

In the Hands of the Living God

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[0 : 00] Father, sometimes your word is very scary to us. And when your word is very scary to us, for those who are your children and your friends, the disciples of Jesus, we don't really know what to do with it.

And Father, for those outside the faith, they are just very, very puzzled as to why such things would even be in your word. We ask, Lord, that when our hearts are afraid, that you would draw us to yourself.

That you would draw us closer to you. And Father, we don't ask that you turn off our mind. We thank you that you never turn off people's minds. But we ask, Father, that you help us to understand who we are, why we think what we think, why our heart longs for what it longs for and turns from what it turns from.

That you might grant us a deeper and truer knowledge of ourself and a deeper and truer knowledge of you and of your world and all these things. And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do that wonderful work in our lives this morning as we look at Lamentations 2.

And all these things we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen. There's a way that pastors often refer.

[1 : 16] I think small group leaders and maybe Sunday school teachers and others will use language like this. I'm going to tackle this book. I'm going to tackle the book of Exodus. I'm going to tackle Philippians.

I'm going to tackle this. And it's an innocent type of expression. There's nothing bad about it. One of the things I have to confess is, I mean, I use that as well. I've had a really hard time with Lamentations.

I continue to have a hard time with it. In fact, one of the things I realized is I jokingly say that I was going to tackle the book of Lamentations, but Lamentations has tackled me.

And that's not a bad thing when God's Word tackles a person. But it's very upsetting. And not upsetting, it can be disorienting to be tackled by God's Word. And I think one of the reasons that the book of Lamentations tackles us, it's a book which isn't preached on very often.

And we at Church of the Messiah, one of the things we do is we read through books of the Bible together and we study a book of a Bible together. That's what we're doing here. We're going to do all five chapters of the book of Lamentations.

[2 : 21] And one of the reasons that I think Canadians have a great problem with the book of Lamentations is, well, because for many people in our culture, the question would be, how can you believe in a God who causes suffering?

Not just, how can there be a God who, how can God exist if there's evil in the world? This is a different question from that. It's a related but different and actually even harder question than that. And that is, how can you believe in a God who causes suffering? That he actually causes suffering in life, in history.

And people would say, George, how can you believe in a God who causes suffering and who actually even wants you to know that he does it? Because you see, that's the hard part about the book of Lamentations.

And those of, a Christian is a disciple of Jesus and a person who has trusted Jesus as their Savior and their Lord. And so if I trust Jesus as my Savior and Lord, I have to trust his understanding of what the Bible is.

[3 : 29] And Jesus' understanding of the Bible is that it's God's word written, that God was the ultimate author. He superintended the different human authors using their own creativity, their own historical circumstances, their own manners of speech.

But he superintended all of that so that the words that he wanted to have written were written. And he superintended the process whereby his people recognized that these were not just one other word amongst many, but that they were in fact words that ultimately came from him.

And Christians believe that God ultimately superintended the process by which his words are preserved for us. Not only recognized, but preserved so that we can read them today. So when we read the Bible, we're actually hearing God speak to us ultimately.

And so this makes the question even harder. People who, there are many people in the visible church who would call themselves Christians, but don't have Jesus' view of the Bible. And they would just dismiss texts like this.

But to dismiss a text like this means, well, I don't know, how do you ever grow? Like in what way can you actually say that you're a follower of Jesus if you think that he's wrong about how to understand the Bible?

[4 : 38] So here we have this, in a sense, great puzzle. As we're going to see, as we saw last Sunday, and we're going to see today, the Bible says that God, the triune God, causes suffering.

And that is a very, very troubling and scary idea to Christians. And it is something which non-Christians find abhorrent and would say to somebody like me, George, how can you believe in the triune God if he causes suffering?

So we're going to walk towards this again, and we're going to look at Lamentations chapter 2. And here's how it begins. I'm going to make a few little, occasionally today, I'll do so more next week, I'm going to make a few grammar geek, for those of us who are grammar geeks, I'm going to make a few grammar geek concept ideas.

Because the chapter 1 and chapter 2, they're basically what Lamentations is, is five different poems, all linked. And three, is it three or four?

