

The Joy of Our Heart Has Ceased

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[0 : 00] Lamentations, we've been in it for seven sermons, did not go as planned, which is appropriate. That lamenting did not go according to the plan that we had. But here we are at the last chapter.

I would like to read the entire book of Lamentations to you, but I won't, even though I would like to. About 15 or 20 minutes, I would recommend. Some of you took Brother John up on a challenge recently to read a book of the Bible all the way through, and you just see the wonder of it.

The Lamentations, you should read through it, and it's not so much necessarily about reading it all and connecting each chapter, but it's about experiencing what they experienced as the destruction of their city.

Just a little quick review, some of the things that we've seen over the last four chapters. We saw that pain is inevitable. We should do what we can to be prepared for it, which means preparing ourselves to think biblically about sorrow and pain.

To cry is human, but to lament is Christian. Everybody will go through it, but we can respond in a way that is informed by the gospel. We can respond in a way that is informed by who we know God is.

[1 : 12] And lament is not linear, meaning that it doesn't just happen as we plan. You can't put a time on it, but it can be continual in our heart. Grace is only amazing because judgment is real.

That's an important part of Lamentations. We're looking at a people that are dealing with the consequences of their decisions, which is what's happening there in Jerusalem. We do know the prophet Jeremiah and others are crying out to God.

They had wanted to turn to God, but as a nation they hadn't, and now they're dealing with the consequences. Hope springs forth from truth rehearsed. It's one of my favorite ones from then to chapter number three, which is when we focus on what is the truth of God's word, then hope can spring forth.

It's not just what you feel, but it's what you know. I think Stephen told me this morning, reminded me of something one of our professors at college, Bob Dalton, would say about not feeling. Maybe you don't feel like you're saved.

And he says, until my second cup of coffee in the morning, I don't feel much like anything. All right? And saying that sometimes your feelings aren't going to be connected to what's the truth, right? It isn't about feeling.

[2 : 18] It's about knowing something, knowing what is true about God. And so hope springs forth from truth that is rehearsed. In times of feeling, of discouragement and depression, we anchor ourselves upon truth that is eternal.

To lament is not to be faithless. It is actually, it's a sign of being faithful that you're turning to him and crying, not running away to say, God, I want to speak to you. I don't have the words to say.

I'm going to borrow the words from the Psalms or I'm going to speak to you in a way that I never have. But turning to God is what faithful people do, acknowledging that they need to turn to him. Waiting is not a waste as we wait upon the Lord patiently, actively waiting upon the Lord.

And then brokenness leads to mercy was the last thing that we looked at in chapter number four. As we've been going through lamentations, part of that time, there was a group that was meeting in grief share.

They were looking at these same principles from God's word, and he was helping, and it's available. I look forward to us with that starting again in the future. But before I look at the prayers of lamentation five, what I really want to do, if I can, and it's not in my notes, because I was sitting there and I was thinking there's a challenge on any Sunday.

[3 : 34] There's such a wide variety of people inside of this room, so many different stages of life and so many things going on. About the destruction of the city a long time ago just does not seem to be anything that's relevant to where you live.

And so when you think about the destruction of the city, you just picture, well, this book of lamentations is what I'm going to take off the shelf when the worst thing in my life happens. You can think about different things in people's lives, and you think, I could see how lamentations is comforting to them in that scenario, but you don't see maybe how you need it in your Christian life.

Even though I've never seen the destruction of Jerusalem, and I read through it before church again, I read all the way through it, and as I did, I'm just reminded again of how much of the book is just drawing a vivid picture of a city that was destroyed.

So place yourself in the middle of a city that you know very well, and then you're just looking out, and you see all the things that show power and beauty, and as you look at it, categorically, God just turns them from color into black and white, and you see them destroyed.

So that when the time you get done, there's just nothing that is left. There's nothing to glory in. There's no beauty left in it. And then you get to the middle of it where he just cries out to God, and he says, there's just nothing left here to replace my confidence.

[4 : 53] Everything has been removed. And if you go through the book, there's just nothing left in the city as you read it, and you see it. And so I know what that's like. I've never seen the destruction of Jerusalem, but I have felt the desolation that comes in my own heart and life when I'm dealing with the consequences and the guilt and the shame of my sin.

