

The Cry

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[0 : 00] Father, sometimes your word touches things in us that make us very, very worried and very much afraid.

And Father, we're going to be looking at a text today and over the next few days that would be one of those texts that triggers within us deep worries and concerns and fears about ourselves, about you, about, well, just about ourselves and about you and about the world.

And so, Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would move with might and power and deep conviction upon us as we look at this text. We thank you, Father, that you speak to us, that you love us, that you sent Jesus to die upon the cross for us, that you desire that we be restored to you.

And so, Father, we thank you for this and bring your word and your gospel home to us very deeply today. And we ask this in Jesus's name. Amen. Amen. I have a bit of a tickle in my throat.

Hopefully I won't cough during this. You can pray that I won't. I'm not sure if we did, in fact, disable the YouTube comments today. We didn't. I don't know if we did or not.

[1 : 14] We talked about it. And one of the reasons we talked about it is that there was an attempt to have a social media mob against an organization that I'm involved with and actually against us.

And this sort of just erupted on Monday. And, in fact, actually, it took a lot of my emotional and calendar time and prayer time this week.

I had to write the council and everything an email about it. I'm the chair of an organization called Dig and Delve that does apologetics events.

And this past Friday we had a live apologetics event featuring Jojo Ruba. And the original advertisement for the event was Finding a Better Sexual Identity.

Sorry. Christian Reflections on Conversion Therapy and Sexual Identity. And then after some conversations with Jojo, we changed the title to Finding a Better Sexual Identity, Gender, Sexuality in Jesus.

[2 : 16] Because I don't know if all social media mobs work like this, but probably many of them lamentably do. Some person decided he was going to stir up an attempt to stir up a cancel culture mob against us.

And as is often the case, he took sort of one or two words, built an entire narrative of his own that had nothing to do with what we were going to say or, in fact, did say since the event happened this past Friday.

In fact, I encourage you to Google, not stay with me for the sermon, but after the sermon, go to Dig and Delve and look up the talk and watch it.

Jojo Ruba did a spectacular job addressing this topic. Anyway, he builds his own narrative about what's going on. Very, very hostile. We have blood on our hand.

We need to be ashamed of ourselves. We're on the wrong side of history. We tried to mobilize some other people. Named the different sponsors. Tried to get all of the sponsors, every one of the sponsors, to cancel the event.

[3 : 23] And anyway, it was an interesting week. On Monday, it sort of exploded in a small way. And I wasn't sure if that was going to be something that would escalate and escalate or whether it would fizzle or whether it would stay around the same level.

You know, thanks be to God, it didn't escalate into the thousands or anything like that. But it still is hard and was hard for some of the sponsors because they literally did want to punish and try to have people be maybe even businesses closed over it.

It was very, very serious. And I mention this because it's not the case. I mean, sometimes life can be very, very hard.

This ended up not being that hard. And on the scale of things going on in the world, gosh, this is just like a teensy-weensy little thing in the scale of things that are going on in the world. And maybe even in the scale of some of the things that are going on in your own lives, it's a very, very tiny thing.

We're thankful God answered prayer in this case and it just continued on, has caused some trouble. You know, but, you know, we didn't cancel and we didn't withdraw our sponsorship and we're going to continue to speak about these types of issues.

[4 : 37] But sometimes life can be very, very hard. And how do you live, how do you pray in times when it is very, very hard? We're going to walk through one of the most difficult books in the Bible, the book of Lamentations.

It's a very, very, very difficult book. In fact, when I was looking at reading it very carefully now because I'm preaching on it, and I'll point this out one day.

It almost looks like a book that one of God's enemies wrote. It sometimes feels, when you're reading it, as if you're reading a deconversion blog or story, if you know what those are.

How people have now seen the light, so to speak, and they've given up on the Christian faith. And in some ways it almost sounds like one of those blogs, yet it's in the Bible. And it talks about suffering.

It talks about very, very profound suffering. And it will have, I don't think it is, some very disturbing images, even images of cannibalism, believe it or not, when we go through the five chapters.

