

Simplify with Courage

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[0 : 0 0] Lamentations chapter number one, thank you, Cook sisters, and we are more than our shame, more than our mistakes. I look forward to when the jail ministry starts again. COVID made that difficult. Some of you went and taught in it. And one of my favorite things to tell the men in that ministry was that you're more than defined by the last mistake you made or the biggest mistake you made. And that brokenness that so many people live in. And what a beautiful story that is told there. Lamentations chapter number one, we will be taking our trip back to Jerusalem after fall, after time taken into captivity. If I could take this church on any missions trip, any place throughout history, this is not the place that I would want to take you to, all right? I'm not supposed to talk about taking the whole church on a trip somewhere to South America. That's not what you're supposed to talk about, all right? We all take individual trips. We won't all be going anywhere together.

Some of you follow what I'm talking about. I'm not suggesting we all go to South America together. No Jim Baker happening here, okay? Is that who it was? Jeff Jones. Jim Jones?

Jim Jones. Sorry, Jeff. All right, Jim Jones. All right. And so, no Jim Jones. But if I was to suggest that we all take a trip somewhere, this is not on the bucket list for us. And I love God's Word, but I don't look forward, always look forward to Sunday nights and the time in lamentation. Gabriel Wilder did a good job in his introduction reminding us that we live in a broken world. It doesn't take very long to get everybody on board with the idea that we live in a broken world. We talk about it. You quickly go somewhere in your mind of something you're currently dealing with, something that you have dealt with, or somebody that you know.

But it doesn't take a lot of persuasion to convince you that we live in a world that is broken. Outside of Jesus, there is only brokenness. So, the book of Lamentations that we've been looking at, this heartfelt cry of sorrow, a prayer where a believer pours out his or her heart to God because of the struggles and the tension of their pain of life. This wrestling between what they know about God, but what they are experiencing at the time. And these people are just really crying out to the Lord at that. And Romans 8.22 says, We know the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And I think about that verse when I think about Lamentations because that's what lamenting brings us to. It gets us to realize that this world is not what I thought it was going to be. I'm not going to find my happiness in it. And more than that, I have found some kind of deep hurt or sorrow. I don't know where you go when I think of that heartfelt cry of sorrow. I was stood outside of a room of a young man who, while under the influence, had a car accident and a small child died. And I never heard anybody cry like that. It's where you're, you don't control the crying in it. You could just literally hear, hear his heart tearing is what it sounded like. It was just, it's horrible to be there. And that cry is happening right now around the world. We're invited into it and hearing this in the book of, in Lamentations chapter number one, but they weren't having a bad day. We're going to see it describe for us. And as it's described, when you find yourself there, you should know you're not the first one to ever be there. And then when you meet other people in this place, it should help you as well. So let me start tonight reading the first 11 verses of Lamentations, which is what we're just going to simply walk through and look at how this heartfelt sorrow is being described. Verse one, how did the city sit solitary that was full of people? How was she become as a widow? She that was great among the nations and princess among the providences, provinces, how was she become tributary? How did somebody with so much power and influence and such beauty now become as a slave?

She weepeth sore in the night. Her tears are on her cheeks among all her lovers. She has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They are become her enemies. She's called the daughter of Zion. It's being pictured here as a woman who is now a widow.

[4 : 36] It's speaking of a city. Jerusalem, verse three, Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction and because of great servitude. She dwelleth among the heathen. She findeth no rest. All of her persecutors overtook her between the straits. The way of Zion do mourn because none come to the solemn feast. All her gates are desolate. Her priests sigh. Her virgins are afflicted and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief. Her enemies prosper. The Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of transgressions. Her children are gone into captivity before the enemy. And from the daughter of Zion, all her beauty is departed. Her princes are become like hearts that find no pasture. And they are gone without strength before the pursuer. Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and all her miseries and all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old.

When her people fell into the hand of the enemy, none did help her. Adversaries saw her and did mock at her Sabbath. Jerusalem hath grievously sinned. Therefore she is removed. All that honored her despised her because they have seen her nakedness. Yea, she sigheth and turneth backwards. Her filthiness is in her skirts. She remembereth not her last end. Therefore she came down wonderfully. She had no comforter. O Lord, behold my affliction. For the enemy has magnified himself. The adversary has spread out his hand upon all pleasant things. For she has seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that thou should not enter into the congregation. All her people sigh. They seek bread. They have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul. O Lord, and consider for I am become vile. Heavenly Father, I pray that you would help me tonight, Lord. Lord, you've helped me have some understanding of what's going on in this passage, where there's more for me to understand.

