

Hurt
Lamentations 4:1-22

Intro:

Illst: Imagine you are a soldier who has been in a horrible battle that is finally over. You are half lying on the ground in haze and smoke of the battle that has just finished. Your ears are still ringing from the guns, explosions and screams of your friends in the battle. You sit there in pain and reach down to touch what is left of your leg. The pain is excruciating. The blood is flowing freely and you know that if you do not do something you will die so you reach in your backpack and pull out a tourniquet. You wrap it around your leg and begin to twist it to stop the bleeding. Finally the bleeding has stopped but the pain is unbearable yet you know you must keep moving. As your eyes clear you take in the scene around you. Carnage is everywhere. Many of your friends are dead or injured. You are in shock as you lay there in a pool of blood, mud and tears.

You begin to look around and count the casualties. You begin to name those who are dead, injured or missing. Your heartbreaks but you must assess the damage. The loss is catastrophic and cannot imagine what you will do next. How can you go on? Yet you must keep moving and . . . you must get help.

You must find some answers: What happened? Why did it happen? Is there any way to recover? This is Lamentations 4. Lamentations 4 is the triage after the battle that points toward recovery. It is the assessment of the suffering, the coming to terms with grief and necessity of moving forward with what is next.

One of the main things Lamentations has been teaching us is how to articulate this awkward emotion of grief. I hope you are learning how to lament when you are suffering. I hope you are learning how to listen to others articulate their grief, to grieve with them. I hope you are learning how to take your pain and lament to Christ in faith knowing He was the Ultimate Suffering. Because He is the Ultimate Man of Sorrows we can take our hurt, pain, suffering and grief to Him.

Grief is such an awkward emotion. Understanding it and expressing it is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. It is hard to get a handle on. It is not like happiness or joy. We often experience happiness or joyful emotions on a daily basis. They are easily understood and accepted by others but grief is not. Grief frequently makes everyone feel uncomfortable even the person grieving. Have you ever sat and watched someone cry? You sit there and wonder what you should do to help. We often do not know what to do.

Illst: My mother grieving my step-dad's death . . .

Like I said, grief is such an awkward emotion. My point is that we need to learn how to grieve and to lament and to help those who are experiencing hard circumstances because they are a normal part of life.

It does not matter whether you are suffering from the consequences of your sin (as is the case of Israel in Lamentations) or the sin of another (as is the case of some of the people of Israel in Lamentations) or suffering because the world is broken and has been broken since the Garden of Eden. Lamentations has been teaching us how to articulate our suffering and grief in order to plant seeds of hope in our soul.

Main Point: We must face the reality of the sin that causes suffering and take it to Jesus.

1. The Costs (vv. 1-10)
2. The Causes (vv. 11-16)
3. The Confession (vv. 17-20)
4. The Conclusion (vv. 21-22)

I. The Costs (vv. 1-10)

Hurt by Johnny Cash
I hurt myself today
To see if I still feel
I focus on the pain
The only thing that's real
The needle tears a hole
The old familiar sting
Try to kill it all away
But I remember everything
What have I become
My sweetest friend
Everyone I know goes away
In the end
And you could have it all
My empire of dirt
I will let you down
*I will make you hurt*¹

Hurt was a lament for Cash. He sang the song to lament the hurt and pain he had experienced in life and to lament the hurt and pain he had inflicted on others over his lifetime.

In some ways, this song reflects Lamentations 4:1-10 because it lamented all the suffering that had happened to Judah. It lamented the high cost of sin on the people of God. But here is what is different about his lament. It is with less emotional intensity but has a more “*as a matter of fact*” emotion.

I am going to give you phrases to hang the points of the verses on as we work through the text. They will help you grasp the flow of the text.