Where's a deacon in here? Am I allowed to admit that I'm a sinner to the congregation? We haven't ever covered that. I'm going to, okay, all right? I want you to admit, y'all look for a second like you weren't sure if I was able to do that.

I think you know that, right? I don't think that's a surprise that sometimes the Lord tells me to go right, and I go left. He says, stop, and I go. He says, use your mouth for an instrument of grace.

I use it for a mouth of destruction, that I don't make decisions that always honor God, and I feel the destruction in my heart and soul when all the lights go out.

Limitations 5.16. Let's see what that says. Limitations 5.16. I believe that it, if you don't have it there, then I got the wrong verse. Limitations 5.15.

[6 : 07] It says, the joy of our heart is ceased. Our dance is turned into mourning. The joy of our heart is ceased, and our dance is turned into mourning.

And you've experienced that, right? Have you experienced that in here? Can you join me here for a second? Have you experienced what it's like when the joy of your heart has ceased, and the dance has turned to mourning?

I read through limitations, and it seems like the landscape of my heart. It seems like the landscape of my soul when I have sinned against God, and I'm dealing with the guilt and the shame that has come.

It seems like a small thing. Some of those object lessons that you Sunday school might use, or a children's director might use, and you don't think that anybody will remember, they really stick with you, right?

I remember somebody taking a bunch of bananas and setting them in front of us, and they said, is this alive or dead? And I'm like, well, they look alive. They're yellow. And he said, no. They've been cut off the vine.

[7 : 11] That they're dead. It's just going to take some time for you to turn them in. What is the bread we make when the bananas go to bed? No, it's the bread we plan to make before we throw them away, right?

The bananas are dead. They're cut off. You just haven't seen them. This is a good place for Jerusalem to be, because when they're going to sin against God, they need to recognize that there is no life outside of Him.

And so those moments are good. That conviction and that living where you have sinned, and you went away from Him, and you realize, I don't want this. I don't want a life. The joy of my heart has ceased.

Our dance has turned in the morning. It doesn't feel like it, but that's the grace of God that Dylan was talking about. When you turn away from Him, and you go in your own direction, and you sin, all that comes about.

And so God, in His goodness towards Jerusalem, does not allow them to continue on that. And so just like that fruit that had been cut off, the time in which you are involved in sin, but you haven't yet felt the consequences, are the most dangerous places to be in your life, where you say, well, I've already, I've done wrong, and I've sinned, or I have this attitude, an accident I'm not repenting of, but I'm just going to continue as things are.

[8 : 23] But you're dying. You're not on the vine, and you're dying. Jerusalem has got to a place here where they recognize life is just not what it should be. The joy of their heart has ceased. Their dance had turned in the morning.

So sorrow shouldn't remove our joy, but it so often does. It brings a time of testing that we're often unprepared for. I wish I had given this poem in the back, but I'll just read it real slowly.

It says this, It needs our hearts to be weaned from earth. It needs that we be driven by loss of every earthly stay to seek our joys in heaven.

Yes, we must follow in the path our Lord and Savior run. We must not find a resting place where he love had none. And so on this earth, we should find no resting place because our Savior found none.

We should recognize that life is only worth living because he lives in and through us. And so we don't want a life apart from him.

[9 : 26] We don't want a Jerusalem that's running. We don't want a Jerusalem that everything's put together where we are living in defiance to him. So this book, Limitations, as we started it, I read to you a portion from 2 Chronicles.

Chronologically, 2 Chronicles ends the Old Testament for us. And so the ending of 2 Chronicles is just filled with hope. Let me read it for you.

Now the first, this is in 2 Chronicles 36, verses 22 through 33. 2 Chronicles 36, 22 through 33. Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he had made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me, and has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is Judah, who is there among you, all his people.

Though this is the part that brings us hope, that's hope-filled. The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up. This is what is said in the middle of Limitations, that it's just so hope-filling that the Lord God be with us.

It's not the loss of the city. It's not the loss of status or identity or the fact that the other nations look upon him. It's the presence of the Lord that is missing from the people. And now it says the Lord will go up with them.

