

A Long & Winding Road - Part 4

Coming back one final time Learning to Lament, super important for you to listen to what we explored the last three weeks, especially last weekend.

The Promises & Nature of God – If God is who the Bible reveals Him to be...If He said what the Bible records what He said, then we have hope, no matter what our suffering and pain is.

- *In the midst of crisis, one seriously reflects and learns most about God's character and his relationship to his people. Lament is an appeal to God based on confidence in His character and His promises.*

How to sit in the mess and know God made a way to move forward. We desire to do this together, we can.

We noted the Power in the Book of Lamentations (broad overview & structure)

- *"Poetry of Pain"* penned because Israel had gone through it's greatest devastation to date. Everything they knew and loved had been wiped out of their land by a pagan enemy because God brought judgment on them due to their rebellion. They were in intense emotional grief and pain.
 - **Feel the Devastation** – Imagine if this happened in our place and time **Man in the High Castle Situation**. What would our artists and musicians say? The best of them would write songs and poems that we would sing over and over again to highlight our pain and desperation and loss. **Creatives Help us Process Emotion** Think about how many times you have been sad and heard a song on the radio and it said exactly what you were thinking. Maybe it helped you discover MORE about what you were feeling. That's when art demonstrates its power. It gives a shape and sound to our complex emotions. (Waiting for the End to Come – Linkin Park)
 - Lamentations is more than just a heart dump, it's a brilliantly constructed, powerful expression of pain.

The Beauty of its Design (Acrostic)

- **The Acrostic (A-Z Structure)** – 1,2,4 Go through 22x, 5 drops it but with mini acrostic in 5:18-19 **To facilitate memory but also to make sure grief and despair are expressed completely, (pain channeled) that we are covering the whole ground, organizing grief, and as we cycle through, to move forward (go back and listen/watch last week to grasp the power of that)**
 - The Lament structure propels us forward rather than wallowing in it and being stuck. It shows that mourning has its limits (end), then there's hope.

We're focusing in though on **the difference in Chapter 3 – each letter gets 3 lines = 66¹ (diff mood) One large, triply full acrostic...** And each section wants us to read on, to not stop. It veers from the pattern (purposefully) **It's an interrupt**. It is the place where hope rises in the cycle and shows us, reminds us that lamenting has a purpose. It gets us somewhere. This along with the elements of the Lament psalms help us see that **God Made a Way to Move Forward**.

¹ Instead of having 3 stanzas in each verse, chp 3 has one stanza so the poem has three times as many verses. And each verse does not start with successive letters of the alphabet, instead the first 3 verses start with aleph, then the next three with bet, the next 3 with gimel, etc.

Why Cycling Back Through Our Pain Helps

- **Emotional work is different than Intellectual Work (head vs. heart)**
 - **Our hearts and bodies don't believe everything our minds tell it to believe.** They are slower processors.
 - **Cycles allow absorption** – each time it passes by we grab another piece and let it sink in and BECOME true for us.
 - **Reflection allows alteration of Mindset** – there are some things we need to accept, and we can't handle them all at once (it can overload and we shut down or distance ourselves) We need to break them down to fully understand what they are saying.
 - **Meditation Allows Expansion** – when we reflect and slow the process down, different aspects of the situation have room and time to enter in. For example, when we hurt, we can only see God in one dimension (in charge & letting it happen). But in meditation we start to see the other perspectives, the other aspects of God and how He's working in our situation, in other situations. We remember the other parts of His nature. We slowly stop talking and start to listen...**Relearning to hear God** when our suffering is so loud? And when it quiets down?

3:1-66 Personal angle

Strong (of faith) man [using *geber* vs *ish*] personally embodies the community's feeling (but adding something more)

I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his [God's] wrath; ²he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; ³surely against me turns his hand again and again the whole day long. ⁴He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; ⁵he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation;

Continues v.6-16 - He has, he has, he has (22-23 verbs heaped one upon the other with God as the subject doing this to me – but God is not named until v.18) Like chapter 2, but feeling more personal (a complete collage of awfulness)

⁶he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. ⁷He has walled me about so I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; ⁸though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer [nothing changes]; ⁹he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones; he has made my paths crooked. ¹⁰He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; ¹¹he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; ¹²he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. ¹³He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver; ¹⁴I have become the laughingstock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long. ¹⁵He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood. ¹⁶He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; ¹⁷my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; ¹⁸so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD."² ¹⁹Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! ²⁰My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me."