[5 : 40] We're just going to go through chapter one. And here's one of the problems that we have when we approach this book. And here we're going to have, Andrew's going to put up an image, so you'll hear my voice and you're going to see an image.

And here's one of the issues. The book of Lamentations is actually most famous for a particular verse, a couple of verses. It's, in fact, what Jono led us in singing.

Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord. Your mercies are new every morning, new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. The steadfast love of the Lord never faileth.

Your goodness never comes to an end. That comes from the book of Lamentations. And usually when you see that quote, you see it with an image, something like what you're seeing right here, hopefully on the screen right now.

You see something of which is somewhere we'd all like to go. First of all, we'd maybe like it to not be snow and winter right now. But even if we had a winter version of this, it would be a cabin with snow, a roaring fire, you know, maybe a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, a nice meal.

[6 : 49] And this text goes along with it. And some of you might even have images like that to go along with the verse. Now, I'm not going to say that you should get rid of those things.

If those verses and those images help you, thanks be to God. That's all I want to say. Thanks be to God. But part of the problem is that for most of us, life isn't like that all of the time.

And it can almost create a type of a romanticism about a romantic spirit. Like, and I'm using it not in terms of romantic love, but that the movement of romanticism is if everything can be good and well in the world.

And there's a way to manage the world and control the world and wrestle and tackle the world so that everything is just hunky-dory. And there's just pleasure. There's just peace.

There's just contentment. And that verse looks as if it just fits right into it. But Andrew's going to put up another image right now. And this is really the image you need to have in your mind when you read the book of Lamentations.

[7 : 49] In fact, it might even be helpful because I'm going to encourage you to read all five chapters over this coming week. In fact, one of the things I really love is when you read the five chapters, if you have questions, comments, things you'd like me to address, send me an email.

I can't promise that I'm going to eat. And I'll try to see if I can weave those comments and questions, objections into the course of the sermons over the next few weeks.

I can't promise I'm going to deal with all of them. It depends how many come. But I will try to. But if you are reading it, it might be very helpful if you had an image like this before you as you read.

A city in ruins. Because the fact of the matter is, that is really how that would actually be a far better thing to have. The steadfast love of the Lord never faileth.

His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. This image that you're seeing right now is actually what should go with the text.

Because that's what the book of Lamentations is about.

[8 : 49] So, in Jewish tradition, it was written by Jeremiah the prophet after the destruction of Jerusalem. The temple's destroyed. The people are destroyed.

They're carried away. Hardly anybody is left. The city is in complete and utter ruins. Complete and utter ruins. And throughout this, I'm not going to refer to the author as Jeremiah because it's actually an anonymous book.

Jewish tradition gives it to Jeremiah. I'll probably refer to the poet or the prophet as the writer of this book. But this book is written after the destruction of Jerusalem amidst the ruins.

And by the end of the poem, the poet is still in the ruins. And it's talking to God in the midst of ruins. That's what this book is about.

Talking to God in the midst of ruins. So, let's look at the text. And it's Lamentations chapter 1. It's sort of almost immediately in the beginning at the middle of your Bibles.

[9 : 49] Just slightly to the right of the middle of your Bibles. And here's how it goes. We're going to read through it. It's 22 verses. And we'll read it.

I'll make a couple little comments as I read it. And then we're going to just sort of try to reflect upon it a little bit. And here's how it goes. 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. Now, just before I read any farther, our Jewish friends. This is a very important book to our Jewish friends.

I'll talk about this more in one of the following weeks. But the Jewish people believe that the first and second temples were destroyed on the same day.

Obviously separated by about 600, 650 years. And that not only that, there's several other key things in Jewish history that all got destroyed on the same day.

[10 : 47] And in the month of July is a day in the Jewish liturgical calendar to remember these acts of destruction. And it's a day of fasting for Jewish people.

And in that day of fasting, they recite the entire book of Lamentations. For those of you who are from a bit of a more traditional Anglican background, the Jewish people actually do something very similar to what Christians do on Maundy Thursday.

I found it very odd at first, but after a while, the Maundy Thursday service, back when we still owned a church building, was my favorite church service of the year in an odd way.