Verses 1-2: From glory to garbage

Verses 1-2 not only recount in poetic form the loss of wealth but also the wealth of the future of Israel. The Poet uses three different Hebrew words for gold: *zahav (gold)*, *kethem (pure gold)*, *paz (fine gold)* and he also adds *holy stones* to the list of wealth that was lost. This is the Poets way to grieve two major losses: literal wealth but also of the loss of the wealth of young men who were the future of Israel. They had all be killed or carried off. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are four examples of Israel's finest that were carried off to Babylon.

Sons and gold were treated as garbage in the destruction of Jerusalem. They were scattered in the streets of the city like refuse. *The wages of sin are destructive.*

Verses 3-4, 10: From wisdom to wickedness

The destruction was so bad that the people lost all morality (not that they had much but at least they cared for their young). The devastation had left the people without food or water. Even the infants could not be fed. The mothers were compared to ostriches. Ostriches were wicked birds with no sense of the importance of caring for their young. They would lay eggs and then cover them in the hot sand and allow them to hatch there without any protection. Even after the babies were hatched they did not care for their young.

¹ *Hurt*, Johnny Cash version, Songwriters: Trent Reznor, Hurt lyrics © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd. Cash's version of Nine Inch Nails song was an instant classic. His version of the song became more popular than Nine Inch Nails' version. Cash sings it with more emotion and ownership of the lyrics. In some ways this song reflects his life and his struggles with drugs and all the pain that went with it.

The mothers in Jerusalem were acting like ostriches. To make matters worse some of the mothers were cooking their own children and eating them. We do not know if they had died or if they killed them and then they cannibalized their babies. This is absolutely amazing and repulsive even to read but the fact is this is how low the people had sunk. The wages of sin are disturbing.

Verses 5-8: From riches to rags

Power, position and prestige were gone. Those who used to rule, dress the best and enjoyed the finest food now scavenge in the streets clinging to ash heaps. Their lives are black with soot and their hearts are black with sin. They have lost it all. The wages of sin are devastating.

Verse 9: From feast to famine

In the final account the Poet was said that those who died by the sword were better off than those who died from starvation. It was better to be pierced by the sword than pierced by the sword of famine and hunger. The final verdict is that the wages of sin is death.

Application:

1. As sufferers we need to reflect on the cost of sin's results in pain and grief. We need to consider all that was lost. Not all of our suffering, grief and loss is due to our own sin OR even the sin of others. Some of our suffering and grief is simply due to the brokenness of the world. Adam's sin is not only a personal struggle but also has corrupted the world in such a way that we suffer and we grieve what we have lost.

So what does Lamentations 4:1-10 teach us about lamenting? It teaches us to count the cost of all that was lost. This is what we find in Lamentations 4:1-10. Reality has set in and he begins to look around and without the intense emotion he laments all that was lost in a practical way. He begins one more time with the Hebrew alphabet and writes down ten verses that count the hurt and pain caused by all that was lost.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in such emotional and physical pain that it almost leaves you numb? Did you just want to sit in the smoke and mud of the carnage so to speak and weep? Did you run through your mind all that was lost and thought to yourself, *"Things will never be the same. It could have been so good if things would have worked out this way instead of that way. Now I have lost my friend or my wife or my job or my future or my peace or my retirement or my home or my health or my whatever."*

We need to learn to articulate our suffering and grief so that the illusions of "what might have been" are gone. Reality becomes real. The phrase, "It is what it is" is no longer a catchphrase but healing. The blinders have been ripped off our eyes and now we can identify our situation. If we do what Jeremiah did and articulate our grief by writing it down and using a letter of the alphabet to be our structure then articulating our grief becomes therapeutic because we do not simply complain, lament but we give it to God. We hand over to Him all that is the burden we have been carrying around in our hearts. In this way, suffering causes us to cleave to God alone.

2. I also think these first ten verses should cause us to think about in what we have placed our hope. Let me say it another way, in what or who have we placed our treasure? You see when you grieve something that was lost it has value in your life and losing it hurts.