Three of the poems, chapter 1, chapter 2, or poem 1, poem 2, and poem 4, all begin with the same word, how. In other words, how on earth can this happen?

[5 : 59] It's a question in the biblical writers, often connected to funerals, often connected to tragedies. How can this be? How can this happen?

And that's how chapter 2 begins. How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud. Just aside, if you're not familiar with things, daughter of Zion here is going to be one of the ways that the writer is referring to the Jewish people, God's chosen people.

So sometimes he's referring to all of the Jewish people, sometimes he's referring just to the city of Jerusalem, but he's always really referring to the Jewish people. When you see Jerusalem, Zion, Judah, Israel, it's all just different poetic devices to refer to the same group.

So I'll read that again. 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. The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the habitations of Jacob. That's another way of referring to Israel, the Jewish people.

[7 : 17] 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.

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 and Jacob consuming all around. We're just going to pause there. And by the way, when I'm saying he and emphasizing it in the original language, it's very clear.

There's, I think it's something like 28 different times in the first few verses where it's made very clear that God is the author. The triune God is the author of these things which have happened.

And obviously, this is now very clearly stating the problem. You can see why I said the reason that the book of Lamentations tackles Christians is that it is clearly presenting this idea that the triune God has caused this suffering.

[8 : 22] And chapter 2, in fact, the first 10 stanzas or 10 verses make this, actually the whole poem will make this clear time and time and time again.

And there's one of these phrases here, and I'm going to mention it because it's a very important little thing. It's one of the things which would obviously bother many people. If you look again at verse 2, how the Lord has swallowed up without mercy.

And we say to ourselves, George, gosh, I mean, shouldn't God be a God of mercy? Shouldn't he be a God of love? Like, how on earth can you worship a God that doesn't show mercy?

Now, that's a very, very, very good question. But it also actually is a question that ends up revealing our heart. In fact, one of the things which is very interesting about the book of Lamentations, if you get over the shock and the horror, I mean, it just really goes against, you know, I like our Christian radio station.

I'm a fan of it. And, you know, it's a safe and fun for the whole family. But I don't know if they'd want to have the book of Lamentations read. Later on, it's going to talk about cannibalism.

[9 : 36] It probably wouldn't pass the good for the whole family little rubric. And it's just, it isn't the type of text which we in Canadians talk about very much. But just think about it for a second.

Mercy to be mercy has to be undeserved. Now, that might be a bit of a shock, but you just think about it for a second. If mercy is actually mercy, it has to be undeserved.

In fact, if mercy is required, there's another name for it. Privilege. So for people to say that God is required to show mercy, you are actually making the claim that God is required to privilege.

But isn't that one of the great horrors of our current age, this idea of privilege? Isn't the idea of privilege of the 1% or privilege of the white race or privilege of men or privilege of some groups, one of the great things is considered to be a huge horror, a profound injustice that fills us with wrath? But required mercy is another way of saying privilege. All of a sudden, this text has taken an odd turn. You see, we thought we're reading a text and we're looking at God and he's not meeting up to our standards.

[10 : 59] And all of a sudden, if we actually pause and think about how we're reacting to the text, we realize that it's revealing something about us. We're actually asking, we are upset with God because he does not show privilege.

Maybe the problem is us. Maybe the problem is you and me. Maybe the problem is that we just have a type of a desire to be God that means that he needs to, he's required.

He has to show mercy to me. Oh, one moment. That means he has to show privilege to me. And that's something I hate in others. I put that pebble in your shoe because if we don't have that pebble in our shoe right off the bat, it means that all the way through this book, this chapter, we're going to react to the text without self-reflection.

In a narrow-minded, non-self-reflective way. See, part of the thing is that really what ends up happening is it's not so much that the book of Lamentation shows us a mirror, but it's as if it shows us like a type of x-ray mirror that we see ourselves where we can't flatter ourselves.

Either that or we stop our ears and refuse to allow God to speak to us because we just want to yell at him. But God wants to speak to you and he wants to speak to me and he wants you and me to understand that we have a problem.

