

Fruitful Weeping in the Pain of Life

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible readings, though, and in our little series on walking in wisdom, we come this morning to the book of Lamentations, and that's on page 685 if you have one of the church Bibles.

Again, we're just spending one day looking at this whole book, so it is but scratching the surface, and we're going to read together chapter 1, which is the first of five laments.

That are all put together into this book, and you should have a handout, I think, which you can use later on, and hopefully later in the week as you read this book for yourself.

Lamentations, then, at chapter 1. The first word is difficult to translate, how? It's really an exclamation. How can it be?

How can it be? That lonely sits the city that was so full of people. How like a widow she's become, who was great among the nations.

[1 : 08] She, who was a princess among the provinces, has become a slave. She weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks. Among all her lovers, she has none to comfort her.

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They have become her enemies. Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude. She dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place.

Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival. All her gates are desolate.

Her priests groan. Her virgins have been afflicted. And she herself suffers bitterly. Her foes have become the head. Her enemies prosper because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.

Her children have gone away, captives before the foe. From the daughter of Zion, all her majesty has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture.

[2 : 11] They fled without strength before the pursuer. Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers from days of old.

When her people fell into the hand of the foe and there was none to help her, her foes gloated over her. They mocked at her downfall. Jerusalem sinned grievously.

Therefore she became filthy. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness. She herself groans and turns her face away. Her uncleanness was in her skirts.

She took no thought for her future. Therefore her fall is terrible. She has no comforter. Oh Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed.

The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things. For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation. All her people groan as they search for bread.

[3 : 12] They trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. Oh look, oh Lord, and see, for I am despised. Is it nothing to you, all who pass by?

Look, behold, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me when the Lord inflicted me on the day of his fierce anger.

From on high he sent fire into my bones. He made it descend. He spread a net for my feet. He turned me back. He has left me stunned, faint all the day long. My transgressions were bound into a yoke.

By his hand they were fastened together. They were set upon my neck. He has caused my strength to fail. The Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand. The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst.

He summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men. The Lord has trodden as in a winepress, the virgin daughter of Judah. For these things I weep.

[4 : 18] My eyes flow with tears. For a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit. My children are desolate for the enemy has prevailed. Zion stretches out her hands.

But there is none to comfort her. The Lord has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should be his foes. Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them.

The Lord is in the right. For I have rebelled against his word. But hear all you peoples and see my suffering. My young women and my young men have gone into captivity.

I called to my lovers, but they deceived me. My priests and elders perished in the city while they sought food to revive their strength. Look, O Lord, for I am in distress.

My stomach churns. My heart is wrung within me because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves. In the house it is like death.

[5 : 21] They heard my groaning, yet there is none to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble. They are glad that you have done it. You have brought the day you announced.

I let them be as I am. Let all their evil doing come before you to deal with them. As you have dealt with me. Because of all my transgressions.

For my groans are many. And my heart is faint. Amen. May God bless to us. This is his word.

Well, please take your Bibles at the book of Lamentations. Get wisdom, get insight, whatever you do, says Israel's wisdom teacher.

And as we've seen, Proverbs teaches so much fruitful wisdom on about how to perceive life with the light of God, illuminating it for us. Last week we saw that Job also teaches us so much about how to fruitfully wrestle amid all the puzzles of life.

[6 : 30] But of course we need wisdom in every part of life. Including in our griefs and our sorrows. And the Bible actually contains an awful lot of weeping.

And a lot of instruction about weeping. By far the biggest contingent of the Psalms, the worship songs of God's people, are laments. Strikingly different, isn't it, from contemporary worship songs, which are nearly all about praise, hardly ever about lament.

But the Bible's worship has a very large part for weeping. And that might shock you, but unless we realize that life will bring us not only joys, but also sorrows and pain and grief and even great calamity, then that might lead to terrible disillusion.

Even to abandonment of faith altogether. Many churches today all around the world try and give the impression that faith in Jesus Christ will bring you joy and happiness and healing and health and prosperity and nothing but.

