

# Despair: A Moment or a Way of Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that you are not silent, but you are a God who speaks and that you have spoken through your word. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you, Father, that he is not only Emmanuel, God with us, but he is also the one who died on the cross for us to make us right with you.

And we ask, Lord, that the Holy Spirit would move with might and power and deep conviction in each of our lives at this time as we reflect upon your word, as your word speaks into our hearts. And we ask that you would grip us again with who Jesus is and what he has done for us. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen. We're going to be looking at Lamentations chapter three. If you have your Bibles, you might want to turn to that.

And as I was sharing last week, it's a way of pastors, ministers and Bible study leaders can often refer to themselves as referred, talk as if they're going to tackle a book.

And the book of Lamentations week after week has been tackling me. Part of it is that it talks about a God who causes suffering. And it obviously raises questions in everybody's mind as to how and why anybody would believe in a God that causes suffering.

[ 1 : 18 ] And not only is that going to be walked towards again this week in the text, but it also talks about God not forgiving. And how on earth can you believe in a God that doesn't forgive? Or at least it seems as if he doesn't forgive or doesn't want to forgive.

And one of the things which is so wonderful about the book of Lamentations is it walks right into these problems. And it doesn't walk into these problems like a philosophical argument. It's a poem. It's not clear whether it would have been just something that was just merely a poem, so to speak, that you would read like a poem if it's meant to be sung. But it's five separate poems, each of them connected and related to each other.

And it's a poem that speaks deep into our heart and into our experience. And not giving away the ending, one of the things that I think the book of Lamentations does regularly is there's enough light to understand who God is and enough light to understand who you are.

And on the other hand, it doesn't force itself on us. And that rather than actually being something which condemns God, it's something which reveals who we are and who we really are in the real world in light of the reality of the living God and how we should then live.

[ 2 : 36 ] So let's look at chapter 3, verse 1. And we'll see right off the bat that it's talking about very, very serious issues because it begins like this. Actually, just before I read it, well, no, let's read it.

I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath. And the his is referring to God. I'm just going to read that again. I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath. This is a poem that has a lot of pain in it. And it's a poem that's going to wrestle and articulate hopelessness and even despair.

And in fact, one of the things I guess that the poem is going to set before us isn't that there should be no point in time when you're hopeless. It isn't that there should be never a time that you experience despair.

In fact, one of the things that the book does is it doesn't shame you if you, in fact, as you read it, are feeling despair or hopelessness. The book doesn't shame you.

[ 3 : 42 ] It doesn't keep on telling you that, okay, real, you know, real authentic human beings never experienced this. Real Christians never experienced this. It's going to articulate these things without shaming them.

But it will also pose the question, is the hopelessness and despair to be a moment or a way of life? Is the pain to be a moment or a way of life?

Obviously, people do choose despair and hopelessness as a very long season and maybe even a way of life. But because we Christians believe that this is ultimately God's word written, the question is, does God, who doesn't shame you over feeling despair or hopelessness, is he calling you to a way of life centered around pain or despair or hopelessness?

So here again it is. I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath. And just, it's very, very concrete poetry.

And it goes like this, it continues on. He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light. Surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long.

[ 4 : 57 ] He has made my flesh and my skin waste away. He has broken my bones. He has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation. He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago.

He has walled me about so that I cannot escape. He has made my chains heavy. Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones.

He has made my paths crooked. He is, just sort of pause before we read verse 10. You notice the power of this imagery. And one of the things about this poem that we have to understand is that it's taken from, in a sense, the point of view of the speaker, the observer.

Just as in other completely different sermons, or apparently different but not really different, that the talk, when it talks about things which we would call scientific things, is always observational language.

And observational language, in a sense, isn't wrong, because you just speak about what you observe. If you read about the sun rising, or if somebody says the sun is rising in the east, they obviously, you know that they're just talking about how it looks from your point of view.

[ 6 : 15 ] And one of the things about this poem is he's talking about things from his point of view, how he's experienced them. And, you know, even here, you have this double image that God, on one hand, has walled him in and constrained his life.

On the other hand, he's made his way crooked. And there's these constant, multiple, very, very concrete images from his point of view. And the poem is a bit of a, it will move you through things. And as it goes through to verse 18, it's going to move to this conclusion that his hope is completely and utterly gone, and he's caught in despair. Continue reading at verse 10.