But what happens is Maundy Thursday is the day that Jesus institutes the Last Supper. And after the Last Supper, he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prays, of course, with his disciples.

And then the soldiers come and capture him. The next day, he dies on the cross. And that day, Maundy Thursday, in the service in the evening, we remember both the institution of the Lord's Supper and we remember Jesus' capture.

[11 : 50] That's how the service ends. And the way the service ends is that while usually something like Psalm 22 or Psalm 51 or some other lament psalm is being read slowly, all of the decorations of the church are removed.

All of the decorations, anything that looks nice, is removed from the church, the worship area. And as the articles that look nice and fine and beautiful are removed, the church gets darker and darker and darker, and the service ends in complete and utter darkness and silence.

And it symbolizes or tries to help us to enter into this, the darkness having now got hold of Jesus in its attempt to extinguish the light.

And our Jewish friends have a similar type of thing for those in their synagogue services for this very solemn day in the Jewish calendar, where they remember these many acts of destruction.

And for our Jewish friends, we of course call this book Lamentations as part of the Old Testament. Our Jewish friends would refer to it as the Tanakh or the Torah. And it has a different name in the Jewish Bible, so to speak.

[13 : 03] And that actually is, the name of the book is How, from the very first word that appears in the book. And this word how is used at times of great lament, great mourning, great tragedy.

How could this happen? How could this happen with God? How could this happen to us? How is this possible? And many of the Psalms, almost a third of the Psalter, the book of Psalms, deals with laments.

And often this word in Hebrew will appear at key moments throughout it. And that's the name of the book in what our friends call the Tanakh, our Jewish friends, and what we call the Old Testament. So we have a different name. But it's a valid name. How, as a book title in English, just wouldn't have the same resonance or power that it would for those for whom Hebrew is their heart language and the language that they know.

But you see right off the bat, it's talking about destruction. And it's giving us these contrasts between a full city and a lonely city, a great to nothing, princess to slave.

[14:16] Verse 2, it continues. She, now referring to the city, weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks. Among all her lovers, she has none to comfort her.

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They have become her enemies. Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude.

She dwells now among the nations but finds no resting place. Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. Now just sort of pause here, just to make sure you understand the great tragedy which is being described, to go among the nations.

I mean, I jokingly say, I mean, I'm looking forward to being able to travel. I'm looking forward to maybe being able to go across the border or go somewhere else, to go among the nations. This is describing homelessness.

This is describing the fact that the people have now scattered. It would be, not to make it too scary for you, but for those who have families, it's as if some great tragedy happens. Imagine a movie and in the midst of the movie, one child goes somewhere else, another child goes somewhere else, the wife goes somewhere else, the husband goes somewhere else, the entire family is scattered and you don't know where they are.

[15:30] And all around you is ruins and around the ruins are enemies. And your lovers and your counselors and your strong towers of defense are all now ignoring you or in fact gloating over you and are being revealed as having never loved you or cared for you, that they've always just used you.

Verse 4, the roads to Zion. This is another name. I'll talk about this probably in one of the next sermons about the significance of some of these names. But we're once again still talking about the same group of people, the same city.

The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival. All her gates are desolate, her priests groan, her virgins have been afflicted, and she herself suffers bitterly.

Her foes have become the head, her enemies prosper. Because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.

Now this is a gobsmacking statement. And for many Canadian Christians, maybe every single Canadian Christian, this creates a high amount of anxiety.

[16:53] And you can see, when I said at the beginning that in some ways the book of Lamentations sounds like a book written by the triune God's enemies, you can start to see why I said that.

When I said that in many ways this looks exactly like a blog written by those deconversion blog sites, you can start to see why I said that.

For a Christian who accepts that Jesus is their Savior and their Lord, and accepts how Jesus understood the Bible, then I have to accept the Bible the same way Jesus does, and that is that this is actually, God caused this to be written.

Not his enemies, but the triune God caused this to be written. Now, this aspect here, which is very difficult, I am going to talk about this a little bit after I finish reading chapter one of Lamentations, but some of you are going to be a little bit dissatisfied.