Father, I pray that you would help me communicate what the sense of the word here in Lamentations chapter number 1. Father, I trust tonight that the work of the Holy Spirit will do the work in the hearts of each person in here and make the application in which you would have for them. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

So this sad story starts off like most sad stories happen, with a person just simply saying, how did this happen? How could this ever happen? And that's what verse number 1 says.

How does the city sit solitary that was once full? The place was alive. It was full. There was things that were going on. But now it's as a widow. The city is empty. The city is now paying tribute to other places. Have you ever been to that place before? How did this happen? Sometimes unexpected events, or sometimes it comes in the same way that it came here to Jerusalem, which is this lie that Israel believed, corporations believed, and many Christians, which is we are just too big to fail.

[7 : 39] Our role in this story is just too big to fail. Things are too great for this promise to be true. I love the story of Zedekiah, the puppet king. I love telling it to teenagers. I tell it quite often through the years because he's a king in rebellion. He's the last king there of Judah. And as he's set up to be king, there's prophecy towards him that he needs to turn over and he needs to surrender the Nebuchadnezzar, but he's just enjoying it too much. And the story that I tell with this is where, and since none of us watch the news anymore, or at least I don't watch the news anymore, but I think most of you would imagine the scenario when the news was more common, the watch of a person running from the police, okay? They're in a high-speed chase, and they're in their car, they're in their Trans Am, they're playing Born to be Wild, and they're looking in the rearview mirror, and they see the police behind them, and they're like, I got this. He's never going to catch me. And they're going, all right? But while he thinks he's going to get away from the cops, we're watching at home in our pajamas, eating Captain Crunch, right? We're watching the story go on, and we're like, you're not going anywhere, buddy. Not only do the police know where you're at, I know where you're at, and I'm in

Kentucky, right? Like, you're not going to get away. But the guy's going, and he's thinking, it's going to be different for me than it was for everybody else. I'm going to be the first one to break all the rules and never pay any consequences for it, and he really thinks it's going to happen. And then the best thing happens. He'll hit, they'll throw the spikes out, he'll run into something, and he'll get out of his car, and then somebody, an academy police officer that used to play football against his opportunity to tackle that guy, right? And we just see him, he'll get tackled, and you're like, what did you think was going to happen? It always turns out the same way. One video was a guy who jumped in a dumpster, and he's peeking like nobody's going to see me. And we're like, we all see you, you know?

Give it up. We're just too good. We're just too smart. We're just too clever. For thousands of years, since the beginning of man, there's been a consequence for sin, but it's going to be different for me.

That's the story. That is the soundtrack of a rebel, and that is the soundtrack that would be playing in Jerusalem at the time when Zedekiah is king. In the book of Jeremiah, God sends messages to him.

Jeremiah 34, 16 says, But you turned and polluted my name. This is God speaking. Then, because every man is servant, and every man is handmaid, whom you had set at liberty, at their pleasure, to return, and brought them to subjection, to be unto you for servants, and for handmaids, they had not followed the rules that God had given to them. And the way that they were treating people, the way that they were treating the land, they were not living according to God's law, and they were not honoring his name. And he had been long-suffering, and he had been patient with them. And now they're going to face the consequences of their ongoing disobedience.

[10:39] Jeremiah 34, 22. So, despite the fact that God had been long-suffering to them, the Lord had been merciful and gracious, and long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, which he describes himself in Exodus, and despite the fact that Jeremiah the prophet had told them to remember and to visit, and that this is going to happen, and that he had been warning them, Jeremiah had been praying that justice would come and this happened, despite all those things, it now comes, and Judah's shameful ruin at the hands of this idolatrous Babylonians is now going to happen. Because of their affliction, they renounce servitude to these heathen people, and they will find no rest. Senator Morris Shepard said, A nation that cannot preserve itself ought to die, and it will die. Die in the grasp of the evils.

