

It is Finished

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[0 : 00] Take out your Bible or your iPad or your tablet or your app, whatever you are going to use to follow along today. And you can get on over to Lamentations chapter 4.

Lamentations chapter 4. And Amy, would you please come and serve us?

Amy's going to be reading from the New American Standard Version. That is what will be on the screen. If your particular translation is just a little different, that is just fine.

How dark the gold has become. How the pure gold has changed. The sacred stones are spilled out at the corner of every street. The precious funds of Zion wait against pure gold.

How they are regarded as earthenware jars. The work of a potter's hands. Even jackals offer the breast. They nurse their young. But the daughter of my people has proved herself cruel.

[1 : 02] Like ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth because of thirst. The children ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them. Those who used to eat delicacies are made to tremble in the streets.

Those who were raised in crimson clothing embrace garbage heaps. For the wrongdoing of the daughter of my people is greater than the synopsodim, which was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were turned toward her.

Her consecrated ones were purer than snow. They shined more than milk. They were more ruddy in body than pearls of coral. Their form was like lapis lazuli. Their appearance is darker than soot.

They are not recognized in the streets. Their skin is shriveled on their bones. It is dry. It has become like wood. Better off are those killed by the sword than those killed by hunger, for they waste away, stricken by the lack of produce in the field.

The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children. They became food for them due to the destruction of the daughter of my people. The Lord has expended his wrath. He has poured out his fierce anger.

[2 : 03] He has kindled a fire in Zion, and it has consumed its foundations. The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the inhabitants of the world, that the adversary and the enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem.

Because of the sins of her prophets and the wrongdoings of her priests, who have shed in her midst the blood of the righteous, they wandered blind in the streets. They were defiled with blood such that no one could touch their garments.

Keep away, unclean, they cried out of themselves. Keep away, keep away, do not touch. For they distanced themselves as well as wandered. People among the nations said, they shall not continue to reside with us.

The presence of the Lord has scattered them. He will not continue to look at them. They did not honor the priests. They did not favor the elders. Yet our eyes failed. Looking for help was useless. At our observation point, we have watched for a nation that could not save.

They hunted our steps so that we could not walk in their streets. Our end drew near. Our days were finished, for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the sky.

[3 : 03] They chased us on the mountains. They waited in ambush for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the Lord's anointed, was captured in their pits, of whom we had said, In his shadow we shall live among the nations.

Rejoice and be joyful, daughters of Edom, who lives in the land of Uz. But the cup will pass to you as well. You will become drunk and expose yourself. The punishment of your wrongdoing has been completed, daughter of Zion.

He will no longer exile you, but he will punish your wrongdoing, daughter of Edom. He will expose your sins. Father, thank you for your word.

As we consider this portion that we have just had read to us, We have much to learn. We have much to consider. Much to think about.

Much to wrestle with. And so in order to do those things, we need so much of your help. So would you please give us all of the help that we need.

[4 : 07] Holy Spirit, please come and illumine your word. In other words, help us to see it clearly. Help us to understand the things that you want us to understand.

Help us to draw from this particular text things that will be helpful in our paths of walking with you.

Help us to be edified and built up in our most holy faith, even as we consider this dark text from Lamentations chapter 4.

So please help us for your glory and our good. Father, we desire to see our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be made more like him.

So please, Holy Spirit, do that kind of work in our heart. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. In Lamentations chapter 3, the lament was in the first person.

[5 : 13] And the author is this representative male who allows us from a first person vantage point to get some first-hand experience of the suffering in Jerusalem.

Rather than feeling the suffering in the first person in chapter 4, you may have noticed that Lamentations 4 is written in the third person.

And that means it's more detached. It's less emotional. We are like voyeurs looking in on the horror, but not experiencing it ourselves.

Like visitors to Auschwitz. And yet, what we find in Lamentations 4 is that it contains some of the most graphic descriptions, of the physical suffering that happened in and around Jerusalem.

One way that these physical descriptions are brought to our attention, even though it is in the third person, is by the use of color. I wonder if you noticed that as we worked our way through that text.

[6 : 41] In the first two verses, the poet uses three different words for gold. Look at verse number 1. Notice that it begins the same as Lament 1 and Lament 2.

How? How? The gold has grown dim. How the pure gold is changed.