Friends, that is a dangerous and a damnable falsehood. It's contrary to everything the Bible teaches. It's contrary to what Jesus explicitly teaches all the time about his kingdom.

[7 : 46] Just read Matthew chapter 24 alone for what he says there about the bitter birth pains of the kingdom that we will have to live through. You will find yourselves grieving and weeping and often very greatly in this life.

Even as Christians, indeed, especially as Christians, according to Christ. Just this week, we've been hearing from the Robres, haven't we, about terrible massacres of dozens of people through tribal violence around them in Joss.

Julia wrote to me this week, there's so much grief around here at the moment and people don't really know what to do with it. Well, here in Lamentations is a whole book of the Bible given to teach us what to do with our weeping.

On the page one of the sheet there, I've quoted from Palmer Robertson's very helpful book where he says, God's people must learn how to weep, for there's a wrong way and the right way to weep. There's a God-honoring way to respond to the deepest tragedies of life, and there's a seriously harmful way for the people of God to react to their calamities, both as individuals and as a body.

[8 : 58] He goes on to say that every generation has needed to learn this, and so also do we. He says, so that the people of God may maintain a proper balance in their lives as they pass through this alien wilderness world as strangers and pilgrims.

There's a wrong way to weep and a right way to weep about the tragedies of life in a fallen sinful world. And that is especially so when the tragedy is directly related to the sin of God's people, which is the primary focus of this book of Lamentations.

There's sorrow nearly always in those situations. But as Paul tests to the New Testament church in Corinth, there's a godly grief that leads to repentance and to life and salvation, and there's a worldly grief that leads only to death.

So we need to learn that godly grief. We need to learn about fruitful weeping in the pain of life. And that's what this book teaches us.

Now we have no time to go into much detail, but let me just try and say some things generally about this book, which I think will help us as we try and read it ourselves in the days to come. First of all, the place of the book in the life of God's people.

[10:12] It was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, when in the final stage of the exile, the city was utterly destroyed with its temple. It's traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah.

There's no good evidence pointing anywhere elsewhere. And we know that Jeremiah did compose laments previously to this for Josiah the king and so on. And corporate lament became a clear part of the life of Israel ever afterwards.

Lamentations came to be read every year in the fifth month on the ninth of Av to remember the temple destruction. So this book had a place in the life of Israel to remember always the terrible and the tragic consequences of sin and evil in the world, and especially the consequences of sin and rebellion among God's own people.

God never wants his people to be blasé about sin or to be presumptuous about his grace. And we need to remember that. We need to remember, don't we, the terrible cost of God's forgiveness.

That's why we have the Lord's Supper so regularly. That's why we have Good Friday services and so on. It's right that we should remember. Then the pattern of the book is for the learning of God's people.

[11:33] There are striking features in this book worth noting. On the back of the sheet there, I've given you an outline of it. But there are a number of things to note. The perspective of the writer, for example, moves between the first and the third person.

And it's moving from the singular and the plural as well. So, for example, in chapter 3, it's all about I and me with just the occasional we. Whereas in chapter 5, it's the opposite. It's mostly we.

Sometimes the poet is embodying all his own people in his grief. Sometimes he's expressing the grief of all the people. And this pattern helps all people to enter into the grief.

It's deeply personal. It's deeply intimate. But it's not just private. It's public. It's corporate. And that means the book speaks directly to all of us, both individually as well as together as the people of God.

It's a book that helps you and me personally to weep and to weep well. It's a book that will help all of us as a church to weep faithfully and fruitfully amid the sorrows that we find ourselves in together.

[12:38] The other striking feature is the poetic structure of the book. And I've noted there for you, there are five separate lament poems. Each one has 22 verses, except chapter 3, which has 66.

But chapter 3 in our Bibles has been versified differently to give each line its own verse. But they're actually the same number of stanzas, 22, in each one of the chapters.

And the number 22 is significant because that's the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. And this book is what you call acrostic. Each line begins with a successive letter of the alphabet.

Chapters 1 and 2, it's the first line of each three-line stanza that's acrostic.