He is a bear lying in wait for me. In other words, to kill me. He, a lion in hiding. He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces.

He has made me desolate. He bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver. I have become the laughingstock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long.

[ 7 : 22 ] He has filled me with bitterness. He has sated me with wormwood. He has made my teeth grind on gravel and made me cower in ashes.

My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is. So I say, my endurance has perished.

So has my hope from the Lord. Now, some of you, before you came to this service, might have been in a good mood. Some of you might have been trying to get into a good mood.

Some of you are thinking, wow, that describes exactly how I feel. Just before we go anything further, you know, Christians are ones who understand that Jesus is their Savior and Lord.

And they've come to trust him as their Savior and his disciples. And a disciple is one, in a sense, who follows another person, who trusts another person to be the wise guide, the leader, the model, the emulator, the one who provides.

[ 8 : 27 ] And one of the things that Christians learn from Jesus is that ultimately the words of Scripture, God uses many, many different authors. But ultimately the word of Scriptures are the words that God wanted to have there.

And if you think about it for a second, this gives these words very, very, very great power. God wanted this expression of hopelessness and despair to be in his word.

Like God wanted it. It wasn't as if he was sort of, he got caught up with watching angels play. And while he got caught up watching angels play, some human being snuck this in or God's enemy snuck this in or the devil snuck this in.

And, you know, then, you know, after a couple of centuries of God watching angels play, he sees and he goes, oh, dang, this part, I didn't want this to get in the Bible. What's this doing there?

That's not what happens at all. That, in fact, this very, very powerful language of being broken, of ruin, of hopelessness, God wanted this text to be in the Bible.

[ 9 : 45 ] Now, before I go any further on this, I need to tell you something about, so, you know, just give me a bit of mercy for a second here. There's a bit of a grammar geek moment, a little bit of mercy.

But some of us love different grammar and structural things. Other of us go, okay, here's my time for a nap. But it's actually really, really important here to understand something that's going on in this.

If it wasn't for the fact that the poem is an acrostic, and that means that every, the first, like, the Hebrew equivalent of the letter A begins the first verse.

And, in fact, actually this, if you go back and you look at it, one of the reasons you can understand that this is the heart of the whole book of Lamentations is that, so an acrostic is where the first word of the first line begins with, in a sense, our letter A, then B, then C, then D.

The second word of this, the second verse, you know, is B and C. And chapter 1 and 2 are acrostics. There's 22, at this time of, in Hebrew, there's 22 letters in the alphabet. And so chapter 1 and chapter 2 are acrostics.

[ 10 : 50 ] But chapter 3 is like an acrostic on steroids. It is, if you're reading it in the original language, it's like, okay, that's an acrostic. Whoa. That's an acrostic.

Whoa. And then you go, whoa, this is an acrostic. Because chapter 1 and chapter 2, every, in a sense, verse or stanza has three poetic lines. But it's only the first word of the first line that has, in a sense, the first letter.

But when it comes to chapter 3, there's still, in a sense, three poetic lines for every letter of the alphabet. But every single line begins with the letter A in the first three.

And then in chapter, and then verses 4, 5, and 6, in a sense, the Hebrew letter for B, every word is like that. And so the way the whole book is structured, it's an acrostic and it's an acrostic.

Whoa, this is like really a huge acrostic. It draws your attention to it, which is what, in a sense, God wants. God wants your attention to be drawn to the despair. But he also wants your attention to be drawn to what happens next.

[ 11 : 53 ] And this is the other thing which is really cool about this, is that if this was like a book like Isaiah or Ezekiel or the book of Proverbs, because in the book of Proverbs, like the first ten chapters are a whole group of, in a sense, psalms or poems.

And so scholars try to debate about whether, you know, this poem here connects with this poem or this poem or this poem. And chapter 4 is, chapter 3 is actually four different poems. Verses 1 to 24, verses 25 to 39, verses 40 to 47, and verses 48 to 66 are all actually four separate poems. But because it's an acrostic, you understand that the author is holding them all together and you're to understand them all together.

