

Lamentations 1-5 · When We're Overwhelmed by the Grief from our Own Sin

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

The last time we studied through the book of Lamentations was 2011. I don't know how many of you were around here back in 2011. I went back and looked at the video and oh, it was bad. So I deleted that puppy right away. But Lamentations, you know what 'lamentations' means, right? It means a cry. To lament something is to cry over something.

So it kind of begs the question, who in the world would pick this book to study? I mean, who, when you're just breezing through books of the Bible, who's going to stop and go, 'Ooh, I want to go through Lamentations. That sounds like a real perky study that's going to lift me up and give me all kinds of warm fuzzies. Yeah, let's do some crying.' Who would study this book?

Why do we study this book? We study this book because it's in the Bible. We study this book because it's an important part of what God has to say to us in the Bible. And we study this book because it's a pretty powerful postscript to the book that we just finished studying, which was the book of Jeremiah.

And as we learned in our study of Jeremiah, the focus of that book, and what we're going to see the focus of this book is about as well, is about the fall of the southern kingdom of the Israelites. That southern kingdom was called Judah. The northern kingdom was called Israel. They're all Jews, but they had divided because they'd had a civil war.

The northern kingdom had fallen long before. Now it was the southern kingdom's turn to fall. Why? Because they had essentially determined in their hearts to reject the law of the Lord, their covenant God. And they began to take on rampant idolatry, just like the nations that surrounded them. And so because all that was happening, God determined to judge the kingdom of Judah, and bring judgment upon that nation for their refusal to listen.

And Jeremiah had warned the people repeatedly. We saw that in our study of Jeremiah. He told them that God would judge that nation because of their

idolatry, because of their rejection of the law of God. But the people ignored Jeremiah.

They ignored his warnings. In fact, they even got to the point where they persecuted Jeremiah. Treated him shamefully just because he was willing to give them a message from the Lord. But everything the Lord spoke through Jeremiah ultimately came to pass. None of us were surprised about that. And God eventually raised up a very powerful enemy in the kingdom of Babylon under the rule of a king named Nebuchadnezzar.

And through Babylon, the Lord brought judgment upon His people just as He said He would. Babylon attacked and dominated Judah for many years until Judah finally rebelled against Babylon. Even though they were being told repeatedly that this was the Lord's chastisement and they were to accept it, but they refused to accept it.

They rebelled against Babylon. And Babylon finally came, attacked and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, even destroying, burning the temple of the Lord to the ground. And if that wasn't bad enough, they proceeded then to take the majority of the people and bring them into exile in the land of Babylon. And what you're going to find as we go through this relatively short Old Testament book are 5 chapters, which make up 5 poems.

I'm not a big poetry fan, I'll just tell you that right now. If you're into poetry, God bless you. Now, Hebrew poetry is different. I'll just tell you that. Hebrew poetry is different than what we kind of. . . when I was in school, we had to read poems. I hated poetry. I really did. We had to write poetry and that was worse. It's like, shoot me now.

But these are poems. It is written in Hebrew form of poetry, essentially lamenting the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the nation, or the kingdom of Judah. And each of these chapters is in itself an expression of grief over the loss of that nation. But this short book should be considered also an expression with eyes wide open.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. What we're going to see as we read through the book of Lamentations is that the writer is completely aware of why Judah had its fall. In other words, the writer of this book is completely aware as to why judgment came, why they went through the situation they went in.

And that's an important distinction. Because I find with Christians, the most popular question people have when they're going through difficult times is

'why?' 'Why?' And sometimes we don't know the why. Sometimes we don't know it all. And often God isn't telling. Proof of that, just go through the book of Job.

But in this case, the 'why' was clear. The why was because of the rejection of God and the rebellion that the kingdom of Judah had embraced. So you're going to notice as we read through this book, that the author repeatedly mentions the why, and it's the sin of the people. In fact, he even takes personal responsibility for it.

He even talks about how he himself has rebelled. By the way, the author, and I'm going to refer to him as the author, he never identifies himself through the course of this book. At least in the Hebrew text. Now, if you happen to own an ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, it's called the Septuagint.