Now don't hear what I am not saying. I am not saying the things listed in vv. 1-10 are not of value or important but there is a way of placing value on wealth, prosperity, position, children and living the good life that when it is lost we are devastated. It crushes us to the point where it seems God is against us and we lose all hope.

Israel did this and we do this today. What are listed in these ten verses are things in our lives that can become the vessels of hope and where we find our meaning and things that we treasure above God. Israel had come to rely on their place in the world; they valued their legacy, gold, way of life and prosperity above God. They had forgotten God. Oh they paid him lip service but that was all they did. Beware that you do not honor God with your lips but your hearts are far from Him. Suffering will destroy and devastate our self-reliance.

3. Finally I think we learn that death is the great equalizer. Reflecting on our own death puts what is important in perspective. What does it matter if you gain the whole world: wealth, success in your profession, successful children and very prosperous (live the good life) but lose your soul. Suffering has a way of helping us to see how bankrupt our own efforts are to please God. In other words, suffering has a way of destroying and devastating our self-righteousness. Here is the point: Christ is to be our Treasure!

II. The Causes (vv. 11-16)

What do you do when the unthinkable and the unexpected happen? This is what the Poet writes about in vv. 11-16. Israel could not fathom Jerusalem being destroyed. Sure it had been attacked and even Sennacherib and Assyria laid siege to the city and came close but no kingdom had ever succeeded. Jerusalem was the city of God, the place where God dwelled and no one would succeed with an invasion because Israel believed in God like He was some lucky charm but they were wrong.

When you look for the causes of why Jerusalem fell, the perpetrators were the religious leaders of the day. They soft-pedaled the proclamation of the whole counsel of God. They only told the people what they wanted to hear and so the blood of the people was on the hands of the prophets.

If you listen closely to vv. 1-12 you will hear their theology in what they lament as lost. The Jews were holding to a prosperity theology. *Jeremiah preached against the prosperity preachers of his day but we need to hear their response to his preaching in Jeremiah 44:16-18,* ¹⁶ "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. ¹⁷ But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. ¹⁸ But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."

Application:

The things we learn from these six verses are critical. When we read these verses we are getting a look back at what happened to the city of Jerusalem because of its theology and what happened to the religious leaders of the day because of the message they preached.

1. Pastors & preachers must preach the whole counsel of God. What your elders and pastors believe and their theology is important. It is important how they interpret the word of God.

We need pastors and preachers devoted to God and rightly preaching the word of God. Leaders who are committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and leading churches in the ways of God. When you look at the religious leaders in Jeremiah, they went after false gods. Their hearts loved success of their own ministries and their own fame. They were condemned not because of their inexperience and inefficiency but because their hearts were bad and they lead God's people away from God.

As one pastor said, "If judgment falls on America . . . I fear a special portion of it will fall on the . . . preachers and pastors. Too often and for too long we have compromised the gospel and cared for ourselves more than for our flocks, our retirement

packages more than our sermons, our own peace and quiet rather than the church's good. God's judgment will fall mightily upon the pastors who preach falsehoods and coddle sin, who are more caught up in visions of their own greatness than the greatness of God, who are more interested in the approval of people than the approval of God himself."² Beware of pastors and preachers who just tell you what you want to hear.

2. The congregation is the emergency brake for the church. No pastor is perfect and I ask the Lord to forgive me for the ways I have failed in my leadership. Yet when we suffer as a congregation, we need to give special attention to the leadership of the church. If your elders and pastors are not leading well then you have the responsibility to pull the emergency brake. Now I do not mean you start a mutiny but you talk face-to-face with your leadership and ask questions. Pray for them and love them well. Seek them out for counsel and understanding. Encourage them to be faithful to the gospel when times are hard. Many leaders are tempted to compromise when times are hard. If they are being faithful to the gospel then encourage them to stay the course.
3. The congregation has responsibility to expect your pastors and elders to preach and teach faithfully the word of God. You should expect us to shepherd the people of God well. This is what it means to be congregational. Not that you lord it over us but that you expect it and encourage us to discharge our duties with a heart that loves Jesus' bride well and is committed to the gospel.