Chapter 3, each of the three lines in each verse begins with the same letter. Chapter 4, there's just two lines in each verse, which is acrostic. And the last chapter is the only one that isn't.

And perhaps the progression there to shorter and to less order is meant to tell us something about the disorder, the disintegration of the city that's being expressed. But the point to note is that this is quite literally an A to Z of grief.

[13:45] It gives expression to a grief that is complete. It teaches how to express godly sorrow in a full and complete way in language that is emotional, that's real, that speaks of deep experience and therefore is helpful.

And as well as being an A to Z that gives completeness, it's also, if you like, an A-B-C that gives control to the grieving. It orders the grief.

Godly grief is not wild and unrestrained and chaotic. It's not just unchecked, unbridled emotion and angst. No, no, no. God teaches his people to grieve but within restraints.

And those restraints, as we'll see, include an understanding of appropriate repentance and faith amid grief. That's very important because we need to grieve as human beings.

We need to get it all out sometimes, but we need to do that God's way. We're to grieve not like the pagans, Paul says to us, who have no hope.

[14:49] We're different. And that is so especially when, and alas, this is often the case, especially when we grieve and lament suffering, which is not just innocent suffering but is fully deserved.

Suffering for our own sin and folly. And the consequences of our own sin and folly. And that, as I said, is the particular focus of this book. It's very different from Job.

Job suffered innocently and he knew it. But the people here are suffering for their sins and they know that. And they needed to learn how to weep in those circumstances.

And I'm afraid that's something that I need to learn about. And I suspect so do you as well. So unless anybody here this morning is sinless, in which case you can probably go home now, there's something here for all of us to learn about godly sorrow, isn't there?

And that's what this book of Lamentations teaches us. It teaches us fruitful weeping, godly sorrow, that we must face up to and deal with honestly. And to do that, we have to face up to the real calamity that comes upon us.

[16:02] And the causes of that. And the chastisement that these things bring to us from God himself. And yet at the same time, we need to do that while holding on to the covenant of God, which alone is what can give us hope in our grieving.

So on page one of this sheet, I've laid out these four themes, which we're going to look at now. First of all, the calamity. We must recognize and not diminish our real sorrows.

The very worst thing that we can do when we face trauma and tragedy and calamity in our life is to try and put a brave face on it and diminish the suffering or pretend it away.

Nothing is more hurtful to a suffering person than for us to do that when they are suffering. And nothing is more damaging for ourselves than to take refuge in that kind of denial when we're faced with certain calamities in life.

We know that, don't we? That to suppress, to repress reality like that is corrosive. It's damaging. We need to recognize and to express real sorrow.

[17:09] We need to let the tears out. It's right that we should feel pain. One of the most important verses in the Bible is one of the shortest. John 11, verse 35. Jesus wept. He erupted in real sorrow.

Deep, troubling sorrow at the calamity. Of the untimely death of his friend Lazarus. The holiest man. The most wholesome human being who ever lived.

Poured out his pain and sorrow. At the reality of that dreadful blot on God's creation. The blot of human death. That's why, you know, when some Christians want to have no grief.

No sadness at a funeral. Just jollity. Just laughter. It's so, so wrong. It's obscenely wrong. No, no, no. We must not airbrush away the reality of real sorrow.

The very first word in the book of Lamentations, chapter 1, verse 1, expresses that agony. It's hard to translate. Ah, ah, how? How can it be? Same in chapter 2, verse 1.

[18:15] And chapter 4, verse 1. It's giving vent to that agony. The shock. This city is Zion's city.

It's the impregnable fortress. It's the city of the great king. Think of Psalm 46. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. Or Psalm 48.

Within her citizens, God has made himself known as a fortress. So when invaders come against her, they melt into fear and trembling. God will establish forever the city of the Lord of hosts.

And yet, now look, chapter 1, verse 1. That teeming city is empty. It's lonely. It's abandoned. It's bereft like a grieving widow.

A princess. She once was. Now cast down utterly as a slave. Verse 2. Weeping bitterly. Empty and desolate, verse 4.

[19:15] Trampled on, verse 5, by enemies. On and on it goes, as we read. As chapter 2, verse 15 says, She who was honored is now mocked and jeered.

Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty? The joy of the whole earth? As the psalmist sang. The shock of it. The shame of it. Ah!

Says the poet. And the sheer pervasiveness of the horror. That's the emphasis, really, in the fourth lament in chapter 4. The total cultural destruction.

Chapter 4, verse 1. The gold itself is tarnished. And society is seen as utterly collapsed into cruelty and death. Verse 4. Infants dying of thirst.

Children being abused. Verse 7. Royalty. Pauperized. An utter devastation. Degeneration. Even into cannibalism. Look at verse 10 of chapter 4.

[20 : 12] The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children. They became their food. Do you remember when we read in Deuteronomy 28 of those dreadful curses?

Moses telling Israel way back then that that would be the depth of horror that they would sink to. If they rebel against God's covenant of grace.

And we find ourselves saying, that could never be. Surely. Well, here it is. In history. This is what happened. But they speak of the sort of things, don't they, that has blighted our world again and again through the course of history.

Take a walk through parts of Syria and other parts of the Middle East today. And you will find, won't you, things almost as horrific as what's being described here. We can't diminish, we can't pretend away that kind of awful reality of calamity and sorrow that infects the lives of human beings in this world.

It's not only deceitful to do that, it's deeply damaging. And so also in our personal lives, I think of a dear, dear lady whom I love dearly.

[21 : 27] Whose husband had cancer. She would not accept that he was terminally ill. God must heal him. She had utterly convinced herself. And of course, ultimately he did die.

And she's never recovered. Not spiritually, not mentally, not even physically. Because she would not recognize the reality of the calamity that had come into their lives.

But calamity and pain and sorrow and grief and death will come into our lives. There's only one question, you know, that you need to ask people whose churches focus on miraculous healings and health and so on.

As the only sign that the Holy Spirit is really in the midst. Just ask them this. What is the prevalence of death in your church? And I'll tell you the answer.

100%. In Adam, all die. Says the apostle. In this world under the curse. And we must face that.

[22 : 34] And every other calamity that we do face in life with reality. We must recognize and not diminish the real sorrow that that brings. One of the most pervasive realities of tragedy and sorrow is the sense of isolation, of aloneness that it brings.

And that's what's expressed so vividly in these laments. Look again at chapter 1, verse 4. The very roads of the city of Zion mourning in their desolation and in their desertion. In verse 8, Zion is pictured as a soiled woman despised the naked and her face turned away, turned to the wall in isolation.

That's evident all the way through these laments. Isolation. The feeling of being alone, apart, far away. Remembering the happy days of the past, the happy throng, the joy, the music.

But old men now have left the city gate. The young men, their music. The joy of our hearts has ceased. Dancing has turned to mourning. Chapter 5, verse 14.

And all tragedy, it isolates in that way, doesn't it? Grief isolates people so desperately. There's the funeral, there's the family and people all around, but then life has to go on and they go back.

[23 : 54] And you're left isolated, alone in that misery. It's the same when you're ill, even just if you're in bed with the flu. Goodness, we've had lots of that recently.

Stuck in your own bedroom, all alone, cut off from all the activities of life. It's even worse if you end up in hospital. You're isolated right out of the place of the living.

One of the tragedies of our wonderful new hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, with all those long corridors and individual single rooms. Every single person I visit in there say, I feel so lonely and isolated.

It's all done to isolate the bugs, but it's isolated the people. Isolation is a terrible thing. But worst of all is the sense of aloneness and isolation and misery when you know that the tragedy that you're enduring is entirely your own fault.

That it's your own folly and sin that has caused the calamity to blight and so devastate your life. To know that is almost unbearable, isn't it? Behold, look and see, is there any sorrow like my sorrow?

[25 : 05] That's the words of a man who knows the real truth. That's the searing agony, isn't it? Of the man who's lost his marriage, who's lost his family and his children, who have nothing to do with him anymore because of his alcoholism.

Or because of his abuse. Or because of his adultery. And anyone who has lost deeply precious things, they feel that terrible sense of that pain and isolation.