It is too feeble to overthrow. And that's what they were experiencing. They had excuses, political reasons, that they were made a series of bad negotiations and allegiances. But the real reasons were their leaders did not believe the Word of God. And Judah looked around for their allies, and instead of looking up for assistance, they trusted in their own selves. So, Jeremiah had a real simple message to them. You knew what was right, and you said you would do it, but you didn't, and you didn't do what was right, and now you're going to pay the consequences of this, and you need to repent of your sin of insincerity. That's what he told them. This isn't my preferred passage, because we need to be reminded in the book of Limitations that sin brings painful consequences into the lives of people. That sin brings painful consequences into the lives of people. That God is too loving for you to continue running in the opposite direction from Him. And so, we're going to fill it. I could ask every one of you to share the story of why this world has broken, but God draws such an incredible picture for us that may resonate with you. Verse 2, it says,

She weepeth sore in the night, and tears are on her cheeks. It says it's being described, we're seeing a Jerusalem that's isolated, it's sorrowful, and it feels abandoned. This broken world makes us feel isolated, sorrowful, and abandoned. There's an emptiness about the city. Verse 4, The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feast, and all her gates are desolate, her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted. She is in bitterness. And so, we have here the priest, and the young people are sighing, a cross-section of everybody. Nobody is happy. Everybody feels hopeless. The roads and the gates are empty. The ways of Zion do mourn, and the gates are empty.

What was once filled with laughter is now empty, and they're experiencing this deep bitterness. Verse 5, it says, The adversaries are the chief. Her enemies prosper. The Lord has afflicted.

So, not only did it happen, but now the enemies are in control. The Lord is afflicting her. The children are in captivity. And the blessings that the Lord had seen to fall on the enemies of God's people. Those that were God's enemies are now seeing the prosper. Those who are not honoring God, they're watching, and they're looking at Him. And it's that insult to injury. Verse 21, it says, All my enemies have heard of my trouble. They are glad that thou hast done it. All the countries are laughing at them. They're the laughingstock of the world. That's when God had said, you had polluted my name. He had set them to be a special treasure. He had set them to be a people that all the world would watch, that people would go to, and that they could see the wisdom of God.

[14 : 29] But that's not where they're at right now. They're being laughed at by all of the nations. There's a natural suffering because of the guilt. And we must teach the next generation and remind ourselves that if we ignore sin, then pain will always come. The ways of sin is death. That is certainly true for eternity, but that rule applies to us in the life that we live. Lamentations reminds us that sin is more than just an individual issue. It shows us that innocent and righteous people are being affected by the consequences of national or cultural sins. During this time where they're being warned, Jeremiah is not the only person that wished that the nation would do right, or prayed, I should say, that the nation would do right, but they don't. And there they would be praying with Jeremiah, and there is something about this broken world and the culture and the nation, and it's not just the individual problem, but all of the nation is filling it. But it brings a clarity to them.

This lamenting will bring a clarity to their suffering. Verse 7, Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and all of her miseries. This is what she thought of, the pleasant things that she had in the days of old. When her people fell into the, before her people fell into the hand of enemies and the nun did help her, the adversary saw her, and then they mock at her Sabbaths. People were making fun of her worship of the Lord. Lament brings them back to remembering a different day, but remembering also a time that God had given them warning. Time and time again, he had warned them, and they did not heed. Limitations 112, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, what an expression, can there be any more sorrow than I have found? And the beauty is now being lost. It's not just the depth that they're filling, but the breadth of the devastation. It's not that it just hurt them deeply. It's just everywhere they look. There's just nothing of any beauty left. There's nothing that's the way that it's supposed to be anymore. It shows the pain and consequences here in verse 6.

It says, all her beauty has departed. The sanctuary, verse 10, is going to be defiled. The people will groan, and they'll be searching for bread. And verse number 11, and it helps them feel the weight of their problems there. This lamentation is giving them clarity, and they're just coming out, and they're saying how bad things have become. But this leads us to a plea of mercy. They've been made aware of the cause and to whom they should return. The city is grieving because they're experiencing the judgment of God. Read with me in verse number 12 and 13, if you will.

Is it nothing to you, all you that pass? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.

From above has He sent fire into my bones, and He prevaieth against them. He has spread a net for my feet. He has turned me back. He has made me desolate and faint all the day. Jesus offers in the New Testament a yoke that is easy. That is not what these people are carrying. The yoke here that is providing, in verse 14, the yoke of my transgression is bound by His hand. They're recognizing that this isn't something that just happened to them, that this is coming from the hand of the Lord. And so they cry out to God, and they plead for His mercy. They recognize that God had given them warning, that He had given them warning in His law. He had given them warning from the messengers, and now they're dealing with the consequences of their sin, which should lead to confession.

[18 : 25] You ever been sitting beside somebody? Or maybe somebody has sat beside you before, and they just said, I'm just dealing with so many things in my life, I don't know why this is happening. And you say, well, maybe it was because of all the bad decisions that you made, right?

People just think it's just magically happening. But we live in a world that has consequences to doing it. It's taught to us in our homes, hopefully. It's taught to us through our government.