[10 : 56] So follow along, if you will, as I read chapter number 5. I'm going to point out three different prayers for you, and if you'll look for them as I read, they're going to be found in verse 1, verse 19, and verse 21.

That's verses 1, 19, and 21, and we're going to see that God's help and deliverance during these uncertain times for them. Limitations 5. Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us.

Consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance has turned to strangers. Our houses, the aliens. We are orphans and fatherless. Our mothers are as widows.

We have drunken our water. For money, our wood is sold unto us. It means they couldn't even drink from the stream without being charged some kind of tax. I think this is a good verse for saying you shouldn't pay for bottled water.

Anybody with me on this? Okay. And so they drunk water that they had to pay for, and the wood was sold to us. Our necks are under persecution. We labor and have no rest.

[11 : 57] We have given the hand to the Egyptians and to the Assyrians to be satisfied with bread. They turned to the Egyptians looking for help, and they weren't. Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have borne their iniquities, casting blame on a previous generation.

Servants have ruled over us, so even the lowest of society are now over them. There is none that doth deliver us out of their hand. We got our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.

They were risking their lives just to survive. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. The sun beating down upon them, their skin would just give off heat as if it was an oven.

They had been tanned to the point they had been blackened. They ravished the women in Zion and the maids in the cities of Judah. Princes are hanged up by their hands. They're chained. The faces of the elders were not honored.

They took the young men to grind. The children fell under the wood. They turned the young people into servants. The elders have ceased from the gate. The elders used to sit there. They have influence of power and authority and the young men from their music.

[13 : 07] The joy of our heart has ceased and our dance has turned in the morning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe unto us that we have sinned. For this our heart is faint. For these things our eyes are dim.

Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it. The place is just destroyed. Wild animals run throughout the place now. Thou, O Lord, remainest forever.

Thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us forever and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned. Remember our days as of old.

But thou hast utterly rejected us. Thou art very wroth against us. Three prayers we see here. Verse 119 and 21. And I would summarize these prayers like this.

God, don't forget our pain. God, are you still in control? And God, we need you desperately. Verse number one, he says, remember our pain. In chapters one, two, and four, each one of those chapters start off with the words, a calling for God, a question asking how.

[14 : 14] I read that one of the titles for the book of Lamentations in Hebrew would just be simply the word how. This is what gets asked all through Lamentations. It's a word that you would say when you're lamenting.

How did this happen? In verse one, it says, how does the city sit solitary? That was once full of people, now it's empty. And then the Lord had covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud of anger in chapter two.

And then the last time in chapter four, it says, how has the gold become dim? The place that was so bright and so shining, how did it get to this place? And this word remember, it's a powerful one.

Remember, O Lord. You hear it in Genesis when God remembered Noah. We hear it when he remembered his covenant. When the Israelites with the golden calf and Moses pleaded with the Lord to be merciful.

And the remember is covenant with Abraham. David cries unto the Lord in Psalm 25, 6. Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindness, for they have been of ever old.

[15 : 12] The remember is very important when it comes to God's relationship with his people. Remember means more than just do not forget. So they're saying their pain has turned them to God, asking him to remember.

To ask God to remember is both acknowledge the pain of what has happened and to look to God for help. It's a great word in lamenting. It is a prayerful, faith-filled word for hurting people to cry out to God and say, Father, remember our pain and see it.

After remember our pain and consider it, it says, behold our reproach. The word carries here a sense of blame or scorn, casting reproach. In the context here of the destruction of Jerusalem, they were ashamed because of what had happened to them under their divine discipline.

If you'll look down at chapter number 5, I'm going to take you from verse 2 to verse 18. Follow along in your Bible and look at the verses, if you will. And I'm just going to give you a summary of the things that are happening quickly here.

They were invaded. Their homes, their country were overrun. They were abandoned like an orphan child. They're economically depressed. The situation was just terrible. We just read verse 4, they're exhausted.

[16 : 25] The constant reality of destruction of them weary with no rest. Our necks are under persecution. We labor and we have no rest. The nation has unsuccessfully and unwisely relied on other nations.

Verse 6, they were bearing the consequences of the rebellion. Verse 7, the society is just completely upended. 8, verse 9, survival, getting bread, constant threat of danger, hunger, dehydration.