And what is possibly dearer to us than those deepest relationships that we cherish. And to have lost them and to know that it is all utterly my own fault.

Is there any sorrow like that sorrow? And that's the sorrow that this book expresses. And you see, the book deals not only with the calamity, but firmly with the causes.

And so if we're to recognize and not deny the real calamity, we're also told that we must repent and not deny the real sin. And that's what the poet does plainly all through these laments.

[26 : 15] Look again at chapter 1, verse 5. A multitude of transgressions has caused this. Verse 8, Jerusalem has sinned grievously. Verse 14, my transgressions are bound into a yoke.

Verse 20, I've been very rebellious. On it goes, all through the songs. And with increasing intensity. Turn over to chapter 4, verse 6. And you see it there absolutely clearly.

We should read verse 6 as the footnote has it in our Bibles. That's the basic meaning. The iniquity of the daughter of my people has been greater than the sin of Sodom.

Worse than the epitome of sinfulness itself. And they were. This is not just rhetoric. Read the books of Kings. You see what Israel sank into.

Full of idolatry. Full of sexual perversity. Religious prostitution. Child abuse. Even child sacrifice. In the name of religion. Not only was their behavior worse than the pagans.

[27 : 18] This was a people who had such a great responsibility. Because their knowledge was so great. They knew from God's own voice. What God wanted. What was right and what was wrong.

What was reprehensible. And they knew the consequences of abandoning God's way. And so as chapter 2, verse 17 says. The Lord has now done what he purposed.

He has carried out his word which he commanded long ago. He has thrown down without pity. He has made the enemy rejoice over you. It is unquestionably a disaster of their own making.

And they know it. They ignored God's clear warnings. And they have paid the price in deep pain. Now that should shock us friends.

And it should sober us. Should it not? As the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ. We should surely fear all the more. Because our responsibility is all the greater. And our revelation is all the greater.

[28 : 19] Should not the church fear? If she forsakes her distinct calling. And becomes just like the perverse culture all around about us.

Especially full of sexual idolatry. Especially full of the scorn and the contempt that it has for innocent life. For the unborn life of the child. How much less is the apostle will we escape?

If we reject him who warns from heaven. The church today. Especially in the West. Needs to tremble at words like these. And read the warnings of the risen Christ.

As we've been doing on Sunday evenings. To the churches. In Revelation 2 and 3. Where the Lord Jesus himself says. If you do not repent. I myself will come against you. And I will remove your lampstand altogether from the world.

Jesus says you need to repent and not deny real sin. In the church. And that's what these laments teach us to do.

[29 : 25] You see it with special intensity in chapter 3. If you read that during the offering. Where the poet embodies personally the confession of his people. And it's a great lesson in real repentance.

Deep repentance. With no presumption. No pretense. Look at chapter 3 verse 39. A man should not complain. About. The punishment of his sin. Somebody has once said.

Lament without confession is just complaint. But that's not so here. There are no excuses. No exceptions. Verse 40. Let us all examine our ways. And return to the Lord.

Let us lift up our hearts. As well as our hands to God in heaven. Because we've transgressed. We've rebelled. That's very revealing isn't it? No pretending. And not just empty words. Not just lifting up hands in prayer.

But hearts also. Returning to God. In real obedience. sins. That because of that.

[30 : 50] That because of that. Every tragedy that we see or experience in this world. Should nevertheless lead every one of us to repentance. Remember that story he told in Luke chapter 13. Of the tower that collapsed.

And killed a whole lot of people. Don't pass judgment on them. He said. As though they were worse people than you. For unless you repent. You also will perish. That is.

All the tragedy. All the calamity in this world. Is ultimately a legacy of human sin. And every human being has a part in that. And every one of us.

Will likewise perish in a judgment to come. Of which all of these things are merely pointers. Unless we also repent. So whenever tragedy strikes.

Of whatever nature. The right response according to Jesus. Always. Is not to complain. About God's sovereignty. And allowing it to happen. But to confess our sin.

[31 : 48] And our part in it. As part of this rebellious world. The truth is. The truth is that often. We are much more directly responsible.