If you have one, I'd like to see it. But if you did, you would find that there's actually an added verse at the beginning which declares that Jeremiah is in fact the author of this book. And the Septuagint is the Greek version of the Bible that was circulating back during Jesus' ministry.

It is historically believed to have been written by Jeremiah. We're going to just read through this book and I'm going to stop and comment when it is necessary. Chapter 1, it says:

*"How lonely sits the city
that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become,
she who was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
has become a slave.*

*²She 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." (ESV)*

Stop there for a moment. This reference to her lovers and her friends is talking about the false gods and also the ancient foreign alliances that Judah tried to create in order to offset their troubles.

They would reach out to Egypt or they would reach out to Assyria for help in the issues that they had with Babylon and so forth. And these were their friends. Their lovers were their gods, their pagan gods. And notice what it says. They've all abandoned her. In fact, they've *"dealt treacherously with her;"* it says in verse 2.

He goes on, verse 3:

*"³Judah 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.*

*⁴The 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." (ESV)*

Notice there's a personification of Judah here. Speaking of her as a female, it says, *"⁵Her foes" verse 5 "have become the head;"* and here the word head refers to authority, the one in charge.

*" her enemies prosper,
because the LORD has afflicted her
for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away,
captives before the foe.*

*⁶From the daughter of Zion
all her majesty has departed.
Her princes have become like deer
that find no pasture;
they fled without strength
before the pursuer." (ESV)*

Talking here about her princes, this is basically saying that the ones who were once defending her have now run off in fear and dread of the enemy.

*"7 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." (ESV)*

And here's why. Notice the awareness here in verse 8. *"8 Jerusalem sinned grievously;"* and it goes on to say, *"therefore she became filthy;"* now, can I stop you there for just a moment? This is no small thing. This is no small thing because it's called the revelation of sin. We've talked about this in the past, in past studies. What is the revelation of sin? Well, for you and me, it's easy. And I say you and me, and I'm referring to Christians.

Christians have been given a revelation of sin. That's why we are Christians, because we've been made aware that we are sinners. We have also been made aware through the word that God has provided a savior and we have embraced that savior, right? As Christians, this is a total duh moment. We're just like, of course.

Of course we're sinners. Jesus is the savior. It is no big deal to us. Do you guys understand that it's a big deal to some people? Do you understand that some people have not been given a revelation of sin? Do you understand that? Do you understand there are people who live in this world today who have deceived themselves and who have allowed others to deceive them by saying things like, 'I'm okay because I'm a good person.'

I hear it all the time. 'I'm a good person. What do I need God for? What do I need to save you for? I'm a good person. I don't need to be saved from anything. What do I need to be saved from? I'm a good person.' And you hear people say it all the time: 'people are inherently good.' Have you ever heard that before?

I hear it all the time. And of course, if you watch any movies, you're going to hear it repeatedly. 'People are inherently good.' Now the Bible disagrees with that. And we as believers, we know that. The Bible says that the heart of man is deceitfully wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), and people are not inherently good (Psalm 51:5). This is the simple fact of the matter.

It's kind of a smack in the face, but it's a fact. People are in inherently evil apart from God. So because people have rejected the word of God, because people

have rejected the revelation of God, people have hardened their hearts against the revelation of their own sin. And they literally live within this false sense of security that says, 'I'm okay. I'm not a sinner. What do you mean sinner? Why are you Christians always talking about sin? Why do you guys bring up sin all the time? It's like you like to hit yourselves or hurt yourselves or beat yourselves with this sin thing. Why?'

You want to know the answer to that question, by the way, in case anybody asks. It's a great lead-in for witnessing. Here's the answer: because we're not afraid of sin. Because we know the One who has saved us from our sin. We know His name, we know what He did, and we are convinced that He is able to save.

That's why we're not afraid to talk about sin. We know what to do with sin. We bring it to the cross. And what happens there? We find forgiveness, right? We find forgiveness. I hope you do. I hope you find forgiveness at the cross. If you're not, you've missed the cross, because that's what the cross is all about.