- **Feels very personal (v.17-18)**
 - Feels very personal, because our experience of his mercy and love is very personal, so both wonderful and tragic emotions run very strong

² The end of the previous section leaves unanswered the question: If the Lord is responsible for the suffering and the tragedy being experienced, to whom does the poet turn for help? The answer, as in so many of the Psalms, is to no-one other than the Lord, the same God who is the source of his trouble. (DSBC)

- **When God's Your Problem** – One of the unique aspects of suffering for a believer is that we believe that God is sovereign, in control with total authority. Nothing happens without His permission. So, whether it's clear, like in this case, that God is causing our pain and suffering, or whether it seems to be happening from another source, if He's in charge, then He can do something about it and isn't! A non-believer can't blame God if they don't believe that He exists. But we do blame God. The bottom line is that, yes, God is in control. Yes, He is letting it happen for reasons too great for us. (whole message of God's response to Job) *But no, that doesn't mean it's how He wants it. It is possible for God to be in control of a broken situation and have a plan to fix it in the future, but for now it's still broken.*
- *V.19-20 Calls on God to remember/pay attention to what He's going through, (because maybe then God will act) and then focuses on his soul remembering it...remember remembers = continually (Im sure recalling it & Im sick and tired of it). But then, he realizes there is something else he can remember...*

[Here's the shift! The truth roots, good stuff] ²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies (compassion) never come to an end;²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

- **This is Reflection & Meditation Help – For a moment this sufferer can lift his head up from his pain and look around.** He takes a moment to control his thoughts that only want to wallow and forces his view on God. He considers what type of God, has God revealed Himself to be. And not just right now. He thinks about His nature and His past actions. He realizes God is good and loving. [Ex. 34:6-7 context of rebellion]
 - Heseb – covenantal love - God is still committed and will always act in loyal kindness according his character. He has not made a complete end and this loyal love still exists! We know it because it took our savior to the cross – that's how committed and huge his love is.
 - Raham (compassionate) – Deep feelings of love never end.
 - *What we still have, our survival is a sign of God's faithfulness*
- This helps him to not abandon prayer and crying out. He then has to talk to his suffering body and soul, to see that although the current circumstances are tempting to deny the goodness of the Lord, **they are not accurate**. God is good and will continue to be good. **Right now is hard, but God is good.** And He deeply loves me...
- Wake up to new things for the mornings – every day presents a new opportunity to experience these realities.
- **Turns to praise God – How great is your faithfulness (persistence in relationship to us! (declare this with each thing you cycle through)**
- *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."* (contrast to v.18 *my endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD*) – What a Drastic turn!
 - *Portion/Inheritance – Levites had no land, because God was that for them, their personal possession. He was near to them and would sustain them. God is our highest treasure, even when it seems like all is thwarted.*
 - *To have a portion in the king was to acknowledge his rule and have access to His deliverance*

- **My communion, my relationship is not lost because it cannot truly be touched by our broken external circumstances. Greatest part is not taken from us.**

FIB: God's PROMISES Change Our CRIES

*²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.” ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; ²⁹ let him bury his face (put his mouth) in the dust³ — **there may yet be hope**; ³⁰ let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults. For the Lord will not cast off forever, ³² but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; ³³ for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men [Wisdom like]*