[12 : 37] And part of our problem is that at a very deep level, we desire privilege. And we can't come to God on the basis of privilege. We can only come to God on the basis of mercy.

So, he's not showing favoritism. In fact, here's another type of thing which I think we need to sort of come to understand when we react to this text.

And in some ways, I'm giving you one of the big ideas of the text right off the bat. And one of the big ideas of the text right off the bat is that we desire to fill our heads with knowledge.

But God knows, because he desires to have a love relationship with us, that what our heads, I mean, obviously our heads need knowledge. The Bible isn't anti-intellectual.

But what God needs from us is to bow our heads. We need bowed heads, not filled heads. And this text is going to bow our heads.

[13 : 48] And if it doesn't bow our heads, it means that we are incomprehensible to ourselves and God is incomprehensible to us. And he bows our heads not to belittle us, but that we might receive mercy and enter into a relationship of love with him.

Continue in verse 4. And just sort of pause here.

Just two things. First of all, you notice it says like an enemy, not that the Lord is their enemy. In fact, this is all actually part of it. It's a very, very odd and little subtle thing. There's all these subtle things in the text that you only discover if you study it.

You might need the help of a commentary or some other language help to actually enter into it. But even in the very opening sentences where it says he's cast God, he's cast Israel down from heaven, there's actually hope there because he's cast them from heaven to earth, not from heaven to Sheol.

In other words, there is still actually hope even in the midst of all of this. And the other thing is, and it's not as obvious in the English, this book is not a book of accusations.

[15:19] It's more obvious in the original language. It's not a book of accusations. It's not a chapter, I should say, or a poem of accusations. It's almost as if it's a theology of the history of God's dealings just recently with Israel.

Because this book is written, these poems are written amongst the ruins. Israel has been destroyed. Most of its people carried away into exile. Its leaders have been taken away or killed. And whether it's Jeremiah or some other poet, he is praying this poem, writing this poem, and praying or singing even maybe this poem amidst the ruins of Jerusalem.

And we are to understand that that's true for all five of the poems or songs or prayers that make up the book of Lamentations. They all are prayed, said, sung among the ruins.

And this is not a poem of accusation. It's a poem of honesty about what is around them and why that has come about.

[16:28] And one of the things, it's not as obvious. If you go back and you read it very, very carefully, you'll see constantly this day language, the day of God's anger, the day of the Lord, the day of judgment.

There's this idea of the day, which is connected to all of those things, of judgment or the day of the Lord. And part of the point of all of these analogies, just as if you go back with a commentary or something, you'll see that it's filled with allusions to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, to the book of Jeremiah, to the first five books of the Old Testament, what our Jewish friends call the Torah, the books of Moses.

And you'll see that there's constant references to this. And you see, part of the point of these references is that God has warned them. God has warned them this would happen. It's as if you have a little child and they're just beginning to enter into moral knowledge.

And you know they're entering into moral knowledge. There comes a point in time for an attentive parent where they realize that their young little infant has entered into a realm of moral knowledge. You know, when they're just young, they just grab, they just poop, they just cry, they just do whatever they're going to do.

But at some point in time, usually when they can walk and you can see that they're going to go to get something maybe off of a table or off the bookshelf that they're not supposed to have. And you say to them, don't touch that.

[17:47] That's bad. And the child stops, looks at you. And you say to them again, don't touch that. Don't grab that. It's wrong. And they look at you and you know that they know.

And then you say to them, if you do that, that's wrong. You're going to be punished. And they do it. And if you're a parent, you need to punish them after you've said that. You see, they've tried, I don't know, maybe give them a little light slap on the hand or something like that.

And they start to cry, but you warned them. And part of the purpose of the Day of the Lord language throughout all of the book of Lamentations is if you go back to the Torah, the way that God introduces the covenant with the consequences of not keeping it.

If you go back and you look, in fact, actually, there's a really interesting linguistic connection to a very, very powerful scene in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah has written down all of the things that are going to happen.