So this awareness that we see here in verse 8 is very important to take note of, at least from that standpoint of just the awareness of sin. He goes on, we're in the middle of verse 8. He says, *"all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns her face away. ⁹Her uncleanness" (which is to say her filthiness) "was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future;" (in other words, she lived like there was no tomorrow) "therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter. "O LORD, behold my affliction, for the enemy is triumphed!"*

Can you relate to any of these verses from the standpoint of your life before Christ? Because I can. I can relate to these ideas of living your life like you have no thought for the future. I lived that way at one time. I'm willing to bet some of you did too. You just kinda lived your life and you just did whatever you wanted to do and whatever pleased you and whatever felt good and whatever got you high and whatever, whatever you wanted to do.

And then eventually you fell into the pit that you created for yourself and you realized you couldn't get out. What a terrible thing it is. Then the enemy triumphs, right?

Verse 10:

"¹⁰The 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." (ESV)*

Stop there. He's referring to the fact that gentiles had been forbidden to come into the temple. They had this area in the outer courts where gentiles, if you were a believing gentile, you could go into the outer courts, but you could not go into the temple itself.

You could not go there as a gentile. You were forbidden from doing that. And now what the author is saying is these gentiles have invaded into the inner sanctuary. They've gone in and they have plundered the most sacred things in the temple. They've looted and stolen what was there.

*"¹¹All her people groan
as they search for bread;
they trade their treasures for food
to revive their strength.
"Look, O LORD, and see,
for I am despised."*

*¹²"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
which was brought upon me,
which the LORD inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.*

*¹³"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." (ESV)*

Well, again, can you relate to any of this from your past before you knew Christ? This is poetic language to be sure, but it's descriptive, is it not. Of just hopelessness. The hopelessness that comes from a life apart from God.

Verse 14, he says, "¹⁴"My transgressions were bound into a yoke;" (remember that yoke is what they put over animals and used that to pull wagons and so

forth) *"by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail; the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand."* And I want you to notice here how the author is saying the Lord did this. He knows that the Babylonians were the ones that carried it out. He knows that. He saw the Babylonians, he saw the soldiers, he saw the army, but he's attributing this to the Lord because he knows that God is the one who allowed it to happen.

That's important. That's important because you see we have a tendency to look this way all the time. All the time. And we make enemies out of people. We say, you're my enemy. You're my enemy. You're my enemy. Because you've done this or you brought this into my life. And then we get into the New Testament, we realize, we battle not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12).

Wow. The Lord allow. I hope that I don't ruin your theology a little bit here. Can I tell you that the Lord even allows satan sometimes to spank His children. He'll even let the enemy do a little spanking just like He did the Babylonians, but He's doing it for your good

Verse 15:

*¹⁵"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.*

*¹⁶"For these things I weep;
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."*

*¹⁷Zion stretches out her hands,
but there is none to comfort her;
the LORD has commanded against Jacob
that his neighbors should be his foes;" (ESV)*

(In other words, his enemies)

*"Jerusalem has become
a filthy thing among them." (ESV)*

And then I want you to notice verse 18 here. He says, ¹⁸*"The LORD is in the right,"* (why?) *"for I have rebelled against his word;"* wow. Again, revelation. A revelation of understanding. Why is this happening? Because I've rebelled against God. I understand. I know what's going on here. And you know what he says? ¹⁸*"The LORD is in the right,"* the Lord is in the right.

Now, let me just make a statement here. The Lord is always in the right. This statement is kind of a throwaway statement. It's a good reminder. But it's kind of a throwaway from the standpoint that God is always in the right. Oh man, wouldn't that be nice if that described you or me that we were never wrong? Yeah, I'm wrong every day. But He's never wrong.

God is never wrong. He's always in the right. That's a mindblower, if you kind of let yourself go on that one for a while. And that's what he's saying here in the most painful of circumstances. It's one thing to say the Lord is in the right when you see Him disciplining your friend who you think rather deserves it. 'Well, I can see that the Lord has been just with you.'

But now when it's on you, when you're the one getting spanked, for you to be able to say then, 'God is in the right for spanking me.' That's saying something, isn't it? Yeah. That's a different thing altogether.

He goes on middle of verse 18, *"but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering; my young women and my young men have gone into captivity."* Talking about those who've been taken into exile.