I hope none of you will be dissatisfied. I hope we'll all be challenged by this text in a way which is very, very good. But because this theme, this idea, recurs in every one of the five chapters, I'm going to sort of look at little bits of aspects of this particular thing every week over the five chapters.

[18:16] But I want to make sure you noticed it. You see, one of the things, those of you who might be chancing to watch this, at the Church of the Messiah, we believe that it's wisest to read through books of the Bible.

The Bible is written as books. In fact, the book of Lamentations is one of the most ornately, carefully structured books of the Bible. It's very, very, each one of the, I'll talk about it more in another week, but the structure is actually very, very intricate.

Five separate poems, but they're all linked. And the themes are linked, and some of them develop over time. So I will talk a little bit about this at the end of the text, and I'll talk a little bit about it every week.

And that's one of the things you can do, is you can pray for me, and pray for yourselves as you read this text. I'll read it again, verse five again. Her foes have become the head, her enemies prosper, because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.

Her children have gone astray, captive before the foe. In fact, just before I go anything farther, it's as if it goes, on one hand, it's given the type of thing that a poet or a journalist would talk about if they went to Aleppo, if they went to some place that had been destroyed.

[19 : 37] And we were just talking about things naturalistically, what happened, what didn't happen. And now all of a sudden there's this profound theological part of the whole discussion.

Verse six, From the daughter of Zion all her majesty has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture. In other words, they're starving to death, they're doomed. They fled without strength before the pursuer.

In other words, the pursuer will capture them. And by the way, this actually is what happened. One of the things that happens when Nebuchadnezzar is responsible for the fall of Jerusalem, one of the horrific things that he did is he captures the final king.

And then he has the final king, and I guess they must have forced his eyes open and his head in one position. And one by one, all of his friends and all of his children are killed.

And when they kill the final one of his friends and the final one of his children and family, then they blind him so that the very last things he ever sees is the death of his loved ones and his advisors and his family.

[20 : 47] They don't kill him. They want to torment him and torture him. Verse seven, Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers from days of old when her people fell into the hand of the foe and there was none to help her.

Her foes gloated over her. They mocked at her downfall. Jerusalem sinned grievously. Therefore, she became filthy. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness.

She herself groans and turns her face away. I just want to notice what's been said here. In verse five is this shocking idea that God is responsible at some real level for the destruction and the ruin of Jerusalem.

And now we see here something which is actually also quite shocking. The poet acknowledges that they have sinned.

There's going to be complaints before God, cries of anguish before God about what has gone on, puzzlement before God as to why this has befallen her and not her enemies as well.

[22 : 02] Like why, how come her? How come them? But one of the things which is quite shocking and striking here, and you will see it continually throughout the book, if you read it carefully, if you, in a sense, overcome your fear, and you read the text, you'll see that there's an acknowledgement of guilt on their part.

Verse eight, Jerusalem sinned grievously. Therefore, she became filthy. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness. She herself groans and turns her face away. That's what I just read. Verse nine, her uncleanness was in her skirts.

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

First of all, she acknowledges that she took no sense of the consequences of her action. And now the consequences have come. And in verse nine, this last little third bit, Oh, Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed.

For the first time, now there's going to be different things in the Hebrew. I might or might not tell you about it. Part of the ornateness about second voice and third voice and all of that stuff. But here is the first time now that the poet addresses the Lord, the triune God.

[23 : 19] It's a prayer. It's going to happen again in verse 11, and it's going to end versus the last few verses are going to end in prayer as well.

And here's that little arrow prayer, so to speak, not a long ornate prayer, but just this quick little arrow prayer. Oh, Lord, behold, my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed.

And by the way, in the original language, it's actually, and it's captured quite well here with the enemy. The implication is that it's not only the enemy of Jerusalem, but it's the enemy of God.

That these people who have triumphed and brought about the ruin of this man's life and the ruin of the city, that they're also God's enemies. You see, this text is so nuanced in terms of reflecting upon life.

But let's continue on in verse 10. The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things, for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation.

[24 : 27] In other words, they've entered by force to destroy. Haven't entered by faith to worship. They haven't entered by faith to seek, to seek him, to know him, to enter into relationship with them, but they've entered as enemies to destroy.

