

Intro: A quick review of the context of Lamentations and how it perfectly sets us up for Holy Week.

- *The Justice Calling*, 58-9, “...it is critical to name the source of all that has gone wrong [in the world]. The name of the source is sin—a term that is one of the most avoided and yet compelling aspects of the Christian faith. Sin is routinely denied in many societies today, and yet it can be life-giving to understand and acknowledge it. Invoking the reality of sin gives us language to describe and protest all that is wrong in this world and in our lives...”

Structure: Acrostic structure is lost in ch. 6 as the book limps to a close.....

**1 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace! 2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners. 3 We have become orphans, fatherless, our mothers are like widow.**

**1. Our inheritance...our homes...**

- The land belonged to the Lord (Lev 25:23), but he gifted it to Israel as an inheritance from him to be used for his glory and mission in the world. It was a “monumental tangle proof of their relationship with YHWH. They were God’s people in God’s land” (Wright 150). But now it was turned over to strangers (Lev. 18:24-28).

**2. The irony: “...we have become orphans, fatherless...widows.”**

- Israel was called to be a people who looked after these people, but instead they became a cruel culture of corruption and oppression. Instead of prizing social justice—biblical justice— and championing the rights of the marginalized, they trampled their rights and became themselves trampled upon.

**3. And yet...there is hope: “Remember, O Lord...; look, and see....”**

(1) This is covenantal language...this is Exodus language.

- Exodus 2:23, “...the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”

(2) Is it possible that God might remember his covenant again? Is it possible that God would “look, and see our disgrace!” and answer from heaven? It’s not only possible, but it was a promise. If the people had been listening to Jeremiah (which they hadn’t), they would have known that God promised to make a new covenant.

- Jer. 31:31ff, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”
- Jer. 29:10-14, “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the Lord....”

(3) The Poet is beginning this process by using words of lament, and crying out to the LORD because if there was an Exodus in the past, there could be a new Exodus in the future based on God’s promise.

**4 We must pay for the water we drink; the wood we get must be bought. 5 Our pursuers are at our necks; we are weary, we are given no rest. 6 We have given the hand to Egypt, and to Assyria, to get bread enough.... 9 We get our bread at the peril of our lives because of the sword in the wilderness. 10 Our skin is hot as an over with the burning heat of famine.**

- The humiliation of having to pay for basic commodities of life in the land they used to own...driving to exhaustion by conquering armies...the indignity of having to buy food from former enemies.... But that's not even the worst of it...

**11 Women are raped in Zion, young women in the towns of Judah; 12 Princes are huge up by their hands; no respect is shown to the elders. 13 Young men are compelled to grind at the mill, and boys stagger under loads of wood.**

1. **The rape of women...** (1) a weapon of terror; (2) humiliation; and (3) attempted eradication of bloodlines (cf. O'Connor in Wright 154).
2. **The enslavement of men and boys...**
3. **The humiliation of princes...**
4. **The disrespect to the aged...**

Everything is the opposite of what it should be...shalom has been vandalized by Israel's sin, but also by Babylon's sin.

**7 Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities.... 15 The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning. 16 The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned! 17 For this our heart has become sick, for these things our eyes have grown dim, 18 for Mount Zion which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it.**

1. **Here is genuine acknowledgement of sin against the Lord going back for generations.**

- Wright, "[These] Hebrew words...('Woe-indeed to-us for we-have-sinned') may be the shortest, simplest and deepest moment of self-awareness in the book. Indeed, they are perhaps the most concise condensing of the essence of repentance in Scripture... On the foundation of this clear-eyed but tear-filled acknowledgement, the Poet will lead the people to appeal to God, for the grace of repentance and restoration."
  - RC Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, "The slightest sin is an act of defiance against cosmic authority. It is a revolutionary act, a rebellious act where we are setting ourselves in opposition to the One to whom we owe everything."
2. **Mount Zion lies desolate!** In Israel's mind, Mount Zion was the throne of God himself because that is where their Temple stood. But now it's been destroyed by the Babylonians. Does that mean that YHWH has been dethroned?
    - That's certainly how the Babylonians would have interpreted it. In the ancient times, it was thought that the army that was victorious in battle was the army whose god was supreme.

**19 But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations.**

1. **Such is the defiant, tear-soaked faith of the Poet.** Jerusalem may have fallen, her king may have fallen, the people may have fallen, the Temple may have fallen... But you, O YHWH reign forever; your throne endures to all generations!

2. **Make no mistake about it: YHWH was still enthroned as the King of the universe**, and that is the Good News that Israel need to hear in that moment—and the only hope to which she could cling.
3. **To declare, “your throne endures to all generations” roots Israel and us in a larger story of God’s redemption** of the world in Christ Jesus. But for the moment, it felt like the end of the story because it was the end of the story for that generation....

## 20 Why do you forget us forever; why do you forsake us for so many days?

1. **This is the last question in a book full of questions as a damaged faith seeks understanding.** Would God remember us...or utterly forsake us? The question is left “hanging frozen in the air” (Wright).
2. **There is no where else to turn.** There is nowhere else to hope. So the poet utters a desperate last prayer...

## 21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old—

1. **Here is evidence of genuine repentance...the Poet speaking for the people want God.**
  - **What they want is** not so much an end to their suffering, nor that their enemies get repaid, nor are they merely regretful that they have experienced the consequences of their choices—**they want more than anything else God himself.**
  - Cf. Ps. 73, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”
2. **This requires nothing else than a divine miracle in their soul—restore us to yourself...**

## 22 —unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.

1. **Lamentations ends where it begins**—with the present lived experience of the consequences of their choices and the unbridgeable distance that their sin created between them and their God.
  - Lamentations ends with sin and evil doing its worst job upon Israel. It ends living with this tension.
2. **God included this book of Lamentations within the library of books called The Scriptures.** This book has its own voice, and it teaches us how to find our voice when life doesn’t make sense.
  - (1) But it’s not the only voice—nor the only lament. For the story of the Scriptures themselves tell us that when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son into this world to bear the curse for the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29). Sin and evil did its worst job upon Jesus, who bore the sin and evil of this world upon his shoulders.
    - “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And the heavens were silent as God condemned our sin in the flesh of Jesus so that he could one day put an end to evil without putting an end to us (HT: Tim Keller).
  - (2) Jesus would remain under the power of death—for a time. Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday lies what is called Holy Saturday—a dead time in between when sin and evil did its worst job on Jesus and before God raised him from the dead and seated him as the King of the universe (HT: Wright).

So we enter Holy Week, and as we await the return of the Lord Jesus to set everything to right, let’s find our voice to practice lament—this unguarded type of prayer that is honest about the pain and sorrow of this world; and let’s let lament lead us to pray even more earnestly the final prayer of Scripture: **“Come, Lord Jesus”** (Rev. 22:20).