¹⁹*"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.*

²⁰*"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.*

²¹*"They heard my groaning,
yet there is no one 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;
now let them be as I am.*

²²*"Let all their evildoing come before you," (ESV)*

(Now he's talking about those who gloated over the judgment that he himself received. He says:)

²²*"Let all their evildoing come before you,
and deal with them
as you have dealt with me
because of all my transgressions;
for my groans are many,
and my heart is faint." (ESV)*

And so you can see here that chapter 1 ends with a prayer for the Lord to judge the enemies of Israel. Or in this case, the kingdom of Judah, who had rejoiced in her downfall. But they themselves were continuing in their evil ways.

Chapter 2:

¹*"How the Lord in his anger
has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!
He has cast down from heaven to earth
the splendor of Israel;
he has not remembered his footstool
in the day of his anger." (ESV)*

(He refers many times throughout the scripture of Israel as his footstool.)

²*The Lord has swallowed up without mercy
all the habitations of Jacob;
in his wrath he has broken down
the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
he has brought down to the ground in dishonor
the kingdom and its rulers.*

³*He has cut down in fierce anger
all the might of Israel;
he has withdrawn from them his right hand
in the face of the enemy;
he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob,
consuming all around."* (ESV)

I need you to stop there for just a moment. I want to bring out a point. We had a family discussion going on, I can't remember if it was yesterday. I guess it was, because a bunch of our family got together. We were chatting about the fact that in ancient kingdoms, when bad things happened in ancient kingdoms, they would often erase that from their history.

You think that people have been retelling history lately and that's a new thing? Oh no. This has been going on for a long time. Kingdoms would, if they got conquered, if they got beat by an enemy, they'd just erase it. They would not record it. They'd only record their victories because they wanted their history to look powerful and proud and honorable. Which really is something that makes the Bible particularly unique in that it records the failures of Israel for everybody to read.

For all these days, the failures. And the reason that it does it is because you can't just cut out the failures from your life and pretend like they didn't happen. Because you never learn anything that way, right? You never get around to actually growing and maturing in your understanding of God and His work in your life if you kind of just ignore your failures.

You've got to bring them to God. 'Lord, this was a failure. This was a colossal failure. I mean, I really messed up bad and I'm not going to pretend like it didn't happen. So Lord, show me what I need to learn. Because obviously I need to learn things. I'm not done learning. So teach me, instruct me, help me to look my failures right in the face, because I know that you still love me anyway. And I know that you're never going to take your love away from me. I know that you'll never leave me nor forsake me. And so I'm not afraid to look my failures right in the eye and deal with it.'

Verse 4 says:

*"⁴He has bent his bow like an enemy,
with his right hand set like a foe;
and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes*

*in the tent of the daughter of Zion;
he has poured out his fury like fire.*

*⁵The Lord has become like an enemy;
he has swallowed up Israel;
he has swallowed up all its palaces;
he has laid in ruins its strongholds,
and he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah
mourning and lamentation.*

*⁶He has laid waste his booth like a garden,
laid in ruins his meeting place;
the LORD has made Zion forget
festival and Sabbath," (ESV)*

(and he's talking about the feasts that they would celebrate with great joy and wonder. And he says all that's done, it's over.)

"and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.

*⁷The Lord has scorned his altar,
disowned his sanctuary;" (ESV)*

(the people thought that couldn't happen. They thought that couldn't happen, and yet it did.)

*"he has delivered into the hand of the enemy
the walls of her palaces;
they raised a clamor in the house of the LORD
as on the day of festival." (ESV)*

In other words, these pagan, gentile soldiers celebrated in the temple of the Lord in the way that we should be celebrating the good things of God. And they were celebrating their vicious slaughter of our people.

Can you imagine what would be like if a conquering army came into our country and devastated the land, burning houses, burning buildings, taking people captive to another country, raping the women, pillaging the homes, places that were important to us and so forth. Where people wandered around in the streets and couldn't find anything to eat. Can you imagine what that would be like? That's what they went through. That's what he's lamenting. That's the reason behind the lamentation.