And so here we come up to verse 18 in this poem. And we have this very powerful, you know, look again at verse 17. My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is, so I say my endurance has perished.

So is my hope from the Lord. We're coming to the end of the first poem. And then verses 19 and 21, there starts to be a little bit of a transition. It goes like this, Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.

[ 13 : 04 ] In the Bible, usually when they use the word remember, it's asking the God to do something. It's not just remembering. But because you now look, because I have returned to you and I'm asking you, can you note this and do something about it?

So it begins to be a bit of a transition from this thing of my hope is, my endurance has perished. My hope has perished. Verse 19, Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.

My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. And then listen to these next three verses, which is the end of the psalm.

But it's all part of this bigger poem that makes up chapter three. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in him. Now, just a couple of things. I shared this in the first week.

[ 14 : 09 ] This is the best known part of the Book of Lamentations. In fact, many people, it's the only part of the Book of Lamentations they know. And it's not unusual for those verses to be in a little prayer card or a little fridge magnet or to be a little greeting card or something like that.

And it's very, very interesting that usually when these verses, if you could put this image up now, that would be very helpful. Usually when these verses come up, it's with something like this. You have a beautiful scene of a cottage at a lake or you have a beautiful scene of a farm in the middle of the countryside and everything is green and everything is lush and everything is peaceful and everything is wonderful.

And that's how people see and understand this verse. But now you understand that to see that card like that, and I'm not going to diss that card. I'm not saying that if you have that card in your fridge and you find it helpful, throw it in the garbage.

I'm not going to say that at all. If that works and helps for you, that's good. But in a sense, it's a type of a romantic view of what life is like. And it doesn't speak to people who are caught in despair.

If you could put up the second image, this would be very, very helpful. You have to understand that these five poems have been written, are being written, while somebody sits in the ruins like this.

[ 15 : 25 ] In fact, I was just thinking that maybe I should ask Amy to make a postcard card with those ruins and the words. And the words, And that is something to put on your fridge, because that's exactly the context within which this is being said.

The person who says this, the poet, is saying these words, singing this song, praying this prayer, making this confession in the midst of the ruins. In the midst of the ruins.

And in fact, you won't understand the rest of the poem, or you won't understand chapters 4 and 5, the poems that finish after this, if you don't understand, that just because the poet comes to this recognition, doesn't automatically mean that his reality is now like being in a farm, or in the countryside, or in a cottage, or wherever your happy place is, and everything is green, and everything is prosperous, and everything is safe, and everything is peaceful.

The poet comes to this profound realization. And as they come to this profound realization, they're still in the ruins. And they're going to be in the ruins tomorrow, because ruins don't get, in a sense, unruined or rebuilt, just instantly.

This text isn't talking about magic. Now look again at the text. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.

[ 17 : 06 ] Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in him. This is the heart of the whole poem. In one level, you might say, George, that doesn't make any sense, that all of a sudden, he's just gone through this profound experience of speaking of hopelessness, and his endurance is gone, and now all of a sudden, this pops up.

But I would like to suggest to you that that's exactly realistic. That's exactly realistic. I've had many, many, many times when I've just felt very, very, very down, very, very completely overwhelmed, and all of a sudden, something like this pops into my mind.

You know, I've had many, many times when I've just felt angry at the world or nobody loves me or completely down, and all of a sudden, unbidden, so to speak, or maybe I've shot up the odd little prayer, God, why don't you do something about that, and all of a sudden, something will come up into my mind, some act of kindness, some act of love, some person who does love me, some person who does care for me, some memory of joy.

And part of the problem for we as human beings have, and this is, this, you see, that's exactly how these things happen. Part of the question then is, what do we do with it?

Where do we go with it? I mean, I know for me, there are many, many times in my life that I hang on to the suffering. I hang on to the sorrow. I hang on to the bitterness. I hang on to the pain.

[ 18 : 34 ] I, in a sense, the door opens to think about something different, and it's as if I do all in my power to shut that door, to close that window, to cover the light, to repress that moment of hope, or joy, or love, or peace, or truth that comes to start to flood me in the midst of my pain.

So I would say that rather than being artificial, this actually describes human experience. Some of us might not think of the human experience as being like this because we've become so accustomed to almost, without even thinking about it, the second that there is a pleasant thought, a hopeful thought, that we close that door immediately.