III. The Confession (vv. 17-20)

After we see how they examine the costs and the causes of the judgment that fell on them we hear again, as we heard in previous chapters, a confession that is also a lament. What has happened is that what they had placed their hope of deliverance in had failed. The Poet knows that and he writes a communal lament. Notice the change in the pronoun in v. 17. It shifted from third person plural to first person plural. The first person plural is used 14 times in 4 verses. The Poet, Jeremiah, in writing, he had remained faithful to God but he owned the sin along with his people. He makes the confession right along with his people. Let's work through these verses:

Verse 17: No security.

Israel had been looking to Egypt to come and deliver them from the Babylonian invasion but they did not. They felt their security was in the covenant with Egypt but Egypt did not come to their aid.

Verses 18-19: No safety.

We are already very familiar with the atrocities that happened to them. Verses 18-19 describe the Babylonian invaders as pursuers who were stalking the streets of Jerusalem looking for someone to devour. They even chased them into the hills of the surrounding city.

The phrase "*walk in the streets*" is a key phrase because the phrase carried the idea of peace and celebration. Now the phrase is used in the context of fear and devastation. They could no longer sing the joyful worship song Psalm 121, the Psalm of ascent that says, "*I lift my eyes up to the hills, where does my help come from, it comes from the Lord the Maker of heaven and earth*" of "*As the mountains surround Jerusalem so the Lord surround His people.*" Instead they were fleeing to the hills because the enemy had surrounded them in the streets. It was unthinkable that this would ever happen but it did. This is what happens when a people leaves God.

Verse 20: No savior.

² Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, 624.

The last part of the confession is directed toward the king. Egypt did not save them, the city could not protect them and now the king, the Lord's anointed, the one who represented God to the people, the one who should have lead Israel's armies and been the deliverer had been chased from the city and killed outside of Jerusalem.

Application:

The confession that the Poet made for the people of Israel is for us too. It was a confession of sin, although he did not mention sin but it describes it. The confession is that you cannot save yourself. You will never make enough friends that will insulate you from suffering and the coming judgment of God. There will come a time when there is not peace in your heart and it will seem like an invading army is running wild in your heart and mind. There will be no place to flee from your bad choices, mistakes and sins and you are running into the hills. There will be no place to flee and everything you have placed your hope in will have failed even those who said they would never leave you or forsake you have, indeed, left you. You will be alone. All the props of your life will have been knocked out but this is a good thing.

Do you know what it will reveal? It will reveal where you have been placing your hope. It will reveal where you have been seeking your satisfaction and peace. It will reveal what has been providing you will stability and meaning in life.

The question is: will you confess it? Will you own where and what you have been trusting in as your substitute savior. It may have been your job, your family, your kids, your retirement, your position at work, your status among your peers or whatever.

Brothers and sisters in Christ false saviors always try to creep back into our hearts and take control ever so subtly so beware. Friend if you are not a Christian then we are glad you are here but you need to know you need Jesus. You need to abandon your attempts to insulate your life from suffering or trusting in some false god to deliver you because only Jesus can save you. There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved except Jesus Christ. There is no other way to the Father except through Him for He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Flee to Jesus. Christ suffered alone so you and I would never have to be alone in our suffering.

IV. The Conclusion (vv. 21-22)

The conclusion in vv. 21-22 literally is our conclusion. There are only two ways to live and we find these two ways laid out at the end of Lamentations 4. The first thought is found in verses 21a & 22a.