Verse 11, all her people groan as they search for bread. They trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. And here's now the second prayer. It's a little arrow prayer.

I use it in terms of it's just this quick one shot up to God, looking to the Lord, talking now not to people around, not to himself or herself, could have been written by a woman, but looking right to God and says, Lord, O Lord, look, O Lord, and see, for I am despised.

Verse 12, is it nothing to you, all you who pass by, look and see, is, if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is brought, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

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

[25 : 45] 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.

The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst. He summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men. The Lord has trodden as in a winepress, the virgin daughter of Judah.

For these things I weep. 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.

It does sound a little bit, doesn't it, apart from the prayers, as if it's written by one of the Lord's enemies, rather than the Lord. I mean the poet, and now included by the Lord in his word. The Lord being the ultimate writer of the scripture.

Verse 17, Zion stretches out her hands, but there is none to comfort her. The Lord has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should be his foes. Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them.

[26 : 47] The Lord is in the right. Isn't that shocking? Is this so that the writer is a bit of a masochist?

I mean, I guess some might say that. It shows a type of masochism, a type of doormat type of mentality. One of those types of ideas that we rebel against in our culture, because we are to be the master of our fate, we are to be the master of our castle, we are to be the master of our circumstances, and anything which does not encourage us to be the master of our karma, the master of our destiny, the master of our salvation, the master of our marriages, the master of our wealth, is looked down upon.

It's to deny this idea that there's these techniques, these ways of handling and managing yourself, your emotions, your fears, your vision of the future, your children, your family, your job, your neighborhood, your country, the weather, the movement of the stars.

Oh, one moment. As soon as I say that, we start to realize, maybe there's a problem with this view. And maybe part of the problem, you see, here's one of the things which I'm going to suggest.

The problem we have with the Bible is that it's too realistic. We think we are realistic, and that when we read the Bible, we're reading something which is unrealistic. But what actually is the case is that the Bible is too realistic for us who dwell amongst delusions and illusions and fantasies of our greatness and of our mastery.

[28 : 31] And because we constantly are consumed with illusions, delusions, and lies, we, in our arrogance, think that when we come upon the Bible, we are reading something which is not in the real world.

But the fact of the matter is, is that the Bible is vastly too realistic for most of us to handle, including myself. See, that's one of the reasons, friends, that, you know, for me, you begin with the gospel, you begin with Jesus and what he has done for you and how he gripped, how he has dealt with that

which keeps you far from him, and he has done that which makes you right with him.

And it's, in a sense, in a very, very real and powerful sense that it's the gospel which is to grip us and to start to give us a bit of a comfort to go and look at these very, very difficult texts which describe the reality of who we are at the level of our heart.

In the context of the triune God and the real world, not the fantasy world that we keep trying to impose upon the real world. Verse 18 again, The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word.

But hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering. My young women and my young men have gone into captivity. I called to my lovers, but they deceived me. My priests and elders perished in the city while they sought food to revive their strength.

[29 : 47] This poem closes with prayer. Verses 20, 21, and 22 closes with prayer. 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 streets, the sword bereaves. In the house, it is like death. 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. Let all their evil doing 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. And Christians say, this is the word of the Lord, and we try to respond, thanks be to God. Now, just a couple of things as we reflect upon this.

The first thing is, if maybe all of a sudden I could ask Andrew to put up that very, very first image.

The steadfast love of the Lord never faileth. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning.

[30 : 51] Great is thy faithfulness. That's actually as we're going to see, and actually I'll just read it right now because we'll come back to it. If you go to, it's not going to be on your text. I should have had that. You just have to read the Bible.

Trust me that it's there. And next week, I'll make sure I have Andrew have it up on the screen or whoever. The steadfast, chapter 3, verse 22, to sort of the very center of the entire book is this part of the book which is radically different than the rest.