The people of Israel are doing horrific things. And Jeremiah has said that they're going to come under God's judgment for doing these horrific things. And he writes them all down. And he has this fellow Baruch go and read it in the temple.

[18:59] And people are all completely and utterly shocked by it. So they bring it to the king. I think it's King Jehoiakim. And there's this very, very powerful scene. And it would make a beautiful movie scene.

He's there with his nobles and his warlords, all dressed in his splendor and his armor and his might. And they're gathered around the fire because it's a bit cool. And as Baruch, and he's reading it from a scroll, right?

It's not pages of a book, but from a scroll. And as part of it is read, and the other part is, in a sense, hanging down, the king goes and cuts it with his knife and drops it into the fire.

And Baruch continues to read. And then the king, I think it's in Jeremiah 36, cuts the part off with his knife, drops it into the fire. And by the end of this list of warnings from the prophet of Jeremiah to the

king and to the people about what's going to happen if they continue to do what they're doing, if they continue to oppress the poor, if they continue to give their daughters and their sons into sex slavery, if they continue to kill their children that they don't want by offering them to terrible gods, if they continue to do these terrible things that they're doing, God is going to punish them. And by the end of the whole thing being read, it's all in the fire. And the king says, what are we going to do next? And it's in that context that the poet is singing or praying his poem amidst the ruins of Jerusalem.

[20 : 36] Verse six. He has laid waste his booth like a garden, laid in ruins his meeting place. The Lord has made Zion forget festival and Sabbath.

And in his fierce indignation, a spurned king and priest. The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary. 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. The 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. Notice that this is all part of God's purpose. I mean, here's another one of these questions for us as Christians.

And we're going to look at it more over the next couple of weeks. If we Christians encourage each other to believe God's promises and live by them, why don't we encourage each other to believe his warnings and live by them?

[21 : 35] Why do we only want his promises to be dependable, but not his warnings? Like, why is that? That that is part of the human heart?

You see, these things about the human heart, that we desire privilege, that we desire promises but not warnings, is all part of the reason that we start to understand that we need a Savior, that we cannot save ourselves, that unless God in his mercy does something that we cannot do in and of ourselves in a way which is beautiful and just and good and merciful, and in keeping with the fact that there are other people on the planet and the planet itself, that we need God to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

I need God to do what I cannot do for myself. You need God to do what you cannot do for yourself. Verse 9. Her gates have sunk into the ground.

He has ruined and broken her bars. Her kings and princes are among the nations. The law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the Lord. The 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. Now, there's a structure to the poem.

[23 : 01] And if you look at it very carefully, it's obvious in English as well. And the structure to the poem is this, that the first ten verses are in a sense this, just not accusation, this statement of what God has done, that in fact God had warned, and that people had not believed his warnings, and that God, in fact, has in history actually carried out what he said he would do if they didn't listen to his warnings.

And that's the first ten verses. Verses 11 and 12, you'll notice that there's a very, very clear change in verses 11 and 12. And now it's the poet himself just sharing his heart with how this all just breaks his heart.

And then verses 13 to 19 are going to be, in a sense, the poet speaking to his Jewish friends, the people of God, reminding them of what's happened and calling them and urging them to turn to the Lord.

And then verses 20 to 22 is, in a sense, the people of Israel, the poet on behalf of the people of Israel, the Jewish people, calling out to the Lord in prayer.

That's how it's structured. So there's going to be this shift now. But one of the things which is very interesting, and there's actually, if you go back and look at it, there's actually a very interesting pattern that verse 22 and verse 1 refer to the same types of things.

[24 : 26] Verse 21 and 2, 20 and 3, you know, all the way through it. That, in a sense, all of the things which happen when the poet is just pouring out his heart, when he's looking to the people who are left amidst the ruins and hoping that maybe by his written words it will go to the exiles, that they will call out to the Lord for mercy.

And when the people of Israel, in a sense, are calling out in mercy to the Lord as well, all of it shows that they have accepted the analysis of their situation, that it's not accusation but acceptance.

And here's how it goes with verses 11 and 12. And actually, by the way, I'm going to talk about this more next week, but I think I'm going to say it right now, a little bit of another pebble in our shoe, another little bit of a self-reflection that we're not often conscious of.