Verse 8:

⁸The LORD determined to lay in ruins
the wall of the daughter of Zion;
he stretched out the measuring line;
he did not restrain his hand from destroying;
he caused rampart and wall to lament;
they languished together.

⁹Her gates have sunk into the ground;
he has ruined and broken her bars;
her king and princes are among the nations;
the law is no more,
and her prophets find
no vision from the LORD.

¹⁰The elders of the daughter of Zion
sit on the ground in silence;
they have thrown dust on their heads
and put on sackcloth;
the young women of Jerusalem
have bowed their heads to the ground.

¹¹My eyes are spent with weeping;
my stomach churns;
my bile is poured out to the ground
because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
because infants and babies faint
in the streets of the city.

¹²They cry to their mothers,
"Where is bread and wine?"
as they faint like a wounded man
in the streets of the city,
as their life is poured out
on their mothers' bosom.

¹³What can I say for you, to what compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you,
O virgin daughter of Zion?

*For your ruin is vast as the sea;
who can heal you?*

*¹⁴Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen for you oracles
that are false and misleading.*

*¹⁵All who pass along the way
clap their hands at you;
they hiss and wag their heads
at the daughter of Jerusalem:
"Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?"*

*¹⁶All your enemies
rail against you;
they hiss, they gnash their teeth,
they cry: "We have swallowed her!
Ah, this is the day we longed for;
now we have it; we see it!"*

*¹⁷The LORD has 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
and exalted the might of your foes.*

*¹⁸Their heart cried to the Lord.
O wall of the daughter of Zion,
let tears stream down like a torrent
day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!*

*¹⁹"Arise, cry out in the night,
at the beginning of the night watches!
Pour out your heart like water*

*before the presence of the Lord!
Lift your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger
at the head of every street."*

²⁰*Look, O LORD, and see!
With whom have you dealt thus?
Should women eat the fruit of their womb,
the children of their tender care?
Should priest and prophet be killed
in the sanctuary of the Lord?*

²¹*In the dust of the streets
lie the young and the old;
my young women and my young men
have fallen by the sword;
you have killed them in the day of your anger,
slaughtering without pity.*

²²*You summoned as if to a festival day
my terrors on every side,
and on the day of the anger of the LORD
no one escaped or survived;
those whom I held and raised
my enemy destroyed." (ESV)*

Wow. Now, as we get into chapter 3, you're going to find that this is kind of the jewel of the book of Lamentations. What I mean by that is, first of all, this chapter probably gives us more quotable quotes that you've probably heard many times but didn't perhaps realize were in the book of Lamentations. But this chapter also has a section in it that gives us really the only real glimmer of hope that we get throughout the course of this study through Lamentations.

And it is like cold water that refreshes. And you'll see that here in just a minute. But it begins rather negatively here for the first several verses. He says in verse 1:

¹*I am the man who has seen affliction
under the rod of his wrath;
²he has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;*

³surely against me he turns his hand
again and again the whole day long.

⁴He has made my flesh and my skin waste away;
he has broken my bones;

⁵he has besieged and enveloped me
with bitterness and tribulation;

⁶he has made me dwell in darkness
like the dead of long ago.

⁷He has walled me about so that I cannot escape;
he has made my chains heavy;

⁸though I call and cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer;

⁹he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones;
he has made my paths crooked.

¹⁰He is a bear lying in wait for me,
a lion in hiding;

¹¹he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces;
he has made me desolate;

¹²he bent his bow and set me
as a target for his arrow.

¹³He drove into my kidneys
the arrows of his quiver;

¹⁴I have become the laughingstock of all peoples,
the object of their taunts all day long.

¹⁵He has filled me with bitterness;
he has sated me with wormwood.

¹⁶He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
and made me cower in ashes;

¹⁷my soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;

¹⁸so I say, "My endurance has perished;
so has my hope from the LORD."

¹⁹Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!

²⁰My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me." (ESV)

Pretty negative, huh? Pretty dark. But I want you to notice here something. Beginning in verse 21, and on down through verse 40, we begin to see an interesting somewhat altered expression of the author of this book.