I'll talk about it more in a moment, but here's how it goes. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. But you can see that to have this text read with the image, which I think is still in front of you, is not to actually understand where the book, where that verse comes from. So, Andrew, if you could put up the other image, the image of the ruined city, or Claire, I think it's Claire putting up the images. This, the book of Lamentations, the poet writes it amidst the rubble. And by the end of the book, he's still in the rubble. And in the very middle of the whole, of the five prayers, the five laments, is this profound text.

[32 : 11] The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. And there's other texts along that same line that come after it that we'll look at more when we come to chapter three.

So, here's just a couple of ways to try to get our minds around what's happening. By the way, I really understand that my primary job is to hopefully be one with you as you, to help you read the text for yourself.

Because God wrote this text for you and I to read it and to pray it. Our Jewish friends pray this text as part of their synagogue worship when they remember these acts of destruction that have befallen their people.

And obviously, it's had a very special poignancy since the Holocaust happened to them. But here's the first thing. Many of us have a very, very, very hard trouble with this whole idea that God could be involved in their punishment.

But here's the fact, the matter is, and here's where I say the text, if we get beyond our just childish response, our unreflective response, and in our age of social media, unreflective responses is primarily what we see in social media and lots of the world.

[33 : 26] And it reflects just who we are. That we take the Bible after it's read that and we throw it away. How dare you? I hate that. And we stomp and we just sort of say, that's one of the reasons I'm not a Christian.

That's one of the reasons I hate Christianity. That's one of the reasons I hate Christians. But let's just pause for a moment and just ask ourselves, this is the first of five separate questions that we'll look at, at least five, over the next few weeks.

In the real world, you always have consequences, don't you? You think about it for a second. I'm getting older. The other day, I was, somebody who was 30 said that they were already entering middle age.

And I said that I planned to live to over 120, so I've just entered middle age. And they hadn't entered middle age, yet not even clear at the quarter age.

Of course, I won't live to 120. But you know what? If in the real world, nature has consequences. I mean, if all of a sudden I was to decide that from now on I'm going to have a cheese omelet with sausage and bacon and white toast with lots of butter, and that would be my breakfast every day, and the rest of the day it would be alternating between extra cheesy, meaty pizza, Big Macs, and poutine, and that's all I ate, well, you would expect me to have particular consequences from that.

[34 : 49] They wouldn't be good. I wouldn't end up looking like the rock by the end of it. And I wouldn't live to be 120. Nature has its consequences. You drink too much alcohol, you often have liver problems, you smoke cigarettes, the odds are going up of you having cancer.

You go on and on and on. The fact of the matter is that's separate from the fact that if you ever watch the movie, it's a really funny movie with Will Ferrell and I should have, and Mark Wahlberg. I think it's called The Other Guys, and at the beginning of the movie they have these macho cops that you see. In fact, I think it's acted by The Rock, and I can't remember who the other, oh, maybe Samuel L. Jackson, and it's really funny.

At the beginning of the movie, you know, they're invincible, etc., and there's this time when the bad guys sort of are all surrounding them, and they're at the top of a 20-story building, and they decide their way to escape is to jump off it, and of course in movies people survive these falls all the time, but of course in this movie they die, because if you jump off a 20-story building, you die.

Like, nature has consequences. So if nature punishes things against nature, why can't God? In fact, think about it more. You punish other people.

[36 : 03] You punish other people. You do. If they do something against you, you try to punish them. If you can't punish them because they're more powerful than you, then often you deal with revenge fantasies where you enter into depression.

But the fact of the matter is you punish people when they go wrong against you, so why can't God?

The fact of the matter is, if the government punishes people, I mean, one of the things which is going on with this lockdown right now, those of you who are watching this live, is that two things. First of all, I don't care what the polls say, most people are in some ways breaking the protocols. You know, they give themselves mulligans and passes for small infringements, and one of the things which is keeping them from bigger doing it is in many cases that they're afraid that their neighbors will tattle on them and have huge fines.

But the government punishes people. Why can't the triune God? You punish yourself. Why can't the triune God punish you? And in a sense, and this, by the way, is a problem in all of our relationships, if we're just very, very honest about it.

Because, you see, the fact of the matter is is that we feel quite self-righteous and justified in punishing other people. Like this attempt by the person to create the social media storm.