- **What is a healthy suffering posture?** – The majority of the book has a loud wailing posture crying out and giving full vent to grief, which is appropriate and healthy. But here there **is a challenge to wait quietly (not just not speaking but not acting) and patiently for God to turn things around. So, which is it?** Patient silence is not what much of the book calls for – so why here? **The book/poem doesn't say.** Therefore, we can surmise that both are legit for our seasons of grief.
 - If there needs to be a venting to get out the poison of pain from our souls, then scream it out. But if we are in a place where our emotions are spent and we want to know what to do next, then it's time to sit quietly and wait on God who is always active and working.
 - Jesus displayed this submission/posture through his sufferings
 - Stirring on these truths of God's promises and character set us up to pause and sit for a moment. (to look for the flashes of expectant trust & hope)
 - We seek the mercies of God (which are often hidden and hard to recognize when they are happening.)
- **The Cause of Suffering was God's Judgment** – Not trying to rescue God from his sovereignty. The comments about God harming them are not always accurate (processed through human emotions), but they aren't always metaphors either. God really let this happen. You could say that God caused it to happen (technically it was the sin of Israel that *caused* it to happen). You and I may FEEL like God is against us, but in this case God was REALLY against their sin and brought them down. God's contract with Israel was that they had to obey Him to remain in His blessing. If they rebelled, they would be wiped out. They rejected him and did their own thing. This was the result. The "man" is accepting God's righteous justice, in light of the hope of his mercy.
 - **Jesus Changed our Position** – Thanks to Jesus sacrifice and death on the cross, many of us have been made Children of God. That changes our status from enemy of God to Child of God. Judgment is for God's enemies, not children. **Discipline is for God's children (and sometimes it feels the same, but it's not. The purpose of it is vastly different).** Heb. 12 God is not AGAINST true believers. He is ALWAYS for us, so we don't need to question that. National Israel was different. They were a religious community that was

³ "putting one's mouth in the dust" (verse 29) denotes an act of humble submission before a superior (cf. Isa. 49:23) (DSBC)

in contract with God to do things for His blessing and avoid things to avoid punishment/wrath. It was a mixed group of people who were 'true Israel' (true children of God) and those who were 'born Israel' (but also called God's People). So, at times they were simultaneously God's Kids AND God's Enemies (thus they received judgment but also a plan to restore). That was a unique situation. *In the New Covenant in Christ, we don't have the complication. We are God's Children and have been 'born again' into a new nature and no longer 'children of wrath' or 'enemies of God'. Judgment isn't for us. But we can learn from Lam here how to engage in the hope we know of in God's merciful and loving work in Jesus.*

V.31-33 *Literal center For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men*

- This is the reason we can sit silently waiting & hope
- Even though God was afflicting, he did not do this from the heart. God gets no pleasure from permitting or inflicting pain on people. Judgment is not the way he wants to relate to his humanity – it's by his faithful love and compassion, his innermost character
 - Abundance of his loyal love overwhelms the bounds of the affliction
- Not his final word, new covenant Jer 31, sin will be covered and obedience given

³⁴ To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth, ³⁵ to deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High, ³⁶ to subvert a man in his lawsuit, the Lord does not approve ³⁷ Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? [He is in charge] ³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? ³⁹ Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?

- *God is aware of injustice – He sees even when we complain he doesn't see. He sees it better.*
- *He is the source of all things, good & bad, however given that humans sin and function apart from God why should someone complain if they don't like the consequence of their actions?*
- **God is a God of Justice** – when we suffer, we usually look for a way that it's been perpetrated on us. We want someone to blame. It's too ethereal to just say that things are difficult, we want an enemy that we can picture to get mad at. Consider how most have dealt with our situations. Instead of saying that disease and sickness freaks us out and makes our lives miserable, we have chosen others to get angry at. We forget there is human greed, selfishness, error. So, in our natural desire to find someone or something specific to blame (we always feel that any suffering is 'unfair', which ironically is not only incorrect, but rather 'unfair' in and of itself), remember this truth. **If there is injustice, God sees it and will deal with it.** People don't just get away with stuff. Not with God watching. However, be sure to look at yourself, because the justice you seek may be coming right back at you. And that's what he goes on to say

Turns back to a communal lament & confession – We are all traumatized

⁴⁰ Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD! ⁴¹ Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven: [And the cycle goes back to the devastation happening] ⁴² *“We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven ⁴³“You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us, killing without pity; you have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. You have made us scum and garbage among the peoples. “All our enemies open their mouths against us; panic and pitfall have come upon us, devastation and destruction; my eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. “My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, until the LORD from heaven looks down and sees; ⁵¹ my eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the daughters of my city.*