Aren't we for the calamities that we face in life. Very often it is our own personal sin. That's had a lot more to do with it. Than we'd ever like to admit. Things aren't going well for you at work.

Or with your colleagues. Or with your boss. And there's all sorts of difficulties in rumpus. Or in your marriage. Or with your children. Or with your parents. We always complain about the others.

Don't we? But often. The truth is. It's our own behavior. That's one of the chief causes. If not the chief cause. And if that's the case. Denial will not help us.

Will it? We must repent. And at the same time. It's often true as well. In so many of our troubles.

[32 : 46] That we are a big. Big part of the cause. And so. God himself. In these troubles. Is having to chastise us. So that we will learn the reality. About ourselves. And about him.

And his holiness. But about our sin. And about the consequences. Of our sin. And that brings us to the third theme here. You see. The chastisement.

These laments teach us. That we must revere. And not despise. Our real sovereign. The greatest agony of all. In these laments.

Is knowing that. Not only is that calamity. Fully deserved. But that it's inescapable. That it is the result. Of God's own. Personal anger. Vented upon them.

They are chastised. By God's own. Burning wrath. Again. It's all through these laments. We just look at chapter 2. Verse 1. It's the Lord.

[33 : 42] In his. Anger. He. Has done all this. Look all the way through. It's he. He. He. Verse 4. He. He has poured out his burning fire. Verse 3.

It's his. Fierce. Anger. Verse 6. It's his. Fierce. Indignation. All the way through to. Verse 22. At the end. The day of the. Anger of the Lord. It's his. Own.

Anger. That has. Devastated. His. Own. Church. Abandoning. His. Footstool. Verse 1. That's the. Ark of the.

Covenant. In their midst. Verse 7. Scorning. His. Own. Altar. His. Own. Sanctuary. Verse 6. Even his. Own. King. And. Priests. All. The precious.

Emblems. Of their. Unique. Religious. Establishment. Are gone. In God's. Fierce. Wrath. And notice.

[34 : 35] In chapter 2. Verse 14. The heart. Of God's. Anger. Falsehood. At the very. Heart. Of their. Spiritual. Leadership. Men.

Who had not. Called. Sin. Sin. And who. Led their. People. Into what is. False. And misleading. If you turn over to chapter 4. And verse 11. You'll find it's exactly the same.

Even more explicitly. The Lord gave full. Vent. Verse 11. To his wrath. And his hot anger. Why? Verse 13. This was for the sins of her prophets.

The iniquities of her priests. Verse 16. The Lord himself has scattered them. He will regard them. No more. Depends.

The church today. He needs to read these words. And tremble. Especially in the western world. Especially in our nation. Where the. It's the leaders. So often. Of the professing churches. Who have refused.

[35 : 29] To call sin. Sin. Who have led people. Into what is false. And misleading. Turning them away. From the very gospel of God. That is there. Is to proclaim. And if God.

In his wrath. Utterly. Dismissed. And destroyed. The whole. Religious. Establishment. Of Israel. His own. Chosen. Covenant nation. Do you think.

He will shrink. From doing that. To just. One or two. Little privileged. Branches. Of his church. In the western world. Today. When they've abandoned. His calling. Scorned his name.

There are many. Christians today. Even. Evangelical Christians. Who seem to think. That's true. But listen. When Jesus said. I will build my church. And the very gates of hell.

Will not prevail against them. He did not mean. I will build your church. Regardless of whether you keep going knocking on the very gates of hell. No. God wants us to revere.

[36 : 28] And not despise. His real sovereignty. Because he is a God whose anger burns against sin. And above all. Against sin and blasphemy of his name.

Among those who claim to bear his name. And proclaim his name. And his wrath is personal. It burns greatly against sin.

So that he will destroy. Even. The last vestiges of the institutions of his earthly glory. In order to blot it out. That's what happened here. His chastisement was fierce.

And terrible. And complete. And so the poet says. We have transgressed and rebelled. And you have not forgiven. You have wrapped yourself with anger.