And that's why one of the things about this whole poem, from the beginning to the end, is such an important thing for us to reflect upon and enter into. Because it starts to maybe show a little bit into

us.

There's several things. As the poem goes on and continues, and chapter four and chapter five goes on, pain doesn't go away quickly. It doesn't go away instantly.

This isn't like a technique or magic. It isn't as if reality is like a bank machine where you put your card in, you just press the options, and the options just mechanically follow. And God isn't the sort of God.

[ 19 : 53 ] Like, why would you think, I mean, it's as if we want a God who's like a cash machine, but if, like, why would we worship that? I know we worship money. Why would we want a God who works like a machine that you just press a button and then something transpires?

The fact of the matter is, is that emotionally, we can live, we can be in pain. I mean, the pain might be real. The ruin might continue to be real. We are dealing with the ruin of our relationship, the ruin of our finances, the ruin of our friendships, and those things don't get solved or healed just right away, and the pain that goes away with it doesn't go right away.

And in that sense, this poem and the whole book of Lamentations is profoundly emotionally accurate. But at the same time, at the same time, even in the midst of pain, part of the reason that pain is pain and that suffering is suffering and ruin is ruin, is that we have in our very, very deep bones that that's not what we were made for.

That it's out of whack. That it's not our true resting place. That our true resting place is somewhere quite different.

And so one of the things which is so remarkable, I'm going to be spending longer time on this verse, obviously, because it's so important to understand our experience and the message of the book of Lamentations and what happens next. But this, these three lines make these powerful lines, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

[ 21 : 20 ] That it's part of God's essential nature that he is a God of steadfast love. And actually, a better way to understand it is covenant love.

It's not just that God is love, but it's a covenant language. It's relationship language. It's the language of God desires to have people who are his children who are his and his love for his children never ceases.

It's clear relational love. It's not an emotion. Although it's not separate from emotion, but it's not primarily emotional. It's a conscious willing for relationship in the good of the other and a delight in the other.

It's in a sense everything that you want from a friend to a spouse to relationship with children to pets to places. It's all of the senses of love all woven together in the context of relationship.

And this is part of God's essential nature that never ceases. His mercy never comes to an end. He never stops being a merciful God.

[ 22 : 29 ] And they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. There's this idea that it's got, as I said in the attitudes, it's not that God is old and stale, but that he is eternal and new every day.

It's as if he is him for the very first day. Everything is fresh. It's never stale. And that his faithfulness, his faithfulness is something which characterizes him.

He's unstoppably himself. And the Lord is my portion. In other words, that's this sense that I belong to the Lord and he belongs to me.

That that's where my identity and my destiny ultimately is rooted. That if there isn't a God like this that does exist, then I have no hope. And despair, in fact, should just be the rest of the way of my life unless I can grab a few moments of joy.

And one of the things which is so wonderful about this is that the writer of this, writing this amidst the ruins, all he can do is think back to the Exodus and think back to how God deals with Israel on Mount Sinai and he can think back about maybe what happened, how Gideon defeated Midian and he can think back to things like this.

[ 23 : 44 ] But for we as Christians, this text poses riddles that only Jesus fulfills. See, one of the things which is so different between Jesus and Buddha is this, that Buddha constantly said, look not to me, look to my Dharma.

Don't look at me. Like some Buddhists will tell you, if you see the Buddha on the road, kill him. As this sense that it's not about Buddha, it's about his way, it's his doctrine. And the Buddha keeps saying, okay, it's not about me, it's about my doctrine.

But the thing which is different about Jesus is it is about him. Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. And so what we understand is that everything in the Bible is pointing to Jesus. That those things, the part of the Bible that are written before him in a sense are posing riddles or jumps of faith which only start to become clear when Jesus arrives. You see, Jesus is described as Emmanuel. In other words, Jesus is with you in your mess. Jesus is with you in your ruins.

[ 24 : 59 ] Jesus is with you in your despair. He is with you in your pain. He is so with you that ultimately, even though he himself had never broken his relationship with God and was sinless, he is so with you that he takes upon himself the sin and the punishment that is proper to you.

And he's also Savior that on the cross he doesn't die for the things that he has done wrong himself, but he in a sense the ruin that you deserve, the punishment that you deserve is laid on him and the destiny that he deserved and was properly his is offered to you.