Their women are victimized. The princes and the elders are disrespected. Verse 12, verse 13, the people are subjected to forced labor. Verse 14, we started with. And 15, the music had ceased because they had no reason to rejoice anymore.

And it continues. They were sorrowful in their conditions. They were desolate. They were discouraged. They were depressed people. They were a joyless people that were dealing with the consequences of their sin.

And everywhere the people looked, there was nothing but destruction. Every aspect of their nation had been affected. Everything had been ruined. The nation's only hope was that God had not forgotten about their suffering.

[17 : 33] And they were staking their claim of hope in God's promise to remember. And so this prayer reminds us that something enormously comforting about God, that he knows us and that he sees us, even at these times where we feel like everything is lost.

God is not gone. God sees his people. And so they praise. He says, Lord, remember us and behold our reproach. Then in verse 19, the next prayer. The focus here is upon God's role over all things, which is really important in light of the description of disaster that is found in verses 1 through 18.

The circumstances of life had created their own narrative. They've thanked to themselves and tempted to themselves to draw the conclusion that life is totally out of control or worse, that God is not ultimately in control.

So, Limitations 1, 14 says, The yoke of my transgression is bound by his hand. They are withered and come upon thy neck. He hath made my strength to fall.

The Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I'm not able to rise up. So while the Babylonians may have been the means of judgment and discipline, it was ultimately God who was behind it.

[18 : 51] God used the sinful pagan nation in order to accomplish his loving discipline to his children. But knowing that God reigns does not remove the questions that we have, nor did it do that for them.

They will ask questions. This is much more than we would have in the next nine minutes or nine lifetimes. Contrary to many commentaries and theologians, we do not find God's people resting in a fatalistic view of God in scriptures.

It says in verse number 20, There's two things that are certain in scriptures. God is not the author of sin and that I have no strength outside of him.

I think we saw it recently in the book of Luke. What do we have when in Luke 22, the Lord said in the Simon, Luke 22, 31 and 32, The Lord said to Simon, and he said, Simon signing, Behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. In that story, we see Jesus praying for Peter. We see Peter will return.

[19 : 59] We see Jesus warns Peter of the work that Satan is doing. And so we find here a God that is in control, but we see that man's living out the consequences of his sin.

But he hasn't forgotten him. He hasn't turned on him. He is there, and he remains faithful. He remains faithful, even though they may feel like he has forgotten him forever. But in their prayer, they would say, You haven't changed.

We have. We're dealing with the consequences. You are good and you are loving. Nothing about you has changed, which is hard, right? When we're dealing with things that are not good, with things that aren't pleasant, and we try to find a way that it's anybody's fault but our own.

And so that's when we begin to change the character of God. That's when we just say something about him that is not true. Then lastly here, the prayer in verse 21, Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned.

Renew our days as of old. That's that last prayer, renew our days. The final and closing prayer limitations is an appeal to be renewed. Renewed. And there's a shout out for the ladies' ministry of renew, all right?

[21 : 06] It's the renew. Say, God, look at the mess I've made. Look at what's happened. Here's the consequence of sin, but you can make all things new. You can rebuild this. The word renew means to turn back or to cause the return back to a better position or state.

It is the promise that God would bring his people back from his destruction. Jeremiah writes a letter that can be found in Jeremiah chapter number 29, verses 10 through 14. And this is what he is saying to the people during that time.

For thus saith the Lord that after 70 years to be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word towards you and causing you to return to his place. For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Then shall you call upon me. You shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And you shall seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord, and I will turn away your captivity.

And I will gather you from all the nations, from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord. And I will bring you again into the place which I caused you to be carried away captive.

[22 : 11] Verse 13 said, and he shall seek me and find me. This is a letter of hope. And I'm so thankful. This is some commentary. Your lamentations, you know what Jeremiah is going through.

But you don't know, does the man have hope? But in this letter here, we find that he is. The restoration of the people of God was primarily about a restoration to God.

The relationship he would have with his people. More than the loss of the temple or their identity, their greatest loss was the presence and blessings of God. The devastation and loss was designed to awaken their hearts to the greater problem of their sin and the greater need for spiritual restoration.

So the destruction of the city and the temple was orchestrated by God in order to help the people of God realize how far they had fallen and to produce repentance in them.