In our culture, and it affects how Christians think as well, there tends to be two different types, especially after you've now read these ten verses.

One of the reasons that many people say they can't believe God, in the triune God, the Father of Jesus, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the triune God, is that God allows evil to happen.

[25 : 47] And so the saying is, how on earth can you believe in the triune God if he allows evil to happen? So now I can say to them, well, I have really good news for you.

You can read the book of Lamentations, and you can see that God is going to judge all evil. But we read the book of Lamentations and say, George, how can you believe in a God that judges evil?

And we never stop to think to ourselves that we've now given mutually, we've given contradictory complaints and demands of God.

It's as if we've asked him, we'll only believe in if you can make square circles. Well, one moment, if it's a square, it can't be a circle. If it's a circle, it can't be a square. That doesn't make any sense.

And so we say to God, we say, I can't believe in the triune God because he allows evil. And then we say, I can't believe in the triune God because he judges evil. Well, who has the problem?

Who's being the tough thinker? Who's being self-reflective? We go back and forward between these two things without even realizing that we go back and forward between the two of them.

[26 : 52] See, once again, it reveals that in our hearts, we want to be the judge. In your heart and mine, you want to be the judge. You want privilege.

You want required mercy. You want God to be tame. You want him to fit into your box and categories. In fact, I'm going to talk about this more a little bit in the next coming weeks.

One of the things which is, in a sense, almost a dream of our culture is that we sort of inherently think that the real God should be beyond good and evil. But we don't really want a God who is beyond good and evil.

To be beyond good and evil, it sounds good as a slogan, but it actually means that God gives evil a pass. It means that there is no good and there is no evil, but really it makes no difference whether a mother cuddles her newborn baby or whether she strangles her newborn baby.

Like, how can there be anything beyond good or evil? Isn't it better and wiser to understand? See, what we really, we think we want a God beyond good and evil, but we don't, that reveals something in us which is just our fallen desire to be God-like.

[28 : 05] You see, what the Bible presents is something far wiser and something which is actually the longing of your heart. What we long for and what we desire is not a God that is beyond good and evil.

What we long for is a God where, what we really long for is something more where there is a God that is both, He is both loving and true.

He is both just and merciful. He is both good and beautiful. And that the God who does exist, that's both true and loving and good and beautiful and just and merciful, that as you press more and more and more into His goodness and more and more into the love and more and more into the truth and more and more into the justice and more and more into the mercy, that each of those things illuminate the other.

That the more you press into His goodness and His truth, the truth illuminates His goodness. The justice illuminates the truth. The mercy illuminates the justice.

The beauty illuminates. And that's the God that's depicted here in the Bible. Not a God who is beyond good or evil, but a God where love and truth, goodness and beauty, justice and mercy are all at one, illuminating each other.

[29 : 28] And we don't want to go into a world, really, beyond good or evil. We want to go into a world where love and truth, goodness and beauty, justice and mercy, are illuminated and at peace, and where we can be at peace with such a world.

And if there is this disease in our souls where we desire a God beyond good or mercy, beyond good and evil, and a God who gives us privilege, we realize there needs to be both some type of a judgment or a breaking of us, but also a breaking that saves us.

Let's hear the poet's heart, verse 11. My eyes are spent with weeping. I mean, isn't that... The Bible says that we are to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. This is really... I keep saying I'm going to talk about this more in the following sermons. I hope I remember to do it. And one of the things which is, you know, there's a very easy claim right now for Christians, some Christians, and it's not just...

It's a human problem. It's every group. It's, you know, the critical theory people. It's the conservatives. It's the liberals. It's the right and the left. And Christians are all part of it. Where we can look down our nose at the bad things going on in culture, as if somehow we should be immune from them and we're separate from them.

[30 : 56] And what we see here is that we should read the newspaper and have it break our heart, even for our enemies. Listen to verse 11 and 12.

My 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, they 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 mother's bosom?

The poet is filled with sorrow for what he sees around him. And now he speaks to those around him. He speaks to you and me.