- *It may feel like God is distant/cut off from hearing us – That may be a feeling but not a reality. We **have to ponder how this and the encouraging stuff earlier relate to each other...***
- **What Do I Need to Examine and Change?** – We can only change ourselves not others. If the cause of your pain is someone else, then God is going to need to deal with them. *That turns your frustration into prayer. If your suffering is just a situation of being in a broken world, you can pray to the Lord to bring creation under His rule and fix it, yet it would have to be in His timing and according to His will. (not Matt’s will be done)*
- But while God is working on all the external issues that are contributing to your suffering, **what can you learn from it? What do you and I need to change? What part did we play in the formulation of our suffering? Sometimes suffering reveals changes that need to take place in us and we can emerge from it healthier and more whole.**
- Silence and Trust alone are incomplete, as this conversion/change must be part of our response as well. **All of this works together to move forward.**
- Lift up our hearts and hands – Honest and sincere prayer

Back into the cycle but remembering that time he was delivered:

⁵² *“I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies without cause; ⁵³ they flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me; ⁵⁴ water closed over my head; I said, ‘I am lost.’⁴, ⁵⁵ “I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; ⁵⁶ you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ ⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’ ⁵⁸ “You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life.” [v.59-66] The bad guys are taking advantage of our situation and making it worse. God will deal with them] ⁵⁹ You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD; judge my cause. ⁶⁰ You have seen all their vengeance, all their plots against me. ⁶¹ “You have heard their taunts, O LORD, all their plots against me. ⁶² The lips and thoughts of my assailants are against me all the day long. ⁶³ Behold their sitting and their rising; I am the object of their taunts. ⁶⁴ “You will repay them, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. ⁶⁵ You will give them dullness of heart; your curse will be on them. ⁶⁶ You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O LORD.”*

- *Something has moved in his attitude and how he really sees God’s – No longer as his enemy but with the possibility of deliverance*
- The poet is reflect back to a personal prior situation when things were terrible, and he cried out to God and God heard him and answered his prayer. **Has God done that for you and me? Do we have a history with God to look back on and remind ourselves of**

⁴ It is typical of such laments that judgment is called down upon the enemies who are held to be responsible for the crisis. (DSBC)

how God works and what He's really like? I'm sure we do. It's vital in times of suffering to refresh our souls with joy from before.

○ **Sharing that hope**

- **The salvation he has experienced becomes a foretaste of the future for the community.**
- **Centered around practice of focused Prayer** – Notice when the poet was able to lift his head up from his suffering and remember God, it put a fire in his spirit to start praying and appealing to God for defense. ***He may not solve all the problems right now, but God can sort out the ones that need to be changed today.***
 - v.56 God heard his voice
 - v.58 God acted to rescue
 - v.57c God came near and said, “Do not fear” Only time God will directly speak anything to the sufferers in Lam. ***May we hear these words...***
 - Prov. 19:23 *The fear of the Lord leads to life: then one rests content, untouched by trouble.*
 - “The remarkable thing about fearing God, is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.” Oswald Chambers. It's about WHO the fear is directed towards.
 - God is just and will act in justice
- If God did this for Him, he will do it for Israel and He in fact does it for us because redemption has come in Jesus.
- ***So, the hope that God is good, present and just motivates him to pray. May our process of suffering get us to places where we will remember the nature of God, turn our hearts toward prayer and share our hope...***

Not the end of the journey - Back into the Cycle of lament in chps. 4-5 – The point is not that we just need to get our head in the game and it will all go away. It's not a matter of pouring our hearts out once and then we suddenly come alive in hope and everything is light again. The point is cycling through it until grief and mourning is given a full vent. There will be more things to lament and grieve over, and even cycle through.

But as we remember and raise our heads – and we live by the realities of God's work and nature - we can walk in freedom. We look forward to futures of shalom and we seek to be those who create it. We don't shortcut the healing process but we allow for it to become more robust and meaningful.

We would love to see this time be our chapter 3, our interrupt, where we all watch our hope rise together. **To see what we are becoming as God moves us.**

God doesn't leave things as they are. He is not only a God who creates from nothing, but He's also a restorer, one who renews, reorients, recreate. Just because restoration takes a long time doesn't mean it's not advancing.