And even this language of God's compassion and his steadfast love, once again, that only makes, those are all relationship languages but only the God revealed by Jesus.

It's only when we understand that there's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and that Jesus is God, the Son of God, made flesh, it's only when we understand that from all eternity there was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So from all eternity love could truly exist in no other system of thought, no other spirituality, no other religion. Is there a proper understanding that, like, where does love come from in any of those?

[ 26 : 18 ] Like, if everything is one, how can there be love? If everything just comes about from chance, like, how does love make any sense? If God is a singular God like Allah, then how can there be love?

Does he have to create to have somebody to love? But this profound insight that God's love is unending, this is posing a riddle that only Jesus in the Gospel starts to explain.

that long before there were human beings there was love. And God did not have to create human beings so that he had someone to love.

Long before there were angels there was love. And that when any one of you have a sense that the ruin of my relationships, the ruin of my life, the ruin of my hopes, that there's something wrong and broken with that and that something like love must be real, if you have that longing and yearning, only the biblical Gospel makes it clear.

Only the biblical Gospel is love from beginning to end and is an invitation for you to enter into love took flesh and died for you because he loved you.

[ 27 : 34 ] and to know him is to know a love that would die for you, that would take your ruin into his life, that you might know the destiny of love.

Only the Gospel. So now it changes. If you look at it in your English language Bibles very, very closely, you'll notice the transitions because it goes from the singular to the plural and it goes... So now in a sense he's going to talk about this a little bit more. What we're going to see now is that it's as if he... Well, look what happens in verse 24.

Sorry, verse 25. Because 25, the poem changes. The Lord is good to those. See, now he's no longer talking about me. I am the man. He's talking to those. He's talking to the people. The Lord is good to those who wait for him, for the soul who seeks him.

Just notice that. Isn't that like... It's a very, very profound... It's a verse well worth meditating upon in the spiritual life. That on one hand what we do is we wait and on the other hand we seek.

[ 28 : 42 ] You see, it's the language of relationship. It's the language of persons. Isn't it? That like... What does a husband and a wife do in their marriage? On one hand they seek the love of the other.

On the other hand in a sense they wait. There's this dance, this balance between seeking and waiting. And it's woven here into the structure of the poem. It's one of the ways that reading a poem like this helps to structure you to understand what it means to have a relationship with the living God.

And by better understanding the relationship with the living God through Jesus, it helps you to understand yourself and your relationships. But it's a very wonderful verse to meditate upon. I'll read it again. Verse 25.

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

And just sort of pause here. There's a bit of a play here and a bit of a point to Jesus. In chapter 1, verse 14, we bear the yoke of our sins. Now the poet is saying, if you understand great is the faithfulness of God, his steadfast love endures forever, it is good to wait for him and to bear that yoke, the yoke that comes from the God whose compassion never comes to an end.

[ 30 : 01 ] And this points us through to Matthew chapter 11 where it says, Jesus says, my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And there's this, once you see that, when you look at this verse in 1.14 and then you realize how Jesus is fulfilling these two things.

Verse 29. Verse 28, I should say, let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him, that is the yoke. Let him put his mouth in the dust.

In other words, that is just, in a sense, to make yourself prostrate before the Lord, to make yourself helpless before him. There may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, let him be filled with insults.

And what this is just really talking about is that if you understand that the steadfast love of the Lord never, that if you understand that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will have hope. And when you start to understand that, in a sense, that God is the God who really does exist and that he's calling you into a relationship with himself and he will accept you if you come to him in the person of Jesus, not weighing your merits and your accomplishments, but parting your offenses, there is a sense that there can be purpose even in seasons of pain and punishment.

[ 31 : 20 ] Verse 31, For the Lord will not cast off forever, but though he cause grief or sorrow, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love, for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.

I just want to pause here. These three verses combined with 22 to 24 are in some ways the high water mark of the doctrine of God which is being presented here.

And they're very key to understanding what's going on. For the Lord, verse 31 again, For the Lord will not cast off forever, but though he cause grief or sorrow, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love, for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.