[37 : 23] There were attempts to reach out to him very early on just to clarify what we were and were not doing, and in fact, what he said we were doing was not at all what we were doing. What we were proposing was not at all what we were proposing.

But the fact of the matter is that was irrelevant. They just wanted to punish. And that's a very real thing for many of us as well that we just want to punish. But one of the main problems, whether it's with friends, whether it's in families, whether it's in workplaces, whether it's in societies, that we want to have a different standard applied to ourselves or our buddies than we apply to our enemies or those who are standing in the way of what we want.

But isn't that what really happens? So what happens in your friendship and your friend says to you that it's obvious you think there's a different standard that should be applied to you than is applied to everybody else, but why do you get that pass?

Why do you get that mulligan? Why do you get it and nobody else gets it? Like, isn't that just part of the normal life? And if that's what normal life is, in fact, if you think about it for a second, we in fact encourage people to punish.

That, in fact, if one of you said something like if one of you came and your husband, it was fun that your husband had cheated on you and you told people and you said, I don't think I'm going to do anything about it, they'd say, what are you thinking?

[38 : 45] What are you thinking? You're going to let him do that and not have him have any consequences? So if it's all right for us to think and talk that way, why is it not right for God, the triune God?

Why is it that you think you get a pass? But you think about it for a second. By the way, this goes on with, in Islam, in all of the Eastern religions, in paganism, there's always consequences.

So whether you're a naturalist and just think there's the natural order and nothing else, whether you believe there is some type of Eastern religion and there's karma and consequences, whether you're a Muslim and you believe there's some type of, you know, in that particular case, Allah can just sort of do whatever Allah wants.

There doesn't even have to be a reason. You can just do it. But that leads us to our second thing.

What do you do in the midst of these consequences? Where can you go?

Now, what are the things that we, yeah, where do you go? Like, if you think about it, there's nothing I can do when nature, and when I violate things, if I jump off a building, there's nowhere I can appeal to in terms of having violated it.

[39 : 57] And if it turns out that five years after my diet of extra cheesy omelets with lots of bacon and sausage and white toast buttered and a diet of extra cheesy meat lovers pizza, Big Macs, double Big Macs or even better, and poutine, I, like, I can't, can I appeal to biology for, like, there's nothing I can do.

There's nowhere that I can appeal to the natural order. Excuse me. In a sense, there's nowhere to appeal with karma. There's nowhere to appeal even with Allah.

Where do you go? See, the fact of the matter is, is that what is, one of the things which we find so surprising about the text is that not only have they admitted that they have done wrong and they are experiencing God's punishment and they're admitting this in the midst of the ruins, they didn't admit it while they thought they could get by with no consequences, they didn't admit it when they thought that their solution was to go to more lovers or more idols.

But now that everything has been destroyed, they cry out to God and they realize that where else can you go? You see, the fact of the matter is, is that the, in the biblical worldview, the rightness of God is both the source of punishment, but also is their only hope, our only hope in the midst of the ruins.

Think about it for a second. You can't appeal to nature, you can't appeal to Allah, you can't appeal to, at the end of the day, in Eastern religions or in Buddhism, there's nowhere to appeal to.

[41 : 34] There's not even a God. And at the end of the day, even within Hinduism, I mean, obviously in lived Hinduism, because it's too hard for us to live this emotionally and psychologically, you can appeal to the different gods and goddesses within the broader, more popular type of Hinduism.

But at a philosophical level, in a sense, there is no one to appeal to. But in Christianity, in the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, love and goodness from all eternity, other, the other from all eternity, yet just one God.

the very, very rightness and justice and goodness of God, which is the source, ultimately, of us ignoring his warnings, thinking there are no consequences and someday there finally is consequences, that very same God's character is also the source of our hope.

See, that's why the poet can pray, you know, Lord, look, Lord, remember, Lord, note. they are in the midst of the ruins, both not hiding at all or pretending that the real world isn't the real world.

They are fully and utterly in the real world and in the real world there is, in fact, a God who is just and right and desires rightness and is the only one who can restore rightness.