And you're going to see that hope shines through the devastation. This section, by the way of Lamentations, is referred to as the cry of the individual. You might have noticed earlier in these first 20 verses, he talks about I, me, what happened to me. And here is this single person crying out to God.

And in these next verses, expressing faith and advising others to have the same, look at verse 21:

*"²¹But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*

*²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;*

*²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

*²⁴"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."*

*²⁵The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.*

*²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD." (ESV)*

Would you stop there for a moment? I've got to just remind you of something. This theme, of waiting quietly. Waiting patiently for the Lord. It's something we see pretty often throughout the Old Testament. You hear it a lot. We see it in the Psalms and elsewhere.

But it kind of makes a little bit more of a powerful statement in the midst of this book, because this is a book of lamentation. This is a book where someone has had a revelation of their own iniquity, their own sin, and they've seen the devastation that their sin has caused.

And as they look around them, all they see is devastation. All they see is hurt. All they see is darkness. That's it. And yet, in the midst of all that they speak of waiting quietly for the salvation of the Lord. And by the way, the word 'salvation' means 'deliverance.' So the writer of this book is saying, and yet even though this is all I see and there's nothing that I can see with my eyes, hear with

my ears, that would in any way convey hope to me about my circumstances, I will wait quietly for the deliverance of the Lord.

I will. I've determined to wait quietly. I don't know if you've ever sat with someone, maybe you've been that someone, who has been like that Job character, sitting amidst darkness, devastation, for whatever reason it may have come. And they're asking the question why, and you don't have an answer.

And I encourage you strongly not to try to think of one. It is not going to do any good. They're going to say 'why' over and over again. Don't answer it. Because you don't know. That's the bottom line. That's why we don't answer that question, because we don't know the answer. But to sit there with them when all is dark and to watch, there's probably nothing more challenging.

But then, to see that person come to an eventual place of understanding that I'm at the bottom and there's nothing else for me to do but look up. I mean, that's all there is. There's nothing more for me. And so I will look up. My hope is in the Lord. And that's what he's saying. In the midst of all this darkness, it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. To wait patiently.

I don't know if there's some here tonight who are waiting patiently for the Lord to rebuild what has been broken down. Maybe that what has been broken down is you. Maybe it's something in your life or, I don't know, a relationship, connection, hopes, dreams, whatever it might be.

That act of waiting for the Lord to rebuild what has been broken takes great patience. But it takes even greater faith. Because it's a very common thing for us to become very impatient with God. He rarely moves at the speed we would like Him to, and we get impatient. And what we end up doing is we try to create our own new beginnings.

We try to rebuild, we try to create our own deliverance. We try to create our own deliverance. We try to deliver ourselves. And that's what we've learned in the world before we came to Christ. 'Hey, you want to fix this thing? Pick yourself up by your bootstraps and get busy.' Right? We all talk about being a self-made man.

I did it my way. All that other junk. Yeah, buck up. No, that's really difficult. So all that's ringing in your ear while at the same time the Lord is speaking to you to wait with patience for Him to rebuild that which has been lost.

Verse 27, he says:

²⁷*It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.*

²⁸*Let him sit alone in silence
when it is laid on him;*

²⁹*let him put his mouth in the dust—
there may yet be hope;" (ESV)*

In other words, suffering is okay sometimes. Verse 30:

³⁰*let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.*

³¹*For the Lord will not
cast off forever,*

³²*but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;*

³³*for he does not afflict from his heart
or grieve the children of men.*

³⁴*To crush underfoot
all the prisoners of the earth,*

³⁵*to deny a man justice
in the presence of the Most High,*

³⁶*to subvert a man in his lawsuit,
the Lord does not approve.*

³⁷*Who has spoken and it came to pass,
unless the Lord has commanded it?" (ESV)*

You can't just say things. I get this thing all the time. People are so afraid. They'll write to me and say, 'Pastor Paul, I think I made a negative confession and now I'm afraid.' And I like to take him to this verse. Who can? Who?

³⁷*Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?"*

You don't have that much power. Okay? You might have been told that you do. You don't. Unless the Lord has commanded it, it ain't going to happen.