It ought to reward those that do right, and it ought to punish those that do evil. And we get to this place, and here it is, and they're just speaking, and they're just communicating, and they're saying what needs to be said. We were warned, and we didn't listen, and now this is what we're dealing with, and we're dealing with brokenness. I'm very quick to run to a story like Job. I'm very quick to tell you I would hate for a person who is dealing through some kind of trial or affliction to believe that that's necessarily the punishment of some type of sin. But I don't need to overcorrect them so much to make you think that it's never the consequence of sin. That is an honest thing that every one of you should ever do in your heart. It ought to cause an examining of your heart when it comes in. You would say, Father, what are you teaching me? The first thing that the Holy Spirit would do in your life, though, is He would bring conviction. There should not be the wondering.

It should not be, well, I had a flat tire on the way to church. What is it that God is trying to tell me? If you're a believer, and you are in His Word as you should be, He would be already telling you what He wants to do. He already should be bringing conviction. The first way in which the Holy Spirit brings correction into your life is through conviction. And that's what He had been doing with the messengers and sending them. And He had been giving them warning. These were not people that were just living their lives and just all of a sudden are now surprised. These were people that messengers have been coming to over and over again, have been clearly warned, and now they're dealing with the consequences of their sin. This can be true for any generation. But young people in here, many of you may sit in that situation someday and just say, now that I'm here, what do I do?

In the worst day of your life, Lamentations provides for you, what does God do when people He loves and warns does wrong and He brings correction into their lives? They confess to Him. And Lamentations 118, the Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against His commandments. Here I pray you all people, and behold my sorrow. My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity. I have rebelled against His commandments. That's what He said. Lamentations brought them to a place of confession.

[21 : 14] Chapter 1, I told you 22 verses, 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, basically A to Z explaining what this world that we live in that is broken. They sung it then and we sing it now. One of the songs we sing, do you feel that the world is broken? And the response is, we do. That's always been the case. And it will always be the case until Jesus returns. No matter who stands here, they're going to be able to ask you, do you feel that the world is broken? And it will always be the respond with, we do. So Lamentations teaches us some things about a broken world. Quickly here, three things. First of all, Lamentations, with this long description of a broken world, teaches us that sin has a real and devastating consequence. Sin has a real and devastating consequence. We know it and we say it, the ways of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. God did not spare His own people from the consequences of their action. And we ought to be cautioned against thinking that because there's no immediate consequence in our life that there will be no consequences at all. That's what the people in

Jerusalem are seeing there. We've been warned, we saw consequences, but now it is finally here. In helping people that are going through times of affliction and sorrow, it is not unloving for you to lead them to recognize the sin that may be in their lives. In your own life is a question that you should ask yourself. Am I dealing with the consequences of rebellion in my life? It ought to bring a humility to you to say, God, is this what is happening here? Has the Holy Spirit been working in my life and teaching me something? So it reminds you here that sin has a real and devastating consequence. Even if you're not seeing it immediately, it doesn't mean it's not coming. Young people, just because you made it a few miles down Highway 400 running from the police and you don't think you're going to get caught, you need to know that it's coming. That it's certainly going to come.

Secondly here, divine justice and judgment are part of this story in everyone's story. It's the story of Israel. It's our story as well. Words like redemption, grace, and forgiveness make sense only in light of God's judgment upon us. All of those things can only be wonderfully celebrated if we know that we are truly deserving. We're not deserving of any of those things. The cross of Jesus is necessary because of our sin and because of God's righteous judgment. The destruction of this city that God loved came due to sin. God is unwavering in His holiness that God had warned them and told them how to live and they had rebelled against Him. So divine justice and judgment are part of His story.

And you should see it as part of your story as well. You can't rebel against Him. I was having a conversation with Thatcher and we were talking about this morning and I said it's very logical to me that people would think, well if I've sinned my way into condemnation, if my sin is causing me to have eternity in hell, then my good actions will take me out of it, right? It seems to make, it would make sense without the Word of God. And Thatcher said to me that without the Word of God, he would think that it was only logical that there's absolutely no way to God. That there's absolutely no way to Him. That is really the more clear way of thinking. That there should be absolutely no way back to Him. That your sin has brought you to a point where you are not deserving of anything.