Some of us entering into this time of worship, reading the book of Lamentations, are in our own ruins. Maybe it's the ruins of our health, of our finances, of our relationships, of our job prospects. And now he speaks to us. Not that everything that happens like this... I mean, I hope I have time to talk about this another way. You know, there's book of Job and book of Lamentations.

[32 : 05] You have to sort of read both of them and think of all of them in light of the cross to start to understand a little bit about what the Bible has to say about suffering. Job very clearly is about innocent suffering, and this is about guilty suffering.

And you need to look at both. So most of these sermons, we're only going to be talking about this one thing. But there's this invitation... Listen to how he prays in verses 13 through 19.

He urges the congregation. What can I say for you? To what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? Now he's speaking to the people. What can I liken to you, and that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion?

For your ruin is vast as the sea. Who can heal you? Your prophets have seen for you faults and deceptive visions. They have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.

Just pause here for a second. You'll notice here that one of the signs of a false prophet is that they never convict of sin. One of the signs of a false prophet is they don't correctly convict of sin or never convict of sin.

[33 : 14] Verse 15. All 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? All your enemies rail against you.

They hiss. They gnash their teeth. They cry. We have swallowed her. Ah, this is the day we long for. Now we have seen it. We see it. The 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. Their heart cried out 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. One of the things about this poem, which I haven't talked about, is that in the original language, there actually every, it's an alphabetical poem, by the way.

It's called an acrostic. And in, I didn't know this until I discovered in the commentary, there was a time in early Hebrew where they had two different alphabets.

[34 : 17] They had the same letters, but a different order. And it's one of the things which is really unique about the book of Lamentations, sorry, geek moment, is that chapter one uses one alphabet and chapter two uses the other alphabet.

In other words, it's, I think, partially trying to say that whichever way you want to look at it, whatever alphabet you use, this is, in a sense, a complete, in a sense, deep entrance into this mystery of what's just happened.

And in chapter one and chapter two, so, you know, chapter one begins with, in a sense, with A, it's not A, you know, B, you know, I mean, not chapter one, verse one, A, second verse begins with, in a sense, B, all the way through the rest of the alphabet, the Hebrew alphabet.

But in every case, there's, in a sense, three poetic lines. And that's true of all of chapter two, except for verse 19, where there's four poetic lines. And it's sort of, in a sense, a bit of a, of a, of a summing up of things before Israel prays.

In verse 19, it says, Arise, cry out in the night, and 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.

[35 : 33] And now, you're going to hear the people pray. And the way they pray on one hand, is very disappointing. Because, it's disappointing, the disappointment says something about us, not something about God.

In fact, it actually says something very good about God. The thing it says about God is that you don't have to be happy all the time. I mean, human beings aren't meant to only experience one emotion.

And, if you've had all these things, which have had, so we read the prayer thinking, okay, now we're going to claim the victory, now there's going to be dancing, now there's going to be hallelujahs, we're going to wave our arms, we're going to do all of that stuff.

And we read it, and we go, oh, dang, this is not like that. But, but other than our culture, why is it that it has to be like that?

I mean, for you folks right now, for me in the past, and probably in the future, pain doesn't go away immediately. That's one of the reasons why the Bible says that we need to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

[36 : 43] You can't just give a comforting word and a Bible verse, and then think that people are going to jump up and dance. You can pray to the Lord in pain.

You can pray to the Lord in sadness. It's not something you have to be embarrassed or ashamed about. It's not something you have to hide your face from God or others about.

And pray that we at Church of the Messiah can walk with people in prayer and rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. And allow people the time and to be present with them without judgment but with love and encouragement as they pray out of sadness and pray out of pain.

And that's what we see modeled here so brilliantly and powerfully. Here's how they pray. Look, O Lord, and see. By the way, the fact that they're doing this shows, this is one of the mysteries of the text, is it shows that they've accepted see, here's one of the things that's another very subtle little message in the first verse that sets up the rest of the whole thing.

If the Lord has visited them in judgment, it means he can visit them in mercy. If the Lord has visited them in judgment because he loves them, he can visit them in mercy because he loves them.