³⁸*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that good and bad come?*

³⁹*Why should a living man complain,
a man, about the punishment of his sins?*

⁴⁰*Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the LORD!*

⁴¹*Let us lift up our hearts and hands
to God in heaven." (ESV)*

Wow. Pretty powerful verses. But now we kind of return to the lamentation that characterizes the book.

⁴²*"We have transgressed and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven.*

⁴³*"You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us,
killing without pity;*

⁴⁴*you have wrapped yourself with a cloud
so that no prayer can pass through.*

⁴⁵*You have made us scum and garbage
among the peoples.*

⁴⁶*"All our enemies
open their mouths against us;*

⁴⁷*panic and pitfall have come upon us,
devastation and destruction;*

⁴⁸*my eyes flow with rivers of tears
because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.*

⁴⁹*"My eyes will flow without ceasing,
without respite,*

⁵⁰*until the LORD from heaven
looks down and sees;*

⁵¹*my eyes cause me grief
at the fate of all the daughters of my city.*

⁵²*"I have been hunted like a bird
by those who were my enemies without cause;*

⁵³*they flung me alive into the pit
and cast stones on me;*

⁵⁴*water closed over my head;
I said, 'I am lost.'" (ESV)*

And then here's the one verse that expresses hope:

*"⁵⁵I called on your name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit;" (ESV)*

You ever done that? Is that you? Is that verse for you?

*"⁵⁶you heard my plea, 'Do not close
your ear to my cry for help!'*

*⁵⁷You came near when I called on you;
you said, 'Do not fear!'*

*⁵⁸"You have taken up my cause, O Lord;
you have redeemed my life.*

*⁵⁹You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD;
judge my cause.*

*⁶⁰You have seen all their vengeance,
all their plots against me.*

*⁶¹"You have heard their taunts, O LORD,
all their plots against me." (ESV)*

(He repeats that.)

*"⁶²The lips and thoughts of my assailants
are against me all the day long.*

*⁶³Behold their sitting and their rising;
I am the object of their taunts.*

*⁶⁴"You will repay them, O LORD,
according to the work of their hands.*

*⁶⁵You will give them dullness of heart;
your curse will be on them.*

*⁶⁶You will pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under your heavens, O LORD." (ESV)*

Chapter 4:

*"¹How the gold has grown dim,
how the pure gold is changed!*

*The holy stones lie scattered
at the head of every street.*

²The precious sons of Zion,
worth their weight in fine gold,
how they are regarded as earthen pots,
the work of a potter's hands!

³Even jackals offer the breast;
they nurse their young;
but the daughter of my people has become cruel,
like the ostriches in the wilderness.

⁴The tongue of the nursing infant sticks
to the roof of its mouth for thirst;
the children beg for food,
but no one gives to them.

⁵Those who once feasted on delicacies
perish in the streets;
those who were brought up in purple
embrace ash heaps.

⁶For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater
than the punishment of Sodom,
which was overthrown in a moment,
and no hands were wrung for her.

⁷Her princes were purer than snow,
whiter than milk;
their bodies were more ruddy than coral,
the beauty of their form was like sapphire.

⁸Now their face is blacker than soot;
they are not recognized in the streets;
their skin has shriveled on their bones;
it has become as dry as wood.

⁹Happier were the victims of the sword
than the victims of hunger,
who wasted away, pierced
by lack of the fruits of the field.

¹⁰The hands of compassionate women
have boiled their own children;

*they became their food
during the destruction of the daughter of my people." (ESV)*

And by the way, that's unfortunately true. They did actually resort to cannibalism during the siege.