The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street. The precious sons of Zion, the people, the nation, they are worth their weight in fine gold.

How? They are regarded as earthen pots. The work of a potter's hands. Did you know that worth your weight in gold comes from the Bible?

Here it is. Right here. Worth your weight in gold. Incidentally, in case if you are wondering, my worth in gold as of this morning is about \$5.3 million. Apparently, I am worth my weight in gold.

[7 : 54] In Jerusalem, however, gold has become worthless. It is tarnished. It has lost its luster. And the holy stones, precious gems.

They are like gravel. Can you imagine dumping a bag of rubies on the gutter that runs along your street? As though they are just worthless.

Can you imagine filling up your sandbox with little crushed diamonds? What would that say about the value of jewels? Worthless.

No value. Something that was once priceless and precious has become common and throw away and have to have no value now.

And this worthlessness, this becomes a metaphor, this gold and these jewels that are treated like this, becomes a metaphor for how God describes, how the poet describes the people in Jerusalem.

[9 : 03] They also are worthless. They are like clay pots. The least valuable and the least permanent of all housewares.

Now this is an interesting undoing that we don't want to miss. Remember in the Garden of Eden, the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground.

And in the book of Isaiah, we read, we are the clay. You are the potter. You have made us with your own hands. And yet now, that beautiful metaphor, metaphor, that beautiful picture, that image.

Immature. What in the world? I combined image with picture and I got immature. Makes no sense. That beautiful metaphor, that image, that picture of God's connection with his people, a potter making them as clay, has now been turned upside down.

And the poet says, we're like throwaway clay pots. Worthless. Brittle. What an ironic twist in the value of people.

[10 : 22] And so, so sadly, this depreciation extends to the children as well. Look at verse number three. Even jackals offer the breast. They nurse their young.

But, the daughter of my people has become cruel. Like ostriches in the wilderness, the tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst.

The children beg for food, but no one, do you see that? No one gives to them. Do you remember where the hyenas are in the Lion King?

Who remembers where the hyenas are in the Lion King? Josie? They're in the elephant graveyard. They are in the ruins. Now, hyenas are not the same as jackals.

I learned that yesterday. They're not even in the same family, which I also learned that yesterday. I was like, hyenas, jackals, those are the same thing in my brain. They're not the same thing. Hyenas are in the cat family, and jackals are in the dog family, but hey, animal husbandry, not my thing, okay?

[11 : 35] They're different, but here are these jackals, and they are among the ruins, culturally, the least pleasant of all the animals.

The most despised of the animals, the jackals. And so now, get the metaphor. The poet says, even the jackals, the animal that we most despise, they take care of their young, but not in Jerusalem.

They are like ostriches in the wilderness who walk away from their eggs. The women in Jerusalem have become cruel.

They no longer care for their own babies. This breakdown of all that is normal, all that is acceptable, all that is customary, this breakdown extends all the way across social classes.

Verse five, those who once feasted on delicacies, perish in the streets. Those who were brought up in purple, embrace ash heaps.

[12 : 49] Those who were brought up in purple, they have gone from luxury to poverty. That's the picture. They used to live in fine homes. And now their home is the dump.

They dwell among the ash heaps. That's the dump. Do you remember how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah?

Who remembers how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in the book of Genesis? Anybody? God rained down from heaven fire and brimstone.

I don't even know exactly what that would be, but think of like hailstones that are burning, falling from heaven, crashing into the city, crushing and destroying everything, and then starting it all on fire.

Why does the poet mention that? Why does the poet mention that? Look at verse six. For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment and no hands were wrung for her.

[14 : 16] We don't know exactly what that last line of verse six means. No hands were wrung for her. I wonder if it has something to do with this. No one even worried in Sodom and Gomorrah because they didn't know what hit them.

That's the picture that the poet is trying to get. It's way worse in Jerusalem than it was for Sodom and Gomorrah. No one is worried about Sodom and Gomorrah because the destruction came so quickly and just leveled the place.

No one was fretting about it. And yet in Jerusalem, the judgment has prolonged days, weeks, months, years.

We would call this punishment in our country cruel and unusual.

That seems to be the idea that the poet is trying to get across. Sodom got shock and awe and Jerusalem gets long, prolonged judgment, punishment, suffering.

