

# The Seed of Hope in a Pain-Filled Heart

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, once again, we come to you acknowledging that sometimes your word is shocking and confuses us very deeply.

And sometimes, Father, if we're honest, when we come to your word, we actually find it not something that gives us hope, but something that we almost find repulsive. And, Father, we're going to be looking at a text like this today.

And so we ask that the Holy Spirit would move with gentle power in each of us, that we might walk towards these fears at the center of our heart as we walk towards you.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I have to give you a bit of a almost like a trigger alert or a spoiler alert at the beginning.

We're going to be looking at Lamentations chapter 4. Those of you who don't have Bibles or aren't familiar with this, the words to the text are going to show up on the screen underneath.

[ 0 : 59 ] But you know what? It's really good to have your own Bibles as well. So you can just sort of check things out and maybe make marks or notes in them if you're that type of a person. And I should let you know that the text is going to talk about a mother who kills her.

Okay. Sorry. There's no sort of way to just sort of bring this up in polite conversation or something like this. This text, once again, talks about some very dark issues, some very, very hard issues, which are issues that happen in the world all of the time but seem to be in the Bible.

And not seem to be in the Bible, are in the Bible and are in the Bible in a way which we find very, very hard to understand. The text is going to make reference to a woman who kills her child and then cooks it to eat it.

There's no way that I can sort of sugarcoat that. And the text is also going to talk about Sodom. And it's going to talk about the Lord causing pain amongst other things.

And so this is what I – when I said this is not the type of text that Christians or non-Christians, I mean, would normally look at. Non-Christians, I guess, probably wouldn't even know that it's there.

[ 2 : 10 ] But it's a very, very hard text. And just a couple of other things before we look at it because we're going to look at the text. We're going to read it from the beginning to the end. And the first thing is, and I hope there's an image here that can go on the screen at this particular time, just to help to understand the context of the text, that the Book of Lamentations are five linked poems.

And each poem, in a sense, is separate, but the poems are all linked. And they're linked in a very sort of very clever way and an important way. For instance, each poem has separate subpoems, but because the poem is an acrostic, you know that the poems have to be held together.

It's exploring a sets of ideas together. And then the way the whole five poems are sort of structured, there's other significance, and I'll mention something about that at the end.

But these five poems are written after the destruction of Jerusalem. And the destruction of Jerusalem was, we would now call it, close to ethnic cleansing.

Many, many, many people were killed by the Babylonians. Most of those who weren't killed were carried away into exile. The city is in rubble. And so when you read this text, really the image, which I think is still up on the screen, that should, in a sense, be in the background of your mind.

[ 3 : 32 ] You might want to, you know, if you're doing this on your own, find some type of image of such ruins and understand the poet is pouring out his pain to God in the context of sitting amongst the rubble, sitting amongst the ruins.

And so that's one of the things that you have to understand about this text as you're going through it. And the second thing is, and maybe here we just want to jump ahead to chapter 4, verse 11.

This I wanted to be especially helpful for those of you who might be looking at this for the very first time and aren't that familiar with some of the things that I've been wrestling with and we've been

talking about in the previous three weeks.

And if you see here in verse 11, the Lord gave full vent to his wrath. He poured out his hot anger and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations.

And Zion sort of is, anyway, it's talking about the rubble. And as we'll see it in verse 17, I think it is as well, or 16. And it's been something that's been in the previous three chapters.

[ 4 : 44 ] It's very, very clear that the destruction was something that the Lord brought about. And so you need to be aware of that as part of the struggling of the text as we read it.

And we're going to go back to the beginning. We're going to go to verse 1. We're going to look at all the text and I'll comment about it a bit as we go along. And then a few things at the end as well. And I just want to say something to those of you who might be watching this who definitely wouldn't call yourself Christians or maybe you're ex-Christians or post-Christians.

But you consider yourself somebody who's a bit of a seeker, trying to get a better handle on the meaning of life and the meaning of what it means to be human. And one of the things, by the way, you're going to get in this text, and I think it's one of the things which makes it hard for us when we read the book of Lamentations, is a lot of us don't realize that the Bible actually reveals that to understand God we need to also understand ourselves.