[38 : 17] And that's why they say see. They're just being transparent. They're just showing him their pain and they're showing him their confusion that comes out of pain, knowing that the Lord is not going to turn his face away from them, but that he will look at them with eyes of love.

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? 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 mercy. You summoned as if to a festival day my terrors in 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. You only understand that if you understand that he's saying, remember he's, chapter, verse 22 is connected to verse one.

It's accepting that this is the day of judgment. And the Lord who is visited in judgment out of love can still visit in mercy out of love.

[39 : 28] And they're just saying, see. It's not a correct theology. It's a cry of the heart. Just sort of include, in just sort of conclusion, one of the things which is very, very powerful, and one of the things for Christians as they read this is it really communicates the terror and the reality of judgment.

And for me as a Christian, as I read this, it helps me to understand my great deep need for a savior. And it also helps us to understand a little bit about why it is that Jesus had to die on a cross. You see, once again, this reveals something about our hearts. We say that we want God to judge. We say that we want God to do this and that, but we then sort of think that it's just going to be spiritual, that it's just going to be something symbolic, that it's going to be something mythical, that it's going to be something analogical.

We don't actually, on one hand, we don't really expect that it's going to be concrete, physical, historical, actual, real. But we see here that it is and will be because the triune God is actual and real and is the one that launched history and is still sovereign over history and will bring history to its proper end.

And so, this text helps to confront us of the fact that we are confused about how we think and how we feel and understand ourselves because on one hand, we want the actual, but on the other hand, we expect the symbolic and the allegorical.

[41 : 05] And here we see that this actually is happened and will happen. And it's in the same sense then that we need to understand that's why Jesus, it isn't just sort of that there can be an allegory about God doing something in the heavens or a spiritualizing of it.

What we need is actually, and what God has done is he wants us to understand that it's real, that it's real. And that's why Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and he dies in history, he dies in time, and there are good historical reasons to believe that it actually happened as it says and that he really did die and he really did rise from the dead.

And if he really did die in your place and in mine and he really did rise in your place and in mine, then if we are in him, there is this whole different way to understand life and universe and a whole level of hope that is based on reality, not on allegory and spirituality and anecdote.

But it's real. It's real. So for those of you outside of Christ, this is a very great warning of your need for Christ.

For those of us who are in Christ, it is a reminder of our great need for Christ that the ruin that I deserve fell on him and the restoration that I do not deserve because I am not privileged is offered in him because he took the ruin that I deserve.

[42 : 39] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you confront us at the level of our heart, the reality of our heart, the reality of who we are, that you do it through your word, but that, Father, in every case of your word, you do not do it to shame us, to cast us away, to push us away, that you confront to connect, that you confront so that we will understand our great need for a Savior.

Father, as a Christian, I confess to you that I regularly need to be reminded of the gospel, that the ruin that I deserve fell on him so that I could be restored to you.

The great, terrible warning of how it is an awesome thing to fall into the hands of the living God and that I am desperately in need of your undeserved mercy that only flows out of your heart.

We give you thanks and praise that you are not a God beyond good and evil, but that you are a God that is just and true, that loving and merciful, beautiful and good, that this is who you are and to press into you is to only know all of these things and more beyond illuminating each other and at peace with each other.

And, Father, we long to be made to be at peace with you and we thank you that Jesus has done what it means for us to be at peace with you in an eternal sense and that you now, by the Holy Spirit, drawing us to the gospel and to your word, begin to help us to grow in holiness, to prepare us for that great day when we will see Jesus and be like him and that we will enter into that beautiful world illuminated by your Trinitarian glory to live at home and at peace.

[44 : 20] We ask, Father, that you help us to have a heart for our city and a heart for the world, that even if we have to say that what is done in the world and done in the city is wrong, at the same time our hearts are broken and that we will call out in prayer that you will turn their hearts.

We thank and praise you that you are God who is real, who has acted in real history and we ask that you help us to entrust each moment of our real lives into your hands and all these things we ask in the name of Jesus and all God's people said, Amen.