[15 : 27] Notice how the poet describes the dignity of the nobility. Verse number seven.

Her princes were purer than snow. Here's another color. Whiter than milk. Their bodies were more ruddy than coral.

They were beautiful. They were good to look at. The beauty of their form was like sapphire. Now their face is blacker than soot.

They are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones. It has become dry as wood. Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger who wasted away, pierced by lack of the fruits of the field.

Once the leaders, the nobles, they were dignified. They were classy folk. They were attractive. They were eye-catching. And now the leaders, the nobility, they are not dignified.

[16 : 36] They are filthy. And their bodies are all shriveled up from starvation. They are not statuesque.

They are grotesque. Almost unrecognizable. So distorted by the starvation that they are experiencing.

And then for a second time, so interesting, the poet turns attention to the children verse number 10. The hands of compassionate women.

Get this metaphor. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children.

They, their children, became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people. Pause for a moment and reflect on this horrific irony.

[17 : 51] These are not careless mothers. These are not neglectful mothers. That's why that adjective is there. They are compassionate women.

They are women. They are women, mothers who would normally do otherwise and care for their children. But now this horrific irony, instead of feeding their babies, they are feeding on their babies.

This is a total disregard of human decency, an utter perversion of the relationship between mother and nursing child, an undoing of all that is normal and right and good and appropriate.

How could this happen in Jerusalem? How could this happen in God's city? What is the cause of such horrors as this?

Verse 12. No one saw this coming.

[19 : 23] The prophets and the priests are charlatans.

They are fakes. They are frauds. Hucksters and hypesters. They do not speak God's words to the people.

And they do not do God's work. And when God's true servants, like Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 26, speak the truth to God's people and serve God's people with God's character.

These false prophets, these wicked priests want to kill God's servants. They want to destroy them.

And they convince God's people. It's all going to be okay. Peace. Peace, they say. It's all going to be okay.

[20 : 59] And meanwhile, faithful ones are saying it is not okay. We must repent. We must humble our hearts before God. Perhaps there is still time.

These priests and prophets are not caring for God's people. They are sinning against God's people.

And in addition to this, there seems to be in verse 14 an allusion to idolatry. Let me try to show you what I mean.

Do you remember? Here, look at the verse first. Look at verse 14. Do you see where it says, defiled with blood? You see that there in your Bible? Do you remember in the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel?

When we're going to have this contest between the one true God and Baal. The idol, Baal. And Elijah says to the prophets of Baal, you go ahead and you go first.

[22 : 10] Whichever God calls down can bring down fire and burn up the sacrifice. That will be the one true God. Agreed, agreed. They make a deal. This is the plan. And the prophets of Baal are hollering and screaming, crying out all day.

So much so that Elijah starts making fun of them. You'll have to go look up the story. It's such an intriguing little story. And then the scripture tells us that they start cutting themselves and lancing themselves.

And blood is getting everywhere. What are they doing? They are trying to get the attention of this rock that is their idol. This idea of defilement of blood seems to be an illusion to that.

That the priests and the prophets have led God's people, seduced God's people into idolatry.

Rather than speaking on God's behalf and interceding for the people to God, the prophets and the priests have taken an awful turn.

[23 : 26] But now the people see that they have been deceived. They see the prophets and priests for what they really are and they want nothing to do with them.

Verse 15, away! Unclean! People cried at them, at the prophets and priests. What is this? This is an allusion to the filthiness, the dirtiness associated with leprosy.

Remember the lepers? They had to cover their mouths because it's contagious. And they had to say, I'm unclean, unclean. And no one would come near them. Here it gets turned and the people are saying to the prophets and the priests, those that you would expect to be closest to God.

But now the people see them for who they are. And the people say of them, unclean. Don't go near them. Don't have anything to do with them.

Jerusalem expected that another nation would come and defend them against the Babylonians. But all of their watching was in vain.

[24 : 42] Verse 17. Let's back up into verse 16. The Lord himself has scattered them.

I think this is another undoing. You might have it in your footnote in your Bible here. The Lord himself is a reference to the face of the Lord. Remember the blessing? The Lord make his face to shine upon you.

Here it's the exact opposite of that. Here the poet says, the Lord himself scatter you. He will regard them, the prophets and the priests, no more.