Here's what it's saying. Punishment is a moment, but God's love is forever. Punishment is a moment, but goodness is forever, love is forever, truth is forever, justice is forever, mercy is forever. Those are God's fundamental attributes. The fundamental attribute of God is not punishment. The fundamental attribute of God is not anger. He is properly angry at evil, but he punishes and the punishment is done, and in a sense, the punishment has a beginning and an end.

[ 32 : 51 ] But God's goodness has no beginning, no end. His love has no beginning, no end. His mercy has no beginning, no end. God's love is not that who he fundamentally is, and that's what this text is capturing in poetic language.

See, once again, I mentioned this a little bit, I think, in my last sermon, but it's a very, very important point to understand that many people in our culture, when they talk, they talk as if what really is needed is a God who is beyond good and evil.

And I said, I challenge this, that's what we really want. Like, if you think about it for a second, if your son or your daughter said that I'm going to pursue a life that is beyond good or evil, would you be happy if they said that?

Well, maybe you would. But maybe, let's say, you're seeking to enter into a relationship with somebody, you'd like to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, and if you start to get to know the person, they say, by the way, I'm pursuing a life that is beyond good or evil.

Well, would you be happy about that? Like, what on earth can that possibly look like? Like, if you think about it, a person pursuing a life beyond good or evil would be the type of person who could, in the morning, early in the morning, capture a cat and kill it, and then later on in the day could maybe do an experiment against their will on a human being, and then after that they could listen to some Bach, and then maybe they could go to church, and then maybe they could tell you how much they love you and give you roses.

[ 34 : 18 ] And in a sense, if you had a person who could do all of those types of things with no type of sense that there was anything inconsistent about it, what you would think is that there was something broken in that person, something missing in that person.

Because the fact of the matter is that we never want a God that is beyond good or evil, just as we would never want to date a person who is beyond good or evil. We would never want to be married to somebody who is beyond good and evil.

We want to be married to somebody who's good. We'd want our children to be kids who are true, that are loving, not beyond good and evil.

In fact, what we want, ultimately, is what the Bible here is describing, that the good and the true, the just, things which are just and things which are loving, things which are beautiful and things which are mercy, that these things never come to an end and they never stop, and that if you press into any one of them, it isn't that the others fade or become contradictory, but that the more you press into goodness, the more you press into love, the more you press into truth, the more you press into justice, the more you press into mercy, and you want a reality, you want a God that, in fact, as you go more into goodness, more into truth, more into justice, more into love, what they do is they illuminate each other and are at harmony with each other and are at one with each other yet remaining themselves.

And that which is your true longing of your heart is that which is revealed here in this poem. We need to wrap this up. Let's continue. Verse 34. To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth to deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High to submerge a man in his lawsuit the Lord does not approve.

[ 36 : 01 ] It's just poetically saying God never thinks that these things are right, by the way. Verse 37. Who has spoken and it came to pass unless the Lord commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? This is a very important verse. Why should any one of us complain? See, this is the heart. The memory verse for this week is the difference between godly grief and worldly grief, godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. And in a sense, worldly sorrow, worldly grief, we can be upset that we got punished. We can be upset that we got caught. But the heart of godly grief is a sorrow that we actually had done something which is wrong and a hope that there is some way that that can be paid for, that that can be amended, that that can be dealt with, that the sorrow and the pain that we have, that we would have done something like that which was both wrong and hurtful, that there can be a day that that can be mended so that there's both a sorrow for the wrong that is done and a longing for mending as opposed to merely how dare you punish me, how dare you say that that was wrong, how dare you question me, how dare you, how dare you cut me off because if I did that and feel sad and sorrowed, not because you've done anything wrong, but because you have consequences. And this psalm is raising this particular issue in a very powerful way, this poem. And if we believe, it's from our point of view, because God isn't responsible for moral evil, from our point of view, it's pain, from our point of view, it's sorrow.

That's what we experience. But if God is, in fact, not in control of things that cause pain, how can we believe that he is in control of things which are good?

[ 37 : 56 ] If he is not in control of things that cause you sorrow, how can we believe that he is going to be in control of those things that bring you joy and blessedness and peace, that in fact will bring you salvation?

Verse 38, it is, is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad has come? Why should a living man complain a man about the punishment of his sins?