And that as we understand ourselves, it also is a way to help us understand the mystery of the triune God. And that's one of the things which is going to happen as we look at this text, is it's going to actually show a bit of a searchlight into what it means to be human.

But what I want to say is, some of you might be wondering, in fact, one of the things we're going to look at, this book of Lamentations looks more like something that's written by one of God's enemies rather than his friends. It looks more like a chapter that's written by a deconversion blog, or a I gave up religion blog, or why I am an atheist blog.

[ 6 : 18 ] And it looks as if it's evidence against the Christian faith. And so you might wonder why we're even looking at, like, first of all, it's a bit of a shock that it's in the Bible, and why are we even looking at it? One of the things we do at Church of the Messiah is, we want to address the important questions, both emotional, existential, and intellectual, that human beings face.

And we don't ever want to try to present Jesus as Lord in a way where, I don't know, God has this wonderful plan for your life, and we say all this, and there's all this glittery stuff, and we sort of hide and cover up the stuff which seems to go against it, or the stuff which is going to be very difficult.

That's one of the reasons why we preach through whole books of the Bible, as a general rule.

There's no fine print. There's nothing hidden. And if you are at all involved in a bit of a spiritual quest, we'd love it if you connected with us.

We'd love to have conversations with you to see what we can do to help you with that, to be challenged by your questions. If you have questions about the sermon, I can't promise to answer all of them, but feel free to email the Church, and I will take that into account as I preach.

We don't want to walk away from problems or questions. We want to listen to good questions. We want to look at good problems. We want to walk towards them. And so if you're at all a seeker, please feel free to connect with us.

[ 7 : 34 ] But let's get into the text. Cannibalism, Sodom, God-causing pain. Let's look. Chapter 4, verse 1. And here's how it begins.

And we'll just sort of pause there for a second.

And the text begins, the word how is part of this whole thing of lament, like how could this happen, usually said in the context of a terrible catastrophe. And that's how this poem is introduced with this word.

In fact, actually to show how important it is, it actually says it three times. If you'll notice in the first two verses, this will be the last one of the five poems where this is worded, but it's sort of highlighted how, how, how.

And the image of the gold and the pure gold and the holy stones or the precious stones being scattered everywhere, that's just talking about the fact that human beings are very precious.

[ 8 : 49 ] It's an imagery to try to communicate that human beings have a great worth. And yet, even though that human beings have a great worth, they're being treated as if, you know, if you just took the cheap type of pottery, maybe you're going to get your kid or your grandkid or your best friend, excuse me, a bit of a frog in my throat, and you're going to maybe get them into pottery.

And you get the cheapest clay and you get them their pottery thing and they try their little experiment and then it's, you know, it dries, but it's a complete and utter disaster, and a disaster in a way that isn't even cute. You know, if it's a kid and you want to keep it, and it just gets shattered and the shards.

And so what's being talked about here at the very, very beginning is how, how, how, that human beings who are of very, very precious should be understood as if they're gold, as if they're precious and holy stones are being treated the same way that you would treat the shards of the cheapest pottery clay after it's been broken.

That's the imagery here, which launches this first section, which is the first 10 verses. And it's going to culminate with this terrible image of a mom having killed her child, cooking the child to eat it.

The first 10 verses are one literary unit in the original language. Let's look at verse 3. And when it says here, the daughter of my people, it's not just saying as if women have become cruel.

[10:22] One of the things all the way through this is that God's people are always, there's feminine imagery to refer to God's people, to the human race. And so when it says the daughter of my people, it's not saying, oh, I like how evil women are.

It's not like that at all. It's, in fact, the way, the, the way to picture humanity is feminine. And the way to picture, in a sense, redeemed humanity is, is feminine.

So that's what's going on here. But notice that the part of it is that the people have become cruel.

Verse 4, the tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst.

The children beg for food, but no one gives to them. In fact, part of the way that you see the deep cruelty of the people and the self-centeredness of the people is the way they handle the most weak and the most vulnerable, the way they handle children.

Verse 5, those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the street. Those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps. And the significance of purple is in the ancient world when this was written, only the very rich could afford things which were dyed in the color purple.