Verses 21a, 22a: *"Rejoice and be glad . . . The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion is accomplished; he will keep you in exile no longer."*

These verses are celebrating the fact that Israel's punishment was over. It was finished. God is a covenant keeping God and He kept His word to discipline His people, to punish them for their sin and so cause them to return to Him. As horrible an experience as it was to let them go so they would never return to Him and end their lives in Hell was a worse evil. For one, it would mean that God does not keep His word and so He could not be trusted and two it would mean they would spend eternity in Hell. But God does keep His word, He did keep His covenant and He came in Christ to reconcile us to Himself by dying on the cross for our sin. This is the reason Jesus cries from the cross: *"It is finished."* He paid for our sin. He kept the covenant. God's word never fails. The ultimate judgment we were under has been satisfied in Christ.

Verses 21b, 22b: *"O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare . . . but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins."*

Edom's time was coming. Edom was the people of Esau. Remember Jacob and Esau, well Edom were Esau's people and they lived in the land east of Israel. They hated Israel and celebrated that Jerusalem had been destroyed. However, God had plans for Edom too. He was going to judge them as well.

Application:

There are two conclusions in life that we see here. We can go the way of Edom and reject God's discipline or we can turn from our sin and trust Christ. So when suffering comes into our lives instead of blaming God we should turn to God and see what He has done for us in Christ. Lamentations 4 points us to the Ultimate Sufferer who endured the ultimate hurt for our sins and we are called to trust Him. So when suffering comes we should . . .

Count the Cost and consider the Cause of Christ's Suffering

- In Christ's suffering we find the holiness and justice of God vindicated for the fame of God. We had sinned against a holy and just God. The wages of our sin is death and hell. Romans 5:8 says, *"But God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* Here is something very important. God loves us, that does not make us supreme but in a way that makes Him most glorious and famous. It is like this, Jesus knew no sin but He became sin for us so that He can conform us to the image of Himself, so that we become the righteousness of God.
- Our sin cost the Jesus His life and it caused His suffering and death. But Jesus was not an unwilling victim.

Understand the Confession of Christ's Suffering

- We must understand Christ' confession concerning His suffering for us. Jesus said in Mark 10:45, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* On the cross Jesus suffered and died for sinners and gave His life as a ransom to God for our sin. Hebrews 12 tells us that it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross scorning the shame associated with dying on the cross for us and then to show He paid for our sins and could give eternal life to sinners He rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus ascended to Heaven and is at the Father's right hand.
- Jesus was not an unwilling victim. He died willingly for His people. He died to ransom a people for His own possession.
- The question is, what is your response to what He has done for sinners? Will you confess your sins, turn from them and trust Jesus as your only hope?

The Conclusion of Christ's Suffering

- So when you are going through a painful time in life, suffering and grieving, we can preach to ourselves the suffering of our Savior. We need to remind ourselves of what Christ has done and why He did it.
- Here is how this works, one quick example: Let's use our own families as an example. One of the places we can suffer the most in our own immediate family. At the beginning of His ministry his own mother and brothers were trying to sidetrack Him because what he was doing was making life hard for them. Jesus went back to the Father and remembered His identity in that God was His Father and what He had called Him to do. He looked around at His disciples who, in some way, was the local church for Him and said this is my family. Those who do the will of God are my mother, my sisters and my brothers. Hebrews 11 teaches us that Jesus looked for a better home too. He kept His eyes trained on heaven and His Father who is in Heaven. He had to remind Himself of who He was. He had to preach to His own heart the truths of God and act on truth.

- This is what we are doing in the Lords Supper this morning. We are reminding ourselves of who Christ is and what He has called us to do. It is a reminder that we are brothers and sisters in Christ and we have a God who kept His covenant and sent His Son to redeem us.
- We remember the Ultimate Sufferer whose suffering and death purchased our righteousness, a home in heaven and eternity with God for His people. You see we can study the suffering of the people of Israel in Lamentations and be stunned by the horrific events but unless we understand that Jesus is the True Israel who suffered infinitely worse as the innocent Son of God for the sinful people of God then Lamentations leaves us hopeless.