illusion of self-justification it grants to us.

But we don't think that sinning means God becomes our enemy. But come with me to Lamentations 2.

[26 : 09] Look at 2 verse 4. Like an enemy, he has strung his bow, his right hand is ready. Or 2 verse 5, the Lord is like an enemy, he has swallowed up Israel.

Babylon is not the adversary, God is. Babylon is simply the instrument in the judgment of God. And so verse 15, the Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst.

He has summoned an army against me to crush my young man. In his wine press, the Lord has trampled virgin daughter Judah. That's what the poet hits you with again and again.

God is your enemy. Let's just take one more sample. In verse 13, God is the one who sets us on fire, a vivid image of his wrath.

From on high, he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. That's especially striking since the image likely recalls that of the Babylonians setting the city on fire.

[27 : 14] Look at the next image in that verse. God is a hunter. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. In the Psalms, it is often the Psalmist enemies who spread nets and set traps, but here it is God.

And so he made me desolate, faint all the day long. You see, if it's you on one side and God on the other side, there can only ever be one winner.

And let's just say that it isn't you. Do you see how sin and idolatry is more destructive than we realize?

Let me ask you, how do you see your own sin? Do you think of it like laksa? Too much is not good for us, but actually it's quite nice to have and once in a while is fine.

Do you think of it like mosquito bites? You know, quite irritating when you walk into it. You but it's not really life threatening and you can live with it. Do you think of it like some people think of COVID-19?

[28 : 24] You know, it will only affect certain people badly, but if I get it, it won't affect me, it will only I probably be asymptomatic, it won't hamper my life. Well, the poet wants to make clear, sin poses mortal danger to your soul because God takes any and every sin personally.

As one theologian puts it, sin is nothing less than cosmic treason. Or as another theologian puts it, it is the grieving of one's divine parent and benefactor, a betrayal of the partner to whom one is joined by holy bond.

When you sin it's always personal, it's always relational. When you sin you are basically slapping God and spitting in his face. And so he reacts.

How can he not? If you're not sure about that we'll just read chapters 2 verses 1 to 9 quickly again. He has held down. He has not remembered his footstool.

He has torn down the strong host. He has brought her kingdom to dishonor. He has cut off. He has withdrawn. He has burned in Jacob. He has slain. He has poured out his wrath. He has, he has, he has.

[29 : 41] This is God taking it personally. Now, and this is very important to note, God is not angry because he has lost control or blown his top or seeking revenge.

God's anger is never unreasonable. Rather, it is always considered and proportionate. It is a response that says this is wrong and it is right that I show my righteous displeasure.

And we need to understand that God has been very, very patient with his people. He sent them warning after warning through prophet after prophet. In chapter 2 verse 17, God is simply doing what he has planned and fulfilling what he has said.

If you disobey, he said, over and over again in his word, there are consequences. In fact, read through all of one and two kings and you might be astonished that God waited so long.

And in fact, the poet agrees with God's actions. Notice that the poet never blames God, not once. In some of the Psalms, you might find the psalmist crying out to God, why am I suffering, is it fair?

[31 : 02] But not here. Because the poet knows exactly why he's suffering. Look at 1 verse 20. See, Lord, how distressed I am.

I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. He takes his sin personally, and owns it.

He doesn't minimize it. God's judgment, he knows, is fundamentally right. And in verse 22, he accepts that God is right to deal with him in this way. It is because of all my sins, he says.

And so, let Lamentations ask some difficult questions of you and me. Firstly, do you have a biblical view of God? All of us like to think of God as a God of love.

But do we have room for a God who gets angry? Do we have room for the God of Lamentations 1 and 2? If not, then let me tell you that you are actually worshipping an idol, not the God of the Bible.

[32 : 14] And the God of the Bible is better because a God who never gets angry at wrongdoing and injustice and sin is a God who doesn't actually care.

Anger is not the opposite of love, but an implication of love. And secondly, do you understand how devastating sin actually is?

Satan is more than happy for you to believe that it doesn't matter, that it's not a big deal. He's happy for you to think that you will never cross the line after all you're God's people. But make no mistake, sin will eventually lead you to a place of isolation, and humiliation.

And it leads to alienation from God. Look at 2 verse 10, why do the elders sit in silence? It is because they have no word from God.

That's made clear in verse 9, one verse back, when there is no law and no more visions. In other words, there is no communication. And no communication means no relationship.

[33 : 18] relationship. And so we come to our third movement, acknowledge the expose, acknowledge the expose. I hope you see this is what Lamentations is doing.

The Bible is not here to make us comfortable. It is here to expose the reality of sin and coming judgment. And when God's spokesmen do not do this, they fail to do their job.

look at chapter 2 verse 14. The visions of your prophets were false and worthless. Why?

Because they did not expose your sin to one of your captivity. The prophecies they gave you were false and misleading. Did you see what was happening?

The prophets were not willing to cause sin for what it is. They were not willing to say that God was a God of judgment. They were probably busy promoting that it could never happen to us.

[34 : 18] It could never happen here. After all, we're God's people. We are safe. It's the bad people out there, the corrupt politicians, the anti-Christian media, the religious extremists, whom God will deal with, not us.

We're not Judah, not B-E-M-K-E-C. We're God's people. We're fine. But the problem is, if we listen to such people, we end up believing lies.

We end up holding on to worthless junk. And most soberingly, we end up as captives to destruction.

And so why do we still listen to such people? Because they say what we want to hear.

We don't mind if other people's sins are exposed. We like eloquent, ego-boosting sermons, but not one of us listening today would like to have our own sin exposed.

None of us enjoy sermons that chujok us where it hurts and challenges us to change. It's uncomfortable. It's painful. It hurts. And yet, God says a key function of his word is to do this work of exposing.

[35 : 27] As an aside, at our recent Next Gen Conference, we were looking at the book of Micah. And there is a striking verse in Micah 3 verse 8, which I hope will appear on the screen, where Micah is contrasting his ministry with that of the false prophets.

And what does he say? Well, Micah 3 verse 8 says this, But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.

Now, in that verse, did you notice that he declares himself to be a Spirit-filled prophet? And what is the mark of being Spirit-filled? Is it about positive messages and powerful miracles?

No, it is to declare to God's people their sin. That is the mark of a Spirit-filled ministry. And that fits with Lamentations 2 verse 14.

And so let's acknowledge the expose when it comes. Was there something in our recent series on the Sermon of the Mount which God brought to your attention? If God is prompting you, don't ignore it.

[36 : 43] Let him expose you. Let him do his work on your heart. Let him shake you out of any self-deception. And so that takes us to our fourth and final movement, cry out in the night.

Cry out in the night. And that's what the poet urges Jerusalem to do in 2 verse 19. Cry out. What should we do when we know that we have sinned?

Go to God. Go to the one who has wounded you. You know, I always find it striking that whenever my children are disciplined by us and they start crying, what do they do?

Well, they don't run away from the one who has disciplined them. They actually run to their parents for comfort. But that does leave us with a question perhaps best expressed in 2 verse 18.

The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord, you wars of daughter Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night, give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest. The poet recognises that he who inflicted the wound is the only one who is able to heal it.

[37 : 48] But the question is, will he? the poet is honest in 2 verse 21 to 22, you know, he doesn't know. He looks around and everything around him says, otherwise there is death in the streets.

And strikingly, by the end of Lamentations chapter 2, there is no answer from God. God is silent. Well, no wonder Jeremiah himself in verse 11 is reduced to tears.

It's gut-wrenching. Are we left only to contend with the wrath of God? I certainly wondered if that was the case as I wrestled with these two chapters.

I don't know if you can feel the weight, but I certainly did, and I certainly do right now. But thank God for older and wiser pastors, and it was actually Dr.

Gary Miller, the recent speaker at the KVBC conference, who helped me find my way, and I'm indebted to him for what I say next. Because look at chapter 2, verse 15.

[38 : 52] All who pass your way, clap their hands at you. They scoff and they shake their heads at daughter Jerusalem. Is this not city? Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty?

The joy of the whole earth? Look at that verse, but come also with me now to Matthew's gospel, to the scene of Jesus' crucifixion. And we pick up the story from 27, verse 37.

Above his head, they placed the written charge against him. This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Those who pass by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, come down from the cross if you are the son of God.

Keep that up there. And having just read Lamentations 2, verse 15, we realize with a jolt what is happening here.

[40 : 02] Jesus, the very son of God, is now in the very same position as daughter Jerusalem. He is, in fact, substituting himself for her.

Like Jerusalem, tears were on his cheek as he prayed alone in the garden. Like Jerusalem, he knew betrayal as his friends left him to suffer alone.

Like Jerusalem, he is stripped naked and publicly humiliated. Like Jerusalem, he left his splendor and was reduced to death. Like Jerusalem, he bore the curse and penalty for sin.

Like Jerusalem, he was violently attacked by a pagan occupying force, the Romans. Like Jerusalem, he felt abandoned and was despised by God.

You see, there is an answer and the answer is the gospel. Like Adam and Eve, the moment we sin is the moment we're exposed. Nothing is hidden from God after all.

[41 : 09] And the moment of exposure is the moment of exile, like Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, like Jerusalem from the Promised Land. And the moment we accept our sentence is the moment we cry out to God for help.

And the moment we cry out to God is the moment God says, now hear the gospel. See my son.

And do you see what he has actually done for you and I?

Jerusalem suffered the penalty and wrath of God for her sin. Jesus bore the penalty and wrath of God for our sin.

He felt our pain and he took it personally on our behalf, exposing himself for our sake and crying out in the night to find no relief there and then.

The poet asks, has anyone been treated like Jerusalem? Jesus steps forward and says, I have.

[42 : 21] Many of us have heard the gospel, but today, do you feel the gospel? Do you feel the magnitude of what Jesus did, bearing the curse, dying our death, absorbing our pain.

Lamentations 1 and 2 is here so that we won't become numb to our predicament, but alive to the gospel. Lamentations 1 and 2 is here so that we won't become numb to our sin, but to grieve over it.

And Lamentations 1 and 2 is here so that we won't be numb to our creator, but to cry out to our savior, because he is the one and the same. And so if you're feeling the pain, don't waste it.

During this time, if God is waking you up to your own sin by means of pain, don't ignore it. Go to him. You see, until the final day, God's judgment on us is always disciplinary in nature.

It is to bring us back to himself and find redemption. And so today, if there's anyone here on the live stream who knows that you've wandered far away from God and you're feeling the effects of that wandering, well, cry out to God and ask him to bring you back.

[43 : 36] Don't wait for the final day of God's anger, for on that day, no one escapes, no one survives, but in Christ, on that day, it will be a day when mourning will be turned into dancing and lament will be turned into everlasting praise.

Let's pray. Father, as we heard these very confronting words from a confronting book, Father, I pray that we will have felt the weight of sin, the weight of your holy character, that we will not have dismissed it or taken it lightly, but Father, I also pray that we will also have felt the great relief of the gospel, we will have felt the healing balm of the gospel, we will have felt what Jesus has done for us, we will have felt that magnitude, so Father, I just pray that it will indeed be true today, even in the situation we find ourselves amidst in 2020, we pray that we would use this as an opportunity to wake ourselves up if there is any way in which we have wandered away from God, and to turn back to our Lord Jesus Christ, the shepherd and the saviour of our souls.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.