And pursued us. Killing without pity. Chapter 3 verse 42. Barry Webb says. Lamentations more than any other Old Testament book. Shows us God's wrath as a directly experienced reality.

[37 : 33] Read these laments. And imagine them as permanent. And perpetual. And a never ending experience. And you begin. Just begin to understand the meaning.

Of that word hell. But Webb also says. And this is crucial. The anger of God. And the suffering it produces. Are overwhelmingly shocking realities.

From which. Only God himself. Only God himself. Can give relief. And that brings us to the final thing. That we must.

Take account of amid calamity. Even calamity caused by our own sin. And our own rebellion. And our own fault. And that is the covenant.

The covenant gospel of God. We must remember. And not despair. Of our real savior. Some people. Recoil so greatly. From this whole notion.

[38 : 26] Of the personal anger. And wrath of God. They just can't. Can't believe it. They want us to think about. The consequences of sin. As a sort of cause and effect. An inevitability. Like touching a live electric wire.

And receiving a shock. Because a personal wrath of God. Is too terrible a thing to think of. But as C.S. Lewis famously pointed out.

You gain absolutely nothing. By that kind of analogy. And you lose something of. Intense and infinite importance. Because as Lewis says. Electricity.

Cannot forgive. But a God who has been. Personally affronted. And outraged. And abused. And angered. He can be prevailed upon.

To forgive. In wrath. To remember mercy. And that's why all through these laments. Are. Glimmers of hope. In the prayers of hope.

[39 : 22] That you read. In chapter 1. The cry is to look. Look Lord. And see. That's an implicit plea for mercy. Isn't it? See our distress. In chapter 2.

Similarly. The weeping. Is. Is an admission. About what the Lord has done. That he has done. What he said he would do. Long ago. In his covenant writings. But that doesn't lead them.

To acquiescing. In passivity. It leads them to active prayer. In chapter 2. Verse 18. Their heart cried out to God. And sustained prayer. Give yourselves. No rest.

Pour out your hearts. Like water. Why? Because. It's the covenant God. Who has done this. True to his covenant. It's the covenant God. Whose mercy. We also crave.

And that is the prayer. Of these laments. It's the prayer. Of covenant hope. Look at chapter 3.

Which really is the high point. Of hope. In the whole book. If you read it.

[40 : 20] You'll see. Verses 1 to 18. Our desperate. Outpouring. Of pain. And lament. The absolute intensity. Of it. Is so great. That at verse 18. He says. My endurance has perished.

And so has my hope. From the Lord. But he still cries out. In verse 19. Remember. Remember my affliction. See how this is killing me.

But look at verse 21. Then. I also call to mind. I also remember. And therefore. I have hope. Why? Because the steadfast.

Love. The covenant love. Of the Lord. Never ceases. His mercies. Never come to an end. The prayer of hope. Even in the midst of darkness. Eugene Peterson says.

Prayer is suffering's best result. And we know that's true. Don't we? Look at somebody. Just recently. Suffering with cancer. Scared by it. And he said.

[41 : 21] But this has brought me. Closer to the Lord. Than I've been for a very. Very long time. Pain. Pain is often like that. Isn't it? It's God's megaphone. It's necessary for God.

To make us take seriously. The thing he makes. He takes seriously. Which is our sin. We don't care that much. About our sin. Do we? Until. It starts to hurt us. And then we start to care about it.

And we cry out to God. For mercy. And we learn. To hope. Only in his great mercy. Chapter 3 verse 24. And we learn.

As verse 27 says. That it's been good. For us to bear the yoke. Of calamity. To teach us. To trust and hope. Only in him. And the only one we can. Whose mercy.

Is never failing. And to hope. In his word of promise. Look at verse 31 of chapter 3. The Lord will not cast off forever. How does he know that?

[42 : 18] Well because he's read. Like us. The whole of the book of Deuteronomy. Do you remember the end of chapter 4. Where Moses speaks about. Even after terrible exile. There will be a return.

If. You will obey his voice. Because the Lord is a merciful God. He will not cast off forever. Or do you remember the end of Moses great song. In chapter 32 of Deuteronomy. For the Lord will vindicate his people.