[11:38] And so it's, that's the sign, it's just one of those little type of images that archaeologists and anthropologists, et cetera, now know. So that's the imagery there of those who were brought up in very, very, very poor places are now also, I mean, rich places are now reduced to great poverty.

Verse 6, and here there's a bit of a, if you have a good Bible, you'll notice a little note with two of the words, and I'll explain the significance of it for you. The chest, for this chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment and no hands were wrung for her.

And the word chastisement, it's one of just things in the original language, the word chastisement can also mean evil or sin or iniquity. And the word punishment can also mean evil or sin or iniquity. And so what the thing is that the author is doing, it's a very, very clever thing. Just as in English, we have ways, usually it's used with sexual things and jokes, double entendres where they're making a comment on one level and others understand that it's probably making a reference to another level. Often in children's movies, not that they'll have these sexual entendres, but there'll be some joke that kids will laugh at. But there's another sense of the words that the adults will get, and they'll also laugh at that.

[13:04] And that's what's going on here, but not in a way to make a joke, is that there's this connection between both the punishment, the sin or the evil that the people have done, and the punishment that the people have received.

And for the writers, Sodom is the example of the worst possible city. Not just in sexual matters, which I'm not going to get into in this sermon.

You can look at some of my other sermons on that. In fact, I think one of my sermons in Colossians, I dealt with it just recently. But it's also in terms of how the bloodthirstiness, if you look at other texts, it's also to do with the cruelty of the people, the way they treated the weak and the helpless, the sheer lust for power and conquest, which was of such an evil matter that the city was destroyed by God.

And so we see here, look at verse 6 again. By the way, this isn't an anti-Semitic text, because it's a part of our Jewish friends call this the Torah or the Tanakh, and we Christians call it the Old Testament, and the poet is Jewish.

And so it's part of the Jewish scriptures. So this isn't an anti-Semitic text, if you're sort of puzzled by it. Verse 7 again. Her princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk.

[ 14 : 39 ] Their bodies were more ruddy than coral. The beauty of their form was like sapphire. Now their face is blacker than soot. If you've ever been to Israel and you've been there in the sunny weather, it's picturing people who have no shade.

And because they're reduced to living under the elements, their skin has just become unbelievably darkened and blackened from the sun. And of course, with the starvation and the lack of being able to wash, that's befallen them.

Now their face is blacker than soot. They are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones. It has become as dry as wood. Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger who wasted away, pierced by lack of the fruits of the field.

The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children. They became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Now that's just a horrific image. And it's a horrific image which could come from the news.

[ 15 : 51 ] Although I think even news outlets, if that happens in different places of the world, they probably wouldn't show it. It would be too horrific for the news. It might even be too horrific for YouTube and social media.

And you can see how reading these first 10 verses, it sounds more like something that's been written to provide evidence against the Lord's existence.

But you have to think about this most horrific detail is also the most telling. Because you have to ask yourself, who or what caused that woman to kill her own child to eat it?

It's very clear within the text that the Lord didn't do that. In fact, as we're going to see as the text goes on, one of the things which actually makes it very, very hard for post-modern and modern or post-truth people like us to get our minds around the Bible, is the Bible is actually, even when it talks about the sovereignty of God, which the Book of Lamentations does, there is no system of thought, no spirituality, no religion that so maintains the importance and the centrality of human freedom as the scriptures.

And while it's clear that the destruction of the nation is part of God's judgment, which we're going to look at in the next few verses, God doesn't sort of just overwhelm random women and while they kick and struggle and resist against God forces them to do something horrific and evil.

[ 17 : 39 ] These women chose that. And earlier, the cruelty towards children were chosen by the people. I can tell you this right now, and I'm not going to use myself as an example because that would be self-righteous.

I can tell you this right now about my wife, Louise. There is absolutely no way in a gazillion, billion, hundred million years, even at the threat of the greatest torture, that she would do something like this.

Like, absolutely no way. She would give every last bit of water, every last bit of food to care for her child or her grandchild or other people's children.

You see, the judgment of God also reveals. And that becomes scary because all of a sudden, you see, we've been looking at this text as an indictment of God.

But if you understand that this is talking about what human beings do, the cruelty that we human beings can do, you realize that all of a sudden, it's inviting us to have a searchlight look at our own hearts and the hearts of the human condition.