And God delivered them over to their enemies in order to rescue them from themselves. They were humbled. Everything had been removed. And it ends with verse 22. So here are some thoughts about the value of suffering.

[23 : 24] Note the value of suffering. Whether it's innocent or deserved, it will change us deeply. I say that when I say innocent or deserved is that we live in a world where there's consequences of our sin because our God is loving to allow us to run in the direction away from him.

So that's the deserved that we would say. But sometimes you suffer from the consequences of other people's sin. And you suffer in this world that we are in. We're not yet escaped from it.

But there's a value to it. And it changes you deeply. Reading a lament or living a lament tunes your heart such that you seek the Lord differently. It causes you to look at the circumstances of your life differently.

So differently, in fact, that you know it is the Lord who is doing that in you. It causes you to see the world through a different lens. That's why in Limitations 3.27, it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

There's lessons that are learned during suffering and sorrow that are good for us. And we can be thankful for it, say Corinthians 6.10, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

[24 : 31] We can be sorrowful yet rejoicing. So Jeremiah was given a difficult assignment. He gave him, but he had a wonderful understanding of hope. Jeremiah 31 through verse number 4.

Chapter 31, verses 31 through 34. Chapter 31, verses 31 through 34.

Jeremiah, and with all the destruction that was around him, he was a person whose hope was anchored in God's goodness towards them.

And as gospel-believing people, the gospel relates to all lamenting and all sorrow that we will ever face. That's through Jesus Christ, the problem that is underneath all problems, which is our sin, is addressed.

Christ's death brought the end of condemnation, judgment, and God's wrath. Christ's death and resurrection made it possible for us to be born again and for Christ's Spirit to dwell in us.

[26 : 02] So while we still live in a broken world, we look forward to the promises of God's word that one day all lamenting will cease. This is how the story ends. It doesn't end at lamentations, but this is how the story of stories end.

Revelation 21 through and 4. Some of us in here long for this, but others in here really long for this.

And for God to remove suffering and to bring all this to place. The cry is human, but the lament is Christian, but it's not forever. Jesus brought our restoration, and one day soon he'll bring it in to our lamenting.

And so we say, even so come Lord Jesus. Some application in here, especially as we get to the book of Lamentations, and then we'll sing together any song that we can today that we've sung already.

But I really want to make sure that the youngest ones in here that can understand me. Who's Iris? Do you understand what I'm saying over here? Okay. All right. Not her. Okay. Hamilton, you with me here, buddy?

[27 : 26] All right. We've got Hamilton. I really want you to know this, is that there come a time in your life, it may be of your own making or some kind of consequences, and you just don't see the presence of God.

Everything seems to be completely dark. All the lights are out, and all you can see is the destruction that has come as a result of sin, that there is hope, that he is there.

And you can cry out to him, and he can see you in your pain, and remember, and there are promises that your story is not going to end there, that every tear that you have will one day stop.

If not here on earth, it will stop one day with him wiping it from you. And so below that, and there's always a way back to him. You can always, in the midst of it, cry out to God, and he will hear you, and that you can have that restored presence with him.

And there's no reason to live like that. And when you deal with that conviction and chastisement and all the consequences of your sin, say, praise God that you would not allow me to live a day like this.

[28 : 32] Lamenting can help us if we will allow it, and we can help people in lamenting during their time if we can help point their attention to the God that will fill us with hope. Heavenly Father, I pray, as there's people in here, Lord, that still shed tears over the things of this world that are broken, things that might have been in their control, and they're dealing with the consequences or things that are just not in their control.

And so they will live their entire lives, Lord, with a heaviness and a sorrow. But Lord, someday you will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Lord, that we can experience your presence.

Father, I think about your Son here upon earth, and as he was in the garden, and the agony that was felt, because he knew that the sin that would come upon him upon the cross would bring a separation, because, Lord, sin separates us from you.

And so, Father, when we feel the coldness of separation, Lord, I pray that in all that we will not believe that you have left us, but we will cry out to you, and that we will know you, and that we will not let what we see be the story, but we will trust your word, and we will feel the hope that is available to us, as seen in Jeremiah through the book of Lamentations.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.