When he sees. That their power is gone. I wound. Says the Lord. Yes. But I heal. I kill. Yes. But I also make alive. When in the depths of.

Sin caused despair. And calamity. There is hope for the hopeless. And the prayer of hope. Rests on that covenant promise. The promise of hope. There's a glimpse of it at the end of chapter 4.

That leads into the final great prayer of chapter 5. Chapter 4 verse 22. The punishment of your iniquity. The punishment of your iniquity. O daughter of Zion. Is accomplished. He will keep you in exile. No.

[43 : 20] Longer. A promise. Hope. Based on God's sovereign mercy alone. A mercy that never comes to an end. And so in this last great prayer.

In chapter 5. All the hope in that prayer. Is in the midst of real. Honest repentance. Verse 7.

Our father sinned. Verse 16. We have sinned. Real hope is never presumptuous. It comes out of real penitence. And a knowledge of God's absolute sovereignty.

In chastising. But also. In mercy. Look at verse 19 of chapter 5. You reign forever O Lord. Why do you forget us forever?

Verse 21. Turn. Restore us. Turn us to yourself O Lord. So that we may be turned. You see. That's real repentance. He knows he can't repent. He can't turn. Unless God turns their hearts.

[44 : 22] And grants them his grace. Turn us again to you Lord. So that we may be returned to you. As you promised. In your covenant of everlasting mercy. That's the prayer of true faith.

Of covenant hope. Unless. Look at the last verse. Unless that hope is misplaced. Christ. And this time we've gone so far.

That you can't forgive. That your wrath must remain on us forever. Because of your exceeding anger. It's part of the darkness.

Isn't it? Of sin's curse. To feel deeply. That that could be so. That that must be so. And the awful reality of our own sin. Is so great within us.

And we know it should be so. Could that be so? For you and for me. Could it be that we've gone so far.

[45 : 24] This time. That God cannot. Could not. Turn us. Forgive us. Restore us. Well friends.

We know that that can't be so. Don't we? Because we look back. Now. With a better hope. Even that this hopeful. Prophet could ever have. Because we've seen in history.

Haven't we? Where the wrath of God. Fierce hot anger. Against all sin. And rebellion. And evil. And iniquity. Where we've seen. Where that has been meted out. We've seen it. Haven't we? In the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Calvary. So that. His mercy. Also. Might be poured out. Never to come to an end.

Full and free. For those who do call out to him. Lord. Turn me. That I may return. But at what cost for our Savior.

[46 : 23] Behold and see. If there was any sorrow. Like unto his sorrow. When he entered into it. And bore in himself. The pain.

The anger. The anguish of grief. The exile. The isolation. The aloneness. Of death. And separation. Separation.

As the true curse of our sins. When as people did to Jerusalem then. Every passerby hissed. And spat.

And wagged their heads. And mocked. And said. Was this the Son of God? Was this the joy of the earth? And when this very last verse.

Of the cry. In chapter 25. Here. Really was. The absolute experience. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. As he cried out. Why? Why my God. Have you forsaken me?

[47 : 20] Have you remained exceedingly angry. And rejected us utterly forever? He bore. That real and terrible curse of horror. So that we might have that tiring certainty of hope.

So that even when we are floored by calamity. Of our own making. Mired in misery of our own sinfulness. Even as we recognize the terrible truth.

That it is our own doing. That has brought everything upon us. We can still come to him. With the cry of verse 21. Turn us Lord to yourself.

That we may turn. Renew my days. As of old. And we can be sure when we do that.

That we will find. That his mercies never come to an end. Great. Great is his faithfulness.

[48 : 20] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father. Help us. Because if we say we have no sin.

We deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins. You are faithful and just. To forgive us our sins.

And cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so grant us Lord. We pray. Fruitful weeping. In all the pain of life. And especially.

Especially in the calamities. Of our own making. Of our own sin and folly. Grant us Lord. That godly grief and repentance. Which leads to salvation.

Without regret. Turn our hearts. And go on. Turning them back to you. For the sake.

[49 : 17] Of our great savior. The Lord Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.