[ 18 : 52 ] This woman's selfishness and callousness and evil, these women, and not just the women, but the whole city. Nobody, no man, nobody stepped in to intervene.

And we all know that human beings are possible of such great evil. And some of us might say, well, I would never do that.

And as I said, my wife would never do that. That's why we have to look at this text and say, whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on? See, the judgment of God always reveals. And when it reveals, it reveals to our great surprise the wisdom of God.

and his mercy. Because we're going to talk at the end about hope and how this text all points towards our need for a very great deliverance.

But the Lord's judgment reveals. And if we look at our own hearts and our own minds, if we look at what we do in our minds, how we talk about other people at different times, what we would do to other people in our own minds, how maybe if you're in a social group at work or curling club or the golf club or something like that and how you deal with the person who's definitely not cool, not hip, how you deal with that.

[ 20 : 15 ] Maybe if you're a whole pile of Canadians, you find out that somebody would have voted for Trump and how you would deal with them. Or if you're a whole pile of Trump supporters and you found out somebody who wanted the tattoo I love Hillary Clinton on their bicep and how you would deal with them, how we deal with the weak and the vulnerable, what we do in our own mind, we have to acknowledge the truth of the Bible for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We have to acknowledge that there's something profoundly mysterious about human beings that at the beginning of this, when I say the text compares human beings as being like precious gold and precious and holy stones and we can all nod and acknowledge that there's something true about that but we also have to acknowledge that when we look at it that there's something about human beings that makes great horrific evil also equally possible and how can we square those two things? Is a human being like trying to, is having a true, good, redeemed human being like trying to have a square circle? How do we put these two truths together and put these two truths together in a way that causes and brings about and is consistent with hope and not despair?

Well, the text is going to go deeper into this whole thing. In fact, once again, it's going to be something that at first it looks like an indictment of the Lord but actually reveals something about human beings.

Look at verse 11. The next little literary unit in the text and this is in the original language is verses 11 to 16 and because it's an acrostic the 22 verses you realize that this series of examinations of mysteries and riddles and paradoxes and horrors and glories are all held together at a literary level by being an acrostic poem.

[ 22 : 06 ] But look at verses 11 to 16. The Lord gave full vent to his wrath. He poured out his hot anger and he kindled the fire in Zion that consumed its foundations.

The kings of the earth did not believe nor any of the inhabitants of the world that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem. This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous.

They wandered blind. This is now talking about the prophets and the priests. They wandered blind through the streets. They were so defiled with blood that no one was able to touch their garments. Away, unclean, people cried at them. Away, away, do not touch. So they became fugitives and wanderers. People said among the peoples they shall no longer with, they shall stay with us no longer.

The Lord himself has scattered them. He will regard them no more. No honor was shown to the priests, no favor to the elders. Now, once again, it's making it clear that the judgment upon the people was something that God does.

[ 23 : 20 ] And here we have to just, I've mentioned this before, I'm just going to mention it again very briefly. One of the things that we don't realize when we look at the Christian God, the triune God, and when we look at the scriptures, is that often people have two different types of complaints about the triune God, about Christianity.

And people rarely stop to ask themselves how they can hold both criticisms at the same time because they can't. They have to choose and there's problems with even choosing one. On one hand, one of the reasons that the most common reason for the last several hundred years why people wouldn't believe in the God described by Jesus, the Trinity, is that he doesn't, he allows evil to happen.

At the same time, and I can tell you this with very, very great certainty that two of the main reasons why many people today will also not believe in the God of the Bible is one that's teaching on sexuality, which we're not going to look at today, but also, of course, it's teaching in hell, which is actually the teaching of God's judgment.

So which one is it? You don't believe in God because he doesn't judge evil or you don't believe in God because he does judge evil? You can't have both. Like the incoherence isn't in the Bible. I don't mean to insult you, but the incoherence isn't in the Bible. And you see, here's this great mystery the Bible would say that the God that does exist is perfectly good and perfectly just and perfectly merciful and perfectly true.

[ 24 : 56 ] And both justice and evil hurts. There's no way around it. Both justice and evil causes hurt.

If I robbed a bank, a series of banks, or I was able to figure out some way to embezzle lots of money or to do something else which was quite wrong, and the police capture me and put me in

handcuffs, that would hurt.

They throw me in jail and that would cause me lots of hurt. Do you think I should be put in jail because I've caused damage?

Because maybe I've beat somebody up or killed somebody or robbed a bank or threatened people with guns? Of course you would. Justice causes hurt. Evil causes hurt.

The difference is, and that's what we're going to see as the poem continues, is that in true justice, and that's what we long for, isn't it? We might feel sometimes very cynical about the possibility of justice, and it's actually a very Christian idea.

[ 26 : 06 ] If you go back, one of the great profound works which have shaped how basically the whole world, almost the whole world thinks, was a profound meditation called The City of God by St. Augustine, Augustine, 1600 some odd years ago, where he contrasts the city of human beings and the city of God, and he makes very clear that on this side of the grave there's imperfect, at best, justice in the world, and our deep longing for something where there is perfect justice that's only going to actually be satisfied ultimately in the gospel, the biblical gospel.

But what we see here is if you understand the profound difference is that if there is true justice, true justice will cause hurt as part of punishment for that which is truly evil.

But in true justice, there is the mixture there of mercy, the hope that after the punishment is inflicted, that there will be an amendment of life and a restoration and a mending of things, and that the justice and the hurt, that there's something ordered about it, that it's the right amount, not enough to dehumanize you or to make it that there can be no mending or restoration, but evil just loves to hurt. Evil hurts until it's bored. Evil hurts until it's bored. And what we see here is justice.

This is going to become a little bit more clear even with the next bit, which on one hand just seems to be, especially if you understand what's going on, is something which is profoundly anti, seems to be very, very anti-Canadian with our love of, you know, in a sense of pluralism and boutique spiritualities.

[ 28 : 00 ] I'm not saying that as a put-down. I'm not saying that as a put-down. I'm just trying to point out that once you understand the next bit, it might be, George, you've made matters worse, but it actually makes matters clearer and better.

The next literary unit is verses 17 to 20. And it goes like this. Now just sort of pause because it's going to be very, very important.

Our eyes failed ever watching vainly for help. They were completely and utterly committed. They were coming under the judgment of God. They had been warned.

I talked about this in other things, is that it's not as if one day God just sort of, you know, thought, you know, I'm in a bad mood. I'm going to punish these people. In fact, at a literary level, one of the things which is very fascinating about this book at a literary level is the constant allusions to what our Jewish friends call the Torah Torah, the first five books of Moses.

But Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the constant literary references and allusions to the book of Jeremiah, the book of Isaiah, the book of Ezekiel, and other parts of the scripture, the Psalms as well.

[ 29 : 18 ] Constant allusions to this, and they're all allusions to this warning that the Lord has made, that there is a day of the Lord, a day of judgment, a warning of what God desires and how God desires us to live in his offer of covenant and mercy and warning the people that if they turn away from this offer of a covenant, of a love relationship, because that's in fact what the constant warning is.

It's, you see, the book of Lamentations, we're going to look at it again in a moment, I hope I remember to do it, is that it's part of a larger story. And in this part of a larger story, the only way to understand this larger story is that it's a love story.

It's a love story where the desire is that at the end that evil and injustice and all has been really dealt with. Freedom has been respected, but justice has been dealt with.

And there's a marriage, and there's a party, and there's a celebration. And the marriage is between human beings and God. That's the end of this overarching story of which Lamentations is just part of this overarching story.

If you think of the Bible like the way a lot of, think of a very, very good novel called World War Z, where you have all these different literary genres all knit together in one book.

[ 30 : 30 ] It's regular now for me to read books where you have in the same novel both the narrative which is going on, but you might have newspaper reports, you might have interviews, you

might have email correspondence, all woven into one overarching story.

And if you understand that the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation, that from a Christian understanding, which we learn from Jesus, by the way, we didn't make this up, we learned it from Jesus. He was the one who told us that there's this overarching story that God has written, caused to be written, that uses myth, uses law, uses poetry, uses proverbs, uses irony, paradox, history, prophecy, historical narrative, philosophical argument, and he's woven this, all these different literary genres together into one overarching story and at the heart of this, it's a love story. Like it's a true love story. The overarching narrative of the world is a love story that desires to have you included in it.

And so if you go back here to verse 17, which I have to read the 17 to 20, our eyes failed ever watching vainly for help. Vain, the image of vain is a perfect image right now in the original language.

It's actually vapor. So actually, if you go outside and you can see your breath and you can only see your breath for the briefest of moment, that's in a sense the image which is being used here.

[ 32 : 02 ] They're looking for help but it's, what they get is just, it has the substance, the solidity, the helpfulness of the breath that you see on a cold winter's day which is no help at all.

That's not, you can't build a house on that, you can't build your life on it. It lasts the briefest of seconds. And they were completely and utterly, notice in our watching we watched in the original language it just, it's an intensification of this, it's showing that no matter what starts to happen to them, no matter how the warnings that God has given for generations and generations through all sorts of different means, through law and through prophets and through miracles, through story, through all of these things that no matter how strong they've been, no matter how present they've been, what is their response is not to go back to the Lord but to in fact to be completely and utterly committed to looking everywhere else.

and the thing, and here's the anti-Canadian, not anti-Canadian, it's just a challenge, is it's not just that they're looking, you know, it's not like in our days we're trying to get the United States to come in and save us or maybe Britain to come in and save us or Australia or Belgium or something like that or Nigeria.

It's the nations, in the ancient world there's no distinction between the gods and the nation. It's not just the people, it's their gods.

They are looking to every other God-created nation. God ruled, God suffused, God infested, God grounded, God permeated, God and goddess permeated people group.

[ 33 : 46 ] They've been completely and utterly committed to finding it there somewhere else. And here's where, before I read the rest of the other verses, here's the big question. You see, if you understand that the living God is actually inviting you into a love relationship with himself that will go into all eternity.

Well, here's maybe a way to get what the significance of it is here. This would be a question for George. I'm George, if you've forgotten my name. George, would you rather have Louise and be poor or lose Louise and be rich?

maybe you're in a troubled marriage or in no marriage and you can't relate to that. You have a little baby. Would you rather have that baby and be poor or lose the baby and be rich?

Now, if you even think about that, that says something very, very, very, very, if you even pause for an instant to question it or wonder about it, that shows something about your heart.

And what's going to happen throughout these laments? You see, lament is a way of expressing pain and incoherence and sorrow and questions to the living God in a way that ends up restoring relationship.

[ 35 : 18 ] And that's what's happening in the book of Lamentations. It's going to happen at the end. Imagine, you know, a couple and you're on the couch and one of you gets this question and you think yourself, you know, Bob is on the couch and Sue's beside him and Bob thinks, well, you know, maybe I would choose riches if I had to, you know, if there's a choice between Sue and riches, I would choose riches.

And Sue's thinking, oh, I would never choose riches. I would choose Bob. And afterwards, you get talking and Bob says, well, actually, I think I would choose riches. Do you think Bob would come under judgment from Sue?

Not just for a moment, but for a long time? And whose side would you be on? Nobody is going to be on Bob's side. You're all going to be on Sue's side. Listen to this.

Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help. In our watching, we watch for a nation, and a God who could not save. That's why it's vapor. In fact, the nations dogged our steps so that we could not walk in our streets.

Our end drew near. Our days were numbered for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the heavens. They chased us on the mountains. They laid in wait for us in the wildernesses. The breath of our nostrils, the Lord's anointed, was captured in their pits of whom we said, under his shadow, we shall live among the nations.

[ 36 : 41 ] And he was pursuing other gods. See, you begin with this poem of great horror, and it takes us into unexpected places, doesn't it?

That if you don't just read it shallowly and dismiss it, thinking, yeah, yeah, check off a box, more reasons to dislike the triune God, but actually start to realize it's saying something very profound about what it means to be a human being and the nature of reality.

And this comes out at the end with the final literary unit, which is verses 21 and 22. And the first part of verse 21, it's not as obvious in English, but it's irony.

Okay, it's irony. You know, it's as if you say to your best friend who thinks that it's a really smart way of dealing with their problems to drink a 2-4 and go driving or drink a 2-4 and play with a loaded gun.

And you give up on them. Say, yeah, yeah, sure, go ahead. That's going to work real well. Okay, you have to understand that's what's going on here with the first little part of it. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, who dwell, and you who dwell in the land of Uz, but to you also the cup shall pass.

[ 37 : 54 ] Now it's not irony. And by the way, Edom is a, it's a, see, one of the things that God, I believe that God designed the Bible to, it's God's word written, but it's designed to be read in company with others, where there are people who are called by the congregation, recognized as being called by God to study.

So one of the things about Edom is, Edom is in a sense, a symbol all the way through the Old Testament, what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh. It's those who hate those who belong to God, who want to belong to God.

The Edom is like a symbol. It's like one of those 50s westerns where you have the black hats and the white hats. You know, the black hats are the bad guys. We see Edom generally in the Old Testament. It's a, not just describing a people group, it's a symbolic word as well.

It's a black hat. It's, it's in a sense, like if we say Wall Street, and Wall Street isn't just mean a street. We know that it means capitalism, it means big business, it means finance, it means all these other things, and that's the same thing here captured by Edom.

Okay, the nations. Now, this is the end. This is, this is where we actually see something like hope emerging at the end of these reflections. It's not the full hope that it, anyway, let's read it again.

[ 39 : 11 ] Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz. Now the irony ends. But to you also the cup shall pass. You shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.

The cup is an image of God's judgment. You know, I've shared this before in other contexts. Those of you who really love fantasy movies, this is, you have the type of image.

And you, you know, if you watch fantasy movies, you might see somebody trying to capture all of the power of demons or all of the power of evil in it. And, and the, the magician or whatever, the evil magician has this power that all of the evil, all the demons, it becomes usually something black and terrible and they're able to put it in, into some cup that can be drunk.

And that, that's the image which is coming here. By the way, it's, it's an image and this is going to be really important in a moment because it's the image if you go to the Gospels and read that one of the images that Jesus uses just before his death is whether he will drink the cup.

It's a case where Jesus' prayer, God says no to Jesus' prayer.

[ 40 : 33 ] Jesus says, Father, if it is possible, take this cup far from me. And we know that that does not happen. God does not say yes to Jesus' prayer.

God says no to Jesus' prayer. And how you understand the crucifixion is that in Jesus' death upon the cross, he is drinking this cup of the evil of the world.

He is consuming it and being consumed by it, the innocent one. None of the substance of that cup comes from him.

It all comes from you and me. And it is that cup that he drinks because for you and me to drink that cup, the punishment that befalls Israel depicted in this book would not be it's too light.

Rejoice and be glad. Verse 21, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz, but you also the cup shall pass. You shall become drunk and strip yourself bare. In other words, completely ashamed, unmade.

[ 42 : 02 ] The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished. He will keep you in exile no longer, but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish, he will uncover your sins.

It's the dawn of hope to understand they're making this historical claim that part of the punishment that God is visiting upon them, remember I said just punishment has an end with the hope of amendment, that that's coming to the end, but it's a recognition that the people who have destroyed Israel, have destroyed the people, have caused that thing, they did that of their own free will.

It was both something that God, in a sense, did, but they did it of their own free will. We might talk about this a little bit in the next talk, but it's of their own free will, and that punishment will fall upon them.

But there's two or three final things here, I know my time, and I need to draw it to a close. The first thing here is this line, in verse 22, the punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished.

What does Jesus say on the cross? It's either the last or the second last very words that he speaks. It is, it is finished. In Greek, it is, also can be translated as, it is accomplished.

[ 43 : 21 ] You see, this story is preparing you for this great, true and greater judgment, and true and greater punishment, and true and greater salvation for punishment that is going to come.

You see, the book sets before you riddles. It's depicted how on earth is it, how deeply evil that human beings can be. It's pointed an image to how deeply evil we can be, yet at the same time it points to this fact that there's something deeply precious about us, and it points to the fact that justice means that harm has to be done.

But how can, how can this happen? How can God do justice at the same time rescuing people who are precious and yet properly dealing with evil? And how can he do that when there are still people doing this to their children and are still doing things which are evil?

Because you see, the fact of the matter is, it could have been, this isn't, Christians aren't ones, at least not a well-instructed Christian, never say that we sort of have arrived, that we're the elite, that we don't do those things, that we're better than others.

No! Mel Gibson, I'm sure, is a very, very, very bad man, but he did one thing which was very, very deeply Christian, is that when he filmed that movie, The Passion of the Christ, there's only one time he appears in the movie and it's not known unless you read some of the other notes about it.

[ 44 : 38 ] And the one place he appears is that when you see in that movie, The Passion of the Christ, Jesus being nailed to the cross, those are Mel Gibson's hands nailing Jesus to the cross and every Christian should say, it could have been my hands that nailed Jesus to the cross.

But God does not weigh my merits, he pardons my offenses. And this is pointing to a true and greater thing and a true and just as this judgment happens in history, this mighty thing that God does happens in history, it happens in real life, that's why what Jesus does on the cross, he who is blameless and perfect, he who contributes nothing to the cup of God's wrath, he drinks this cup of God's wrath and while he's, just as before he dies, he says it is accomplished, the judgment that you deserve falls on him, the judgment that I deserve falls on him and the relationship with God that I don't, that he deserved but I don't is offered to me because he dies in my place as my substitute, as my sacrifice.

You see, it's pointing to a true and greater sacrifice, a true and greater grace, a true and greater justice, a true and greater mercy, that as you begin to understand it, you recognize that it's true as true as the deepest beauty, true as the truth of the best music, true as the best math, true as the best history, true as the best thing that happened in the real world, true as happens in the best emotional truth, that it's true in the deepest way that satisfies our longings and our yearnings and it points to that great end.

There's one other thing just really in closing for those of us who are in Christ that I hope you get from watching all of this, from reading this book. Some of you, lovers of Jesus, are in the midst of ruins and one of the things which is so powerful about this book is you have this high point of the

steadfast love of the Lord never faileth, his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning.

Like, it comes in the middle but afterwards you're sort of expecting that there won't be any pain or anything like that but we all know that pain just doesn't go away quickly and this whole thing of lamentations is there's this in the heart-filled pain has this seed of hope that somehow God will accomplish this dealing with iniquity and they could only hope that it would happen.

[ 47 : 08 ] We now know that it happened but we get this profound invitation that when you understand that Jesus has died for you, that he has dealt with all that separates from you, from God, that when you put your faith in him you become his child by adoption of grace you have the freedom and permission when in the midst of your ruins in the midst of your pain to express your pain to him, to point out the ruins of your life, to pour out your heart to him.

You don't have to wait until you've accomplished some type of dealing with your emotions or some type of spiritual breakthrough or some type of great peace. You can pour out your heart, pour out your incoherence.

He's not waiting for you to be coherent, he's just waiting for you to talk to him. That his grace will start to shape your pain.

You see, one of the things about the text, if the acrostic in chapter 1 and chapter 2, acrostic on steroids in chapter 3, in chapter 4 the acrostics are one-third less and by the end, which is a final prayer, the acrostic structure is broken down.

Pain doesn't just go away right away. You can pour out your heart to Jesus. Friends, if we're going to close in prayer, I just want to put out an invitation.

[ 48 : 28 ] If you're curious to know more about the way of Jesus, give us a call. We'd love to connect you with them by email. We'd love to connect you with somebody who'd like to talk about it. There's Bible study groups where you can ask your honest questions.

We're going to be actually organizing something very soon called Christianity Explored, hopefully within the next couple of weeks where once again you can bring your honest questions and meet with others. And if this has touched your heart, there's no better time now than to call out to Jesus and say, Jesus, I need someone who understands the mystery and the paradox of what it means to be human and that in the truth of history and the truth of poetry and the truth of beauty has actually solved the longings and the answers and the puzzles and the inescapable things about my life and heart to make me right with you.

No better time now than just to call out to him and ask him to be your Savior and your Lord. Tell somebody you've done it as well. Let's just close this time with prayer. Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would bring this word of yours deep into our heart, these truths deep into our heart, that you would both humble us but create within us a deep longing and yearning to know more of Jesus, to know more of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, forever and ever.

And all God's people said, Amen.