*¹¹The LORD gave full vent to his wrath;
he poured out his hot anger,
and he kindled a fire in Zion
that consumed its foundations.*

*¹²The kings of the earth did not believe,
nor any of the inhabitants of the world,
that foe or enemy could enter
the gates of Jerusalem.*

*¹³This was for the sins of her prophets
and the iniquities of her priests,
who shed in the midst of her
the blood of the righteous.*

*¹⁴They wandered, blind, through the streets;
they were so defiled with blood
that no one was able to touch
their garments.*

*¹⁵"Away! Unclean!" people cried at them.
"Away! Away! Do not touch!"
So they became fugitives and wanderers;
people said among the nations,
"They shall stay with us no longer."*

*¹⁶The LORD himself has scattered them;
he will regard them no more;
no honor was shown to the priests,
no favor to the elders.*

*¹⁷Our eyes failed, ever watching
vainly for help;
in our watching we watched
for a nation which could not save.*

¹⁸*They dogged our steps
so that we could not walk in our streets;
our end drew near; our days were numbered,
for our end had come.*

¹⁹*Our pursuers were swifter
than the eagles in the heavens;
they chased us on the mountains;
they lay in wait for us in the wilderness.*

²⁰*The breath of our nostrils, the LORD's anointed,
was captured in their pits,
of whom we said, "Under his shadow
we shall live among the nations."*

²¹*Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
you who dwell in the land of Uz;
but to you also the cup shall pass;
you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare." (ESV)*

You should know that Edom took a very active role in Jerusalem's fall and they rejoiced when Jerusalem fell. Now the prophet says, yeah, well it's coming your way too. Judgment's coming to you too.

²²*The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished;
he will keep you in exile no longer;
but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish;
he will uncover your sins." (ESV)*

And then the last poem.

¹*Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;" (ESV)*

Notice the reference to 'us.' This is the community lament. Previously we heard the personal lament. Now it's the community speaking. These are the remnant, if you will.

² *look, and see our disgrace!*
²*Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
our homes to foreigners.*
³*We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.*

⁴*We must pay for the water we drink;
the wood we get must be bought.*

⁵*Our pursuers are at our necks;
we are weary; we are given no rest.*

⁶*We have given the hand to Egypt, and to Assyria,
to get bread enough.*

⁷*Our fathers sinned, and are no more;
and we bear their iniquities.*

⁸*Slaves rule over us;
there is none to deliver us from their hand.*

⁹*We get our bread at the peril of our lives,
because of the sword in the wilderness.*

¹⁰*Our skin is hot as an oven
with the burning heat of famine.*

¹¹*Women are raped in Zion,
young women in the towns of Judah.*

¹²*Princes are hung up by their hands;
no respect is shown to the elders.*

¹³*Young men are compelled to grind at the mill,
and boys stagger under loads of wood.*

¹⁴*The old men have left the city gate,
the young men their music.*

¹⁵*The joy of our hearts has ceased;
our dancing has been turned to mourning.*

¹⁶*The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!*

¹⁷*For this our heart has become sick,
for these things our eyes have grown dim,*

¹⁸*for Mount Zion which lies desolate;
jackals prowl over it.*

¹⁹*But you, O LORD, reign forever;
your throne endures to all generations.*

²⁰*Why do you forget us forever,
why do you forsake us for so many days?*

²¹*Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!
Renew our days as of old—*

²²*unless you have utterly rejected us,
and you remain exceedingly angry with us." (ESV)*

So as we wrap up this study of Lamentations, what we see is this poetic picture of how desperate the life of sin is. How difficult the life of sin is and how it devastates our lives. It devastates our relationships, our bodies, our minds, our spirits. Nothing is left unaffected by sin.

But can I tell you something? When we bring our sin to the cross, there is forgiveness. There is restoration. There is hope. Whatever darkness, whatever difficulty, whatever pain you've experienced in your life because of a life of basically acting like God doesn't exist. If you've begun to experience a revelation of the consequences of that lifestyle, I encourage you to bring all those things to the cross. Because the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They're new every morning. Great is His faithfulness.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we confess to You our sin. We confess to You, Lord, our transgressions. We confess to You our wrongdoing. We confess to You the iniquity of our heart.

We confess to You the evil of our attitudes. We have thrown You aside. We have pretended that You don't even exist. We have denied Your very life and all that You have done. But like the author of Lamentations, we have seen the devastation, the darkness and the consequence of our actions. And we turn to You now, oh Lord.

And we ask for the hope that is found through Jesus Christ who died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin. We accept that work that He gave for us sacrificially to pay our penalty. Thank you, Father. Fill us with hope. Fill us with a new day, and new life, and new hope, and make us into new people. We ask this in Jesus' precious name, amen.