And when He saved you, you were not deserving of anything. And so there's a justice and a judgment because of our sins. And that's why we can rejoice in the grace of the Lord. And when we come to Christ, it starts with a confession and an acknowledgement of where we're at. And so lastly here, forgiveness through Jesus saves us from the far worse fate than they would have. It is not just that God forgives the sins of those who put their faith in Jesus, it's that God poured out the punishment for those sins on Jesus personally. Between life groups and church this morning, me and Brother John in the back of the service had a conversation about the statement, just if I never sinned. And we're saying about how it's so incomplete because your sin doesn't disappear. And so if you want to know how heavy your sin is, if here in Lamentations, they got an idea of how heavy their sin was. They were sinning and they thought, well, there's no immediate consequence for it. Apparently it's not a big deal.

[26 : 10] I can continue doing this, but God was being long-suffering. But then they get to feel the weight of their sin and they would say that God who loves this city, God that loves me, God that had plans for us is willing to remove us from this, take us into captivity because He loves us and there's a hatred for sin and holiness. It wakes you up and says sin must be a big deal, right? Sin must be, have huge consequences to it. And if it wasn't for this suffering that came into their lives, then they would not ever value sin in the way that they should. And in so doing, they would never cry out to God in confession. For us today, we don't have the ruins of a city around us looking at it and saying, we should have listened to what God had told us. Now look at all this brokenness. But we have, we can look to a cross and we could say, how heavy is our sins?

This is what the payment is. This is what the value of our sin is. It would require. And then we could also look down to this world and say, what is the consequence of sin? We see it on every corner.

We see the world that is living in brokenness and we see the hurt. And it manifests itself in many different ways, but it's always going to be one solution, which is coming to a time of confession before the Lord. Confession is vital to our relationship with the Lord. Confession means to say the same thing about our sin that God would say. Confession is this lament that tunes your heart to the brokenness of sin in light of the holiness of God. There in all of the ruins, they were able to say, I am broken and I have been warned. And now I'm dealing with the consequences of my sin.

God have mercy on us. 1 John 1.9, that we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And that it's through confession that our hearts hear the message of grace again. I'll say that one last time. Give you one little story and then pray.

Through confession, our hearts hear the message of grace again. When a person's living in a broken world, just like they were in limitations, and it's being described in many different ways, it is the loving thing to do to sit down with them and to say, you're dealing with the consequences of your sin. God had warned you that if this is the way in which you would live your life, this is the results that you're going to have. That's only part of the story. But you could also say, you can confess your sins and you can cry out for mercy. And all of your problems aren't going to disappear, but you'll be reconciled to the Father. And that is going to secure you a home that is not broken and a life that is not going to deal with these consequences. And so you have to be open and honest with people. And you have to be open and honest with yourself. In my life and in your life, we often deal with pain and suffering of our own choosing because we decide to rebel against God. And we break a relationship. We break a fellowship with a God who desires to have communion with us, who desires us to live in happiness and joy. And we need to recognize we are just living out the consequences of sin. The young people looking around in that day in limitations, they'd say, how did this happen? And the answer was, we sinned against God and that has brought brokenness. And now we're going to confess and we're going to cry out for mercy. You want to help a broken world? Then you've got to be loving enough to look at people and say, hey, you've disobeyed God, but he hasn't left you. And he is ready to hear from you today. Cry out for mercy. And then personally in your own life, you're dealing with brokenness as a result of the sin in your life. Cry out for mercy.

[30 : 17] He is ready to hear from you. Heavenly Father, I thank you for the picture given to us of a city. And Lord, I know that that city is represented in this city and other cities, but Lord, in our own lives. So Lord, I pray that you would help everyone in here tonight, Lord, recognize when they're in that situation, when they have sorrow upon sorrow, and it's because of the result of their own sin.

Father, thank you for allowing us or causing us to not ever sin without feeling it. Pray that you would help us be people that are sensitive to you, that when sin enters into our lives, Lord, that we will not be content living in that broken state, but we will cry out for mercy from this broken world God and lead others in the same way. Let's take a moment. You can pray at the altar. You can pray at your seat. But as the piano plays, let me encourage you to do that. Limitations lays out a horrific picture for us of brokenness. And maybe you feel like you can relate. Would you pray as the psalmist would? Search my heart, O God. See if there'd be any wicked way of me. And say, Father, is the pain and suffering that I'm feeling and all this brokenness, what you want to use to call me to a point of confession in my life. It ought to be the part of the rhythm of the life of a believer is coming to him. And as you do that, would you think about those people in your life that you know that are living in brokenness and no empty platitudes, no words of encouragement are going to change that situation. Somebody's going to have to be loving enough to them to tell them that what they're dealing with is the consequences of sinful action and be loving enough to point them to a Savior, love them enough to teach them how to confess to the Lord. Let's take some time in prayer.