[43 : 02] And that's why it's part of the wonder of the whole book is that it's the importance of the story. One of the problems that Christians have is that we read the Bible as if it's just a series of quotes. But in fact, it's not that the steadfast love of the Lord never faileth.

It's not just a quote to put on our fridge. It's part of the middle of the whole book. It's as the poet is beginning to call out to the Lord, remembering who the Lord is, that he is the one.

Only he is right. He tolerates no evil. He tolerates no injustice. He tolerates none of that. He is only good. He has punished us because we have violated that.

And now we call out to him because he is the only hope we have in the midst of it, but he is a God who hears. And for us as Christians, we see this because the book of Lamentations is part of a bigger story.

For us, we see that in the bigger story that this true and greater mercy, the steadfast love of the Lord never faileth. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. They are new every morning.

[44 : 05] And this great promise in the middle of the book of Lamentations, we, for the writer, all he could do is two types of things. The poet could both look back at the Exodus and about God's defeat of Midian and God's defeat of the Persian Empire.

And at the same time, I guess that's sort of the future. He hasn't defeated the Persian Empire when this is being written. I got that out of order. You also think you can just sort of look forward to all those prophecies and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, contemporaries of the poet of some day in the future.

And we can look at it and understand how the ruin, he was ruined in my place that I restored will stand.

He was ruined in my place that I restored will stand. That that is preparing us to understand the great punishment that I deserve that falls on him that I can stand before him righteous and right with God.

And that in the overarching story, there's this constant understanding that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And we're going to look at this in the future, that there's none that are righteous, not one, including especially me.

[45 : 22] But in the overarching story of the Bible, God creates everything good, human beings desiring to be like God, to give themselves passes, to take his place.

They bring evil and destruction and ruin into the world. And then God begins to promise that he will restore what human beings cannot restore. And this book of Lamentations comes within that part, looking to Jesus.

And Jesus has come and the ruin that I deserve and you deserve is laid on him so that I restored to God might stand. And now we live in the already not yet, that on one level this is true of everyone who puts their faith and trust in Jesus, that Jesus will never let you go.

That your faith, your hope, is not how strong your grip is on him, because your grip, if it's all like me, there will be times your grip completely and utterly lets go, but he will never lose his grip of you.

Even if you are hearing this in the midst of the ruins of your finances, the ruins of your family, the ruins of your emotions, the fact of the matter is, as at some point in time the final word, earthly word about you, will be ruined, because you will die, as will I.

[46 : 35] But the story continues, which is why we had the book of Revelation read, is at the end, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, all tears will be wiped away, all justice will be final, and we will stand before the throne, not because we were particularly righteous ourselves, but because of the lamb who was slain, who has made us righteous, because the ruin that I deserved was laid on him, that I in him restored might be to stand before the presence of the triune God for all eternity.

And that can be the final word about you. If you are in Christ, that is the final word about you. If you are not yet in Christ, that can be the final word about you. So just as we close, I've already gone longer than I intended.

One of the wonderful things, we'll look at this every week, is you can say this to God. God. That's one of the hopeful things that you can have by the book of Lamentations. It's one of the reasons why it's not helpful for us to only have the pleasant images on the magnets.

And then you almost feel as if you can't bring this complaint and anger and puzzlement to God, like where can you go? But Lamentations shows you that you can say this to God. Pour out your heart to him.

And we'll look at more of that in the weeks to come. Let's close our eyes in prayer. Lord, we ask that you bring your word home to us. We ask that you bring the gospel home to us.

[47 : 56] If there are any here who have not yet given their lives to Jesus, we ask that this would be the day that they call out to you and say, Lord, be my savior. I thank you that the ruin that I deserved has been laid upon you.

All the ruin, all the ruin of my past, my present, my future has been laid on you, that I might be restored to you and stand before you forever as your child, your loved and beloved child.

And so, Father, we ask that you help us to be more gripped with the gospel, that you help us to be more honest in our prayers. And we ask, Father, that you help us to pray for our city and for the world, to not look down upon the world as we pray, but as we see the hard parts of the world, that that would cause us to call out in prayer for them.
And all these things we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen.