

A Righteous Anger

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[0 : 0 0] Enough is enough. I have been patient with you. You have had more than enough chances to turn around to change your behaviour. I'm sure we've all heard or even said something like that in the past. You know, when we've not listened to our parents and they've needed to discipline us, or we've been the school student up the back of the class and the teachers, you know, trying to get our attention and trying to call us back to pay attention, but we don't listen. And so they finally send us to the principal. I know of some people who are trying to get their house built.

It's nearly ready. They're hoping to move in very soon, but there's one person working on the house who is just slowing everything down and trying to be understanding of the season. They've been generous. They've been patient. But just recently they've said, enough is enough. We need this house built. We need to move in. I think we can understand this mood when it is us trying to be patient for a long time. We can also understand it when somebody else is being fed up with us, when we are the child or the naughty child, the school child. This statement, enough is enough, it's only really relevant inside a relationship. It's only relevant for a parent to say to a child when they know each other, which hopefully parents do know their children. It's relevant for a teacher to say to kids because in the classroom the teacher wants the kids to pay attention so that he can teach them, so that she can see these children learn this information. She's not sending them off to the principal just because they're annoying necessarily, but because the teacher wants them to come back in relationship in the classroom to learn. These people trying to get their house built, they need their house built. They need this builder to build the house. Enough is enough comes in relationship.

But how do we respond when God is saying those words? Enough is enough. When God has had patience for generations, when he has called for repentance but no one has listened. What about when God finally says that this sin, this rebellion, enough is enough and God brings swift justice.

How do we respond to seeing God act from anger and wrath? The book of Lamentations is poetry expressing the pain and grief at the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the capital of God's people in Judah. Chapter 2, as Josh has just read to us, shows us a picture of what happens when God finally says enough is enough. And he pours out his righteous anger on those who have rebelled. It is a hard chapter of the Bible to read. Today we'll see what happens when God is grieved by sin into action.

Despite the pain and horror of this chapter, it only comes because of the relationship that God has with us. And so we'll see that anger is deserved. That the anger and the wrath that he brings also grieves him.

[3 : 4 0] But that this anger is absorbed by Jesus. Let me encourage you to take out the St. Paul's app, be making notes. In the St. Paul's app, there are three points. I've cut the third one mostly, so we're mainly just going to be using those first two. Please have your Bibles open in Lamentations 2.

As we see God pour out his wrath, it will remind us just how amazing it is that God has poured out his wrath on his Son, Jesus, so that we can be in relationship with him. As we look at this chapter of the Bible, let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you for who you are. As we've already reflected on today, Lord, you are good and you are steadfast and you are holy. But Lord, you are also a God who gets angry. Lord, we thank you that we can meditate on this part of who you are today. Help us to understand who you are and how you have showed your love to us in Jesus, Lord. Amen.

So please have your Bibles open. Lamentations 2, as first we see the anger of God. In the first 10 verses, there are two repeated themes about what this God does. God, as Josh has mentioned before, is slow to anger, but it has built up over generations. And so God brings out his anger and he tears down. God is the one who has built up Jerusalem. He is the one who made them great. He has built up the temple. He has made them beautiful, but now enough is enough. All of these things that he is brought up, he is going to bring down because of their sin and their rebellion. The northern kingdom were judged. They were taken into captivity by Assyria. Prophet after prophet, God would send warnings. Don't be like them. Repent. Stop chasing other things, other gods, thinking that they will satisfy, that they will keep you safe, that they will protect you. God sent warnings for generations.

But God's beloved people, Judah, with Jerusalem at the capital, did not listen. And so God has had enough. His wrath and anger is deserved. Have a look with me on the screen as we see that God brings these things down. So verse 1, he has hurled down the splendor of Israel. Next one, he has, in his wrath, he's torn down the strongholds of daughter Judah. He has brought the kingdom, the next one, the kingdom and the princes down to the ground in dishonor. Next one, the Lord determined to tear down the wall around daughter Zion. It's just this picture of God bringing everything down.

It's almost as if the people were thinking that we have these walls, we've got these protections, we're going to be fine. But God reveals that it's not the walls that were protecting them.

[6 : 56] It was God all along. And God does so without pity. He's full of anger. We can't just think that it's Babylon, the enemy that actually came in and destroyed Jerusalem, that they were acting alone.

God is the strong fist in the glove to bring destruction here. And we get verbs full of destruction. And so it starts in verse 1, the Lord has covered over with a cloud of his anger.

Next one, he has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob. In his wrath, he is torn down. Next one, in his fierce anger, he has cut off. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire.

Like, verse 4, like an enemy, he has strung his bow. His right hand is ready. Like a foe, he has slain. As we read these first 10 verses, it is this destructive picture. And it's all summed up in verse 5.

The Lord is like an enemy. The Lord is like an enemy. God, who used his strong right arm to build up and to protect his people, his right arm now pulls back the string on the bow to fire it at his people.

[8 : 18] The God who brought a pillar of fire to lead his people into the promised land, now turns that pillar of fire to burn his people. The temple is gone. The people can't go and offer sacrifices. They can't go and seek forgiveness in the usual way. This is a series of poetic statements about what it means to face God's direct, purposeful, and unflinching judgment. It's terrible. It should shock us.

God is the one who has brought Babylon in like a sledgehammer here because he has become their enemy. It might feel strange to see God acting in this way. Isn't he the God of love and compassion?

Why hasn't he forgiven them? Why does he need to bring destruction? How do we respond to an angry God? Do you find it uncomfortable to see God have very human emotions like anger? Maybe it's just easier if we forget this part of the Bible. Lamentations 2, it's particularly hard. God is angry. We see some horrible things happen. Maybe it's just easier if we just don't think about this part of the Bible.

But one of the issues is we can put our human emotions on God and not understand what it means for God to have godly emotions. So I wonder if we can see emotions as good or bad. We think there's good emotions, happiness, joy, mercy. And then there's those bad emotions, anger, wrath. They're bad. So we can have good emotions or bad emotions. And so when we see God having anger, we feel uncomfortable.

But I can be happy about the wrong things. And I can sin. And I can be angry about the right things. Let me share part of my sinful heart to you. I encourage my kids to put Lego away. Our kids have been playing with a lot of Lego in lockdown. It's been great. But like Lego is, it's small. It escapes.

[10 : 32] And it goes everywhere. And so I encourage them to pick it up. And sometimes when they forget, recently, one of the kids stepped on it, and they're in a lot of pain. And my sinful heart was happy.

I need to confess this, because I was happy that they'd stepped on it, because I'd said, oh, you should have picked it up. Now that happiness is not good. My heart is sinful. And so just because we think happiness is good, happiness is not a good emotion.

Emotions are neutral. And anger, in the same way, we should actually get angry. Anger can be good. When there are murders, when there is theft, we should be angry that that little girl in WA is lost.

We should be angry. There's a whole series of movies that I love, the John Wick movies and the Taken series of movies. We see these people who have license to be angry and to cause destruction, because they have been wronged. And so they're able to have righteous anger. Because I think we all have a desire for righteous anger within us. We want to see those who have sinned against us judged. We want to see those who are doing horrible things brought to judgment. So emotions in and of themselves are neither good or bad. It really is the heart behind them. And so, coming back to God, it is good for God to get angry. The sins of his people should make our God angry. When God is angry and he brings about destruction, it is also controlled. God is not having a temper tantrum like a child. He's not like you or me where we can go from anger to rage. God's anger is carefully controlled. Verse 8 says that God stretched out a measuring line to destroy. It's an echo of earlier parts in the Bible where God stretched out the line for the temple. This is how you will build it. This is how we will be as a people. But now God is doing the very opposite. He is stretching out a line to destroy. It is very careful destruction. It is very deliberate destruction. And he's done it because God takes sin personally. He's in close relationship with his people. Their sin grieves him. He's had mercy and compassion for generations. But the people have continued to sin and follow other gods and go to other nations and think other nations will save them. God has said enough is enough.

So when we say that we don't like the wrathful Old Testament God, you know, I just want a God who has no anger. He's just a God of love. We're actually trying to separate two parts of God.

[13 : 37] If he was a God who had no anger, well, there'd be no wrath. There'd be no consequence for sin. There'd be no hell. It would make no sense that Jesus died on the cross. If God doesn't get angry, well, there's no need for forgiveness. There's no need for his love.

You would just end up with an apathetic, uncaring God who was distant. But he's not. He's personal. He's close. The sin of his people grieves him. If he isn't a God capable of both anger and love towards us of wrath and compassion, well, there really is no need for Jesus to die.

Jesus's death is a costly death. He takes God's anger and wrath. He turns it aside from you and from me to himself. If we get rid of God's anger, we actually get rid of a full picture of God's love for us.

God's wrath and anger for our sin shows how much he loves us in sending Jesus. It is good news for us today that our God cares for it because of our sin, but he also cares enough to deal with it. God was grieved into action by our sin. He has brought destruction.

He is a God capable of anger and wrath, but that is not the only picture of God in Lamentations 2. We also see our second point today that God is grieved because of his great love for his people, their destruction grieves him. Jeremiah sees the destruction and has a physical response in verse 11. Have a look with me. My eyes fail from weeping. I am in torment within. My heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city. There is overwhelming grief at what has happened in Jerusalem. The language here changes from third person to first person. And the question here is, is it the voice of Jeremiah grieving what has happened? Or is Jeremiah speaking on behalf of God? He's a prophet. He speaks on behalf of God. And so here, is this what he's doing? And I think that is what is happening. I believe that

[16 : 14] Jeremiah here is grieving on behalf of God. It's an unforgettable part of Lamentations. God's anger is saturated with God's tears, soaked in human and divine tears. God weeps because his people are destroyed. Even the littlest of them are faint in the streets. Children can't even feed in their mother's arms. God doesn't regret his actions. It was right of him to pour out his wrath and to bring judgment.

But it still grieves him. Grieves him in his inmost being. God is not oblivious to the pain he has brought. It is as if he is sitting in the street with those who are weakest, crying with them.

He mourned until he was worn out with mourning. Against the tragedy of children lying in the streets, death and destruction all around, there is nothing to do except cry at this point.

God has been forced to say enough is enough. But that's not his usual way of operating. He has been compassionate and merciful. He only now comes and says enough is enough and brings judgment.

But it's over swiftly. Psalm chapter 30 says that God's anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime. Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. God brings swift judgment, but he still weeps and grieves because he loves his people. Jesus is described as the suffering servant.

[18 : 13] He knew pain and grief. And on his way to Jerusalem, this same city, he weeps over it. And so in Luke, turn with me to Luke chapter 19 verse 42, Jesus on his way to this city says, If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. Verse 44, they will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls.

They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. And in Matthew 23, when Jesus is coming to Jerusalem, he weeps, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those God sent to you. How often I longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and yet you were not willing.

Jesus grieves because Jerusalem would not listen. Unfortunately, God said enough is enough. He destroyed Jerusalem. Eventually, they come back in from exile, but they still do not learn. They continue to sin.

Jesus comes to this city and says, I just want you to be with me. I want to gather you like the little children you are, but you continue to rebel. And so Jesus deals with this himself by heading to the cross to take God's wrath for us. God's anger towards Jerusalem was warranted. It's controlled, but it still grieves him. Ephesians 4 says that our sin grieves the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came and saw this same city in this same peril. They hadn't learned the lesson. And so Jesus is the one who needs to die in their place. How amazing is it that we have a God who is so generous and patient and good, who would end pain and injustice, that he will bring his anger and his wrath on Jesus, but that is not his usual way of operating. Steve said last week that lamenting, it's not just an emotional outburst. It's not just when we wake or just when we cry or when we're upset. Lamenting connects our heart to God's heart. And so in that last part of Lamentations 2 that we're not going to spend a lot of time looking at this morning, God, through Jeremiah, calls the people to cry out, turn to God with your hearts, to look at the sin that has caused the downfall of the city and grieve. Connect their heart to the heart of God. Our sin has grieved God into action so that his people would know him. And we can respond in two different ways that are unhelpful at this point.

- [21 : 25] We can see this incident of God bringing out his wrath and think that that's how God works with us. So we can swing one way too far and think that God is going to be angry at me when I sin and he will punish me just like Jerusalem. Or we can swing the other way thinking that, oh, Jesus has died on the cross for me. He's taken God's anger and wrath. It doesn't matter what I do because I'm forgiven.

I can just say sorry and move on. Both of these are unhelpful ways to swing. Thinking that God is going to punish me each and every time, oh, bad things happen to me today.

That's God bringing his wrath on me. The good news of the gospel is a third way. The good news of the gospel is that God has poured out all his wrath and anger on Jesus at the cross.

Jesus has absorbed all of God's wrath. But seeing God pour out his wrath helps us to understand that God is still grieved by our sin.

And so instead of just flippantly thinking that our sin is okay, it calls us back to have our hearts connected to God, to lament over our sin, to grieve that we would grieve God with our sin and calls us to follow him.

- [22 : 53] Seeing God pour out his wrath in Lamentations 2 helps us to understand how amazing the cross is. On the cross, not just a cloud covers the sky, but the whole sky is darkened.

God brings his fierce anger on Jesus. He strung his bow and pointed it not at us, but at Jesus.

God doesn't slay the ones who are sinful and awful, but the one pleasing to his eye, his own son. God in Jerusalem destroyed the temple.

Here, Jesus is the temple. He is God dwelling with us and he is destroyed. Verse 17, God has done what he planned to do.

He has fulfilled his word. He brought his servant Jesus to die on the cross. He poured out his wrath on Jesus. The full destructive power of God to destroy a nation, a country, to bring out his wrath against generations of sinful people is exhausted at the cross.

- [24 : 05] All of God's anger and frustration and wrath against us is absorbed at the cross. It is soaked up in the blood of Jesus.

So that there is no more anger left for you and for me. To lose this aspect of God, to lose his anger at our sin and rebellion is to lose the beauty and need for Jesus to die in our place at the cross.

The good news of the gospel is that we don't need to be worried or fearful of our God. We can draw close to him because he has made the way possible.

He is a father who will never raise his hand against us. Because of that, we should still care about our sin. God's anger and wrath are exhausted at the cross, but it does still grieve him.

He has no more anger for us, but he is still grieved. When we today continue to choose to chase other things that we think will make us happy, it grieves God.

[25 : 22] Just like when Judah chased other countries to bring them comfort and support, it grieved God and brought his wrath. It still grieves God today, even though his anger was poured out on Jesus.

I wonder if you've ever shared some advice with someone. They haven't taken it and it's grieved you. I've heard of doctors who have met with people and said, look, I've got your blood work back.

It suggests that you're pre-diabetic. You know, you need to change your diet. You need to change what you're doing with your body. You need to be exercising more or you are going to go down a bad path.

You're going to end up with diabetes, needing insulin. Don't go down this path. And then on the way home, you know, the doctor is grabbing a coffee at Macca's and sees this patient with a large meal in front of them.

And just thinks, you didn't take my advice. I said, if you go down this path, it's going to end up badly and grieves. I wonder if we have had that feeling.

[26 : 38] Now, we don't know the best direction for anyone to go down. We only give advice from our own wisdom. But God, in his goodness, knows what is best for all of us.

But we continue to choose things that we think will satisfy. We continue to choose sexual temptation outside of what God has said is best for us.

We continue to chase other things that will satisfy, thinking that houses will actually bring us joy. We continue to store up money for ourself instead of storing up treasures in heaven.

And God sees the way we're going and grieves. If only you followed me. Our sin still grieves God.

But all of his anger is exhausted at the cross. When we see our sin and grieve over it, it connects our heart to God's heart.

[27 : 39] And it can wake us up from apathy at our sin to live lives following him wholeheartedly. So, brothers and sisters, let me encourage you.

Go and have a look at the end of Ephesians 4. There's a list of sin there that grieves God. Lament over your sin. Not that God is going to be angry with you.

He is not. If you are trusting that Jesus died for you on that cross, all of God's anger that you and I deserve is poured out on that cross. But we should lament over our sin.

We should lament that it needed God to pour out his wrath on Jesus. But praise be to God that he would love us so much that he would indeed pour out his anger on Jesus.

Out of his love for us. Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for your goodness and your love for us.

[28 : 43] That, Lord, we have made you angry. That our sin has caused you to grieve. But, Lord, you have poured out all of your anger on Jesus at the cross.

We thank and praise you that that is absorbed, that it is taken. Lord and Heavenly Father, we ask that we would see our sin, that we would praise you.

As we're about to sing, help us to praise you that you don't bring your anger and your wrath towards us. But, Lord, connect our heart to yours.

Help us to grieve over our sin. Help change us to trust in you more each day. We ask this in your Son's name and for your glory.

Amen.