That's the end of the second poem. Now the poet urges people to pray. He goes like this, let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled and you have not forgiven. You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us, killing without pity. You have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through.

You have made us scum and garbage among the people. All our enemies open their mouths against us. Panic and pitfall have come upon us, devastation and destruction. Now how does that fit in with the other things?

[ 38 : 59 ] We have to go back to the sermon I did last week, but required forgiveness is privilege and abuse. And what the poet is saying is that God never gives privilege and he never abuses.

I talk about more in the sermon that I go through yesterday, but the whole point that he is saying this in light of verses 22 to 24 and what's going to happen next is he's all saying, listen, these things have come upon us, we have done these sins, we have done these things which are wrong.

It's because of our wrongdoing and our unrepentant heart that God has closed his ears, that God doesn't want to hear about what, just like if somebody has hurt you and then they want you just to pretend as if nothing has happened and you close your ears to them, that's not your fault, that's their fault.

And anybody who demands that you change while they are unchanged is wrong. And he's just saying, listen, you guys, we've turned our back on God, we've complained about the fact that he's punishment, all we've done is blame shifting, all we've done is these things, it's time to return to the Lord because his steadfast love never comes to an end and his mercies are new every morning, return to the Lord.

And that's how the poem ends from verses 49, but once again it ends verses 48 to the end, it ends within the context of pain. It ends with the sense that the Lord is going to be the final word and it ends with the sense that not only do we understand that there is somehow in the mystery of God that in his mercy he has paid the price of forgiveness, that in his mercy he is both punished and even though we are now not still perfectly righteous that somehow or another he has made a way for this, that even those who've been responsible for the pain, in the enemies, they also too will be judged.

[ 40 : 59 ] I think, let's just read it very quickly, verse 48, my eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees.

My eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the daughters of my city. I have been hunted like a bird by those who are my enemies without cause. They have flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me.

Water closed over my head. I said, I am lost. I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea. Do not close your ear to my cry for help. You came near when I called on you.

You said, Do not fear. You have taken up my cause, O Lord. You have redeemed my life. You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord. Judge my cause. You have seen all their vengeance, all their plots against me.

You have heard their taunts, O Lord, all their plots against me. Their lips and thoughts of my assailants are against me all the day long. Behold, they're sitting and they're rising. I am the object of their taunts.

[ 42 : 02 ] You will repay them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. You will give them dullness of heart. You will curse. your curse will be on them. A blessing is, in a sense, a bestowal of energy towards thriving.

And a curse, in a sense, is a removal of that blessing so that the normal forces of entropy take place. Verse 66, You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O Lord. The final word is Lord. Lord. And a theme is going to be addressed more in the next two. But the heart of it is this fundamental idea that from beginning to the end, God is just, God is merciful, God is loving.

And we have sinned and we need to call upon him. And those who are completely and utterly repentant, all they will know, in a sense, is God's punishment.

But for those of us who understand that we are not perfect, we can call upon him for mercy. And God comes, relates to us, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses.

[ 43 : 12 ] He'll do that for you. He will do that for me. He has done that for me. So, in the midst of your pain, in the midst of the ruin, there is a Lord who does hear your prayers who will be with you.

Jesus is Emmanuel. He will. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you do not shame us for feeling sorrow.

You do not shame us for feeling pain. You do not shame us when we call out to you and cry out to you in confusion and in anguish. That you are a big God, a God of love, and that you can hear this honest expression of our pain and of our confusion.

And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that often unbidden comes into our lives at different points, remembrances of you or longings and yearnings for you. And we ask that you help us, Father, to be gripped by the message here of Lamentations 3, to be gripped by the idea that your steadfast love endures forever.

Your faithfulness never comes to an end, that they are new every morning. That you are, in fact, a God who is both good and true, loving and beautiful, just and merciful, and it never comes to an

end.

[ 44 : 27 ] And you have provided, Father, for our great need in the person of your Son. And we ask, Father, that even though our emotions might not change very quickly, that we still have to live with the situation that we are in, that you are the God, you are our God, you are our God of love and justice and mercy in the midst of the ruins.

And we ask that the Gospel would so grip us that we can call out to you, looking for that day when we will see you face to face and all tears will end, all suffering will come to an end, and we are in your presence forever.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.