No honor was shown to the priests. No favor to the elders. The people are watching for some other nation to come and defend them. But look at 17. Our eyes failed.

Ever watching vainly for help. In our watching, we watched for a nation which could not save.

[25 : 49] They dogged our steps so that we could not walk in our streets. Our end drew near. Our days were numbered for our end had come.

Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the heavens. They chased us on the mountains. They lay in wait for us in the wilderness.

Notice this back up in 17. Three times they are watching. Passive. Watching. Hoping for some other nation to come and defend them from the Babylonians.

But all of their watching is in vain. It's so interesting the way it says, in our watching, we watched. Everything is caught up in, will someone come and rescue us from the Babylonians?

But no one came. Instead, their enemy, the Babylonians, were active and aggressive. Look at those verses. They were stalked.

[26 : 55] They were pursued. They were chased. They were ambushed. That's the idea of lay in wait. They were ambushed. Prophets and priests offered no help and no hope.

But what about their king? Verse 20. The breath of our nostrils.

The Lord's anointed. This is the descendant of David. This is the king that we're talking about. The breath of our nostrils.

The Lord's anointed was captured in their pits. Of whom we said, under his shadow, we shall live among the nations.

They hoped in their king. The descendant of David. What an interesting phrase at the start of that verse.

[28 : 02] Their breath. It's as though they're saying, he's the one that we can't live without. It sounds like a silly love song, doesn't it? We can't live without this one.

And yet, he has been captured. And not just captured. Chained. Forced to watch the execution of his sons.

His eyes are gouged out. And then he is exiled to Babylon. No help. And no hope.

From an earthly king. And then, like chapter 3, Lamentations 4 closes with a sardonic reflection on the enemy.

Notice the disdain. Notice how this is skeptically or ironically humorous. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom.

[29 : 08] Laugh it up. Right? Laugh it up. You who dwell in the land of Uz. But you, to you also, the cup shall pass.

You shall become drunk and strip yourself bare. Go ahead and laugh at all of the indignity. All of the destruction.

All of the suffering. All of the grief and despair. All of the horrific events in Jerusalem. You go ahead and laugh our enemies. But you will also receive this cup.

And you will also get drunk from this cup. And then you will strip yourself bare and expose yourself. Shame. Verse 22.

The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished. He, the Lord, will keep you in exile no longer. But your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, O enemy of the people of Jerusalem, He, the Lord, will punish.

[30 : 14] He will uncover, in other words, expose your sins. In our wandering through grief, God gives us the privilege of perspective.

And it is a privilege, isn't it? To have the opportunity to gain some perspective.

That's grace. When our circumstances rise and fall like a roller coaster.

And our faith follows suit with the rising and the falling of life's circumstances. I think sometimes our faith is like the last car in the train of the roller coaster.

I wonder if when our circumstances rise and fall. And our faith seems to rise and fall.

[31 : 32] I wonder if we can ask ourselves this question. Is it really true? In Christ alone, my hope is found.

Or have I settled for a sense of security in someone or something else?

God may use grief to reveal our idols. And I'm not necessarily talking about a statue that you kneel in front of.

When I say idol, I mean what you really trust in when you sing, He will hold me fast. What do you really trust in when you say, He will hold me fast?

When I say idol, I mean what you actually really need when you sing, Lord, I need you. Every hour, I need you.

[32 : 45] When I say idol, I mean what do you love most? Though you may sing, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

Children, what do you value the most?

What do you value the most? What is your most prized possession? How do you care for it? How do you store it?

What do you do with it? How do you make sure no one ruins it or damages it? What do you value most?

Brothers and sisters, what perspective does grief, the grief of lamentations for, offer us? Well, consider their idols.

[33 : 45] And then consider your own. Consider the empty sources of help and hope that are mentioned in Lamentations 4.

Maybe your hope is in money. Maybe your hope is in a growing bank account, a full retirement account, a promising portfolio, a healthy career path.

What if the value of gold plummets? And what if your financial situation suddenly and shockingly turns? What if you become desperately needy?

What then? What then? What then? Grief gives us perspective on wealth.

What if culture continues to decline? What if what is normal, like mothers caring for their children, turns upside down and couples devour their babies because they refuse to accept responsibility?

[35 : 00] What then? What if there is a further deterioration of morals and standards of decency? What if the social fabric in our world continues to unravel?

Grief gives us perspective on culture. Do you think that this country is beyond the reach of our enemies?

Jerusalem thought that too, didn't they? And like them, God has abundantly blessed us, but God has not promised us the freedoms that we still enjoy.

Any sense of national superiority does not derive from Scripture. nor is our prosperity nor is our prosperity evidence of divine favor.

If you lose your rights, if you lose your rights, I wonder, will you lose your mind?

[36 : 24] Grief gives us perspective on our nation. Maybe there is a relationship that you can't live without.

a politician who needs to be in charge or a party that has to be in power at all costs.

Maybe there is a manager or a spouse or a friend or an extended family member, a co-worker that you need to respond a certain way or your entire day is just ruined.

What expectation have you put on people to give you security and self-worth? Grief gives us perspective on our relationships.

Perhaps like Jerusalem, you have realized that some prophets are false. Perhaps you have realized that some priests are lazy.

[37 : 30] Perhaps you have learned that some elders are authoritative and domineering. Some so-called men of God do not speak for God.

Some pastors and some preachers feed on their flock rather than feeding the flock. grief gives us perspective on religious leaders.

If you have been wounded or abused by a pastor or a preacher or a priest, I am so, so sorry. I'm sorry for what they said to you and about you.

I'm sorry for what they have done to you and the ways that you have been hurt by those who ought to represent God. I'm sorry that their hypocrisy and their lack of love and their failure to model the humility and the gentleness of Jesus has led to a shriveling of your faith.

Please don't stop believing. What do you value most?

[39 : 06] And what happens if God takes it away? Will your world be shattered? Will your life be ruined? Will your identity be shaken?

Will you deconstruct your faith? Or will the removal of someone or something that you have come to treasure more than God, will that removal deepen your faith in God so that you can truly sing, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Look finally at Lamentations chapter 4 again in verse number 22. The poet closes this lament this way, The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion.

Notice this is accomplished. Your punishment is over. It is finished. It is done.

How is that possible? Well, the answer is back up in verse 11. The Lord gave full vent to his wrath.

[40 : 34] Full vent. The Lord has fully used his wrath, fully exhausted his wrath, fully spent his wrath.

It is all used up. It is all, hear it, ended. I don't think it's an accident that it's the same word from chapter 3 and verse 22 where we read that his mercies never come to an end.

His wrath is consumed. But his mercies never end. On the night that he was betrayed in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed this way, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. The Father did not remove the cup from Jesus.

Jesus. And in perfect submission to an agreement with the will of God on the cross, the Father gave full vent to his wrath.

[42 : 02] And Jesus drank it all, consumed it all, absorbed it all, felt it all, made an end to it all for the people of God.

And after suffering alone in the dark for three grief-filled hours, Jesus cries out with a loud voice, It is finished, done.

the work of salvation has been completed. Jesus drank the cup, all of it, for you, beloved brothers and sisters, and for you, dear sinner, if you will call on the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved.

God will save you. He will forgive your sins. And from this moment forward, despite whatever grief or suffering or hardship you feel on the roller coaster of life, you can know this with absolute, solid certainty because it is the word of God to you that God's mercies never come to an end.

truly, we can say, when I taste your goodness, then I shall not want.

[43 : 48] Let's pray. Oh, good Father, we are grateful to receive your word. Amen. would you please take it and apply it to our hearts?

You know where we need conviction and repentance. You know where we need to be comforted and consoled. You know where we need the salve of your gracious forgiveness.

And you know where we have tried to apply some other salve to our wounds. Jesus. Holy Spirit, would you please draw near to us and give us fresh sensitivity to your work.

Make us freshly, please, freshly sensitive to your movement in our hearts as we take a few moments in quiet to prepare to receive the Lord's Supper.

Father, you are rich in mercy and you are full of steadfast love and your mercies never come to an end.

[45 : 18] And so each one of us who is safe and secure in Christ, we plead the blood of Jesus. Ask for your forgiveness and we receive your forgiveness that is full and free because of what our Savior, the Lord Jesus, has done for us.

Please help us as we continue in our time of worship and continue to give us perspective in our grief so that we respond to all of the good that you are doing in our lives and all of the grief that you bring to our lives.

We ask this for your glory and for our good. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.