

“Crumpled on the Floor”

Lamentations 4

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Lamentations - we are coming to end of our study

(Rob Bell did a great sermon series on this a few years ago that has been very helpful in organizing my thoughts.)

Ch. 1 Everything has fallen apart.

The city is destroyed

**How lonely sits the city
that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a [peasant].**

...it's gone, and you weren't here

Ch. 2 Sitting in the rubble, the narrator and the woman turn their anger toward God:

**The Lord has become like an enemy;
he has destroyed Israel.
He has destroyed all its palaces,
laid in ruins its strongholds,
and multiplied in daughter Judah
mourning and lamentation.**

...it's your fault, God!

Ch. 3 The strong man enters and expresses this paradoxical reality
where hope sits side by side with despair

**He has besieged me
The Lord is good
He has walled me in
Great is your faithfulness
He has made my teeth grind on gravel
*The love of God never ceases***

...I'm conflicted and torn

Destruction, Anger, Fury, Hope, Despair - all mixed up together, all sitting side-by-side

With that in mind, let's listen to chapter four of Lamentations in its entirety.

READ LAMENTATIONS 4

“How the gold has grown dim...”

Or, as another translation puts it:

“How the gold has lost its luster...”

The sacred stones are scattered...

The children were worth their weight in gold, but now they are ordinary clay

This isn't the voice of anger anymore.

This isn't the cry of one who is in anguish.

This isn't ALL CAPS texting.

No, this is the language of the day after it all hit the fan.

The night before, there had been screaming and yelling

Terrible things were said.

Hurtful things.

Names were called.

Doors were slammed.

Things were thrown.

Vases and plates were broken.

Accusations were leveled. - This is the reality of Lament of chs. 1-3
unbridled anger
uncontrolled anguish
explosive emotions and descriptions

But the next morning, reality has set in.

The next morning, the anger isn't seething anymore,
and in its place, a deep sadness has set in.

This is the reality of where we are now

"The gold has lost its luster."

Here, we get what Kathleen O'Connor calls the "poetics of diminishment"

I've tried to illustrate this on the back of your insert. (explain that)

Maybe a good way for us to understand this is this movie clip from Forest Gump

Remember that Jenny has spent her whole young-adult life running away
from the abuse she received as a child.

She has just come home and is confronted with that house and all those memories.

(Forest Gump clip)

After all the rocks have been thrown,

all the names have been called,

all the doors slammed,

all the screams yelled at the top of your lungs,

and all the bombs dropped. . .

You just crumple to the floor . . . and sob.

"How the gold has lost its luster."

The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth.

Those who feasted on delicacies perish.

Those who once used to wear fine purple dress in ash.

Her princes were purer than snow, now they are blacker than soot.

Their bodies were ruddy and strong, now they are nothing but skin and bones.

It's as though the narrator crumples to the floor - in despair, in agony, in lament, in grief.
It made me think of this song from the 90's

You might know the version by Natalie Imbruglia (~1997),
but the original was by an LA rock band called Ednaswap.
Listen to this short clip. ("Torn" clip)

*I'm all out of faith
This is how I feel
I'm cold and I am shamed
Lying naked on the floor*

Can you hear it? - "The gold has lost its luster"
Can't you hear it in the guitar solo as well?
It's like it's collapsing down into the floor.
Sorry to the Natalie Imbruglia fans - the original is better

Do you know that feeling?
Can you identify?
Deep Sigh - I'm just done . . . I'm spent . . . I've got nothing left.
This is where we are in chapter 4.

So, how could sum up what we have learned from this look at Lamentations?

- Healing begins when we see the suffering of others and are present with them in it
- We need to be completely honest with God even when that means shaking our fist at heaven and expressing out true anger
- The reality is that hope and despair often accompany the same space (and pulls us back and forth)
- It's ok to crumple to the floor in tears.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross has probably done some of the most ground-breaking work
in the area of grief over the past century.

She identified 5 stages that people typically go through
as they deal with grief and tragedy.

Denial - Anger - Bargaining - Depression - Acceptance

Isn't that what we see here?

Denial - How could this happen?

Anger - God this is your fault!

Bargaining - God, ok I'll deal with what I had coming, but you pay back those who did this.

Depression - How the gold has lost its luster...

We go through this grief process in one way or another over and over and over again.

Have you noticed that every change in life involves some element of grief?

Even good changes.

For example - becoming a parent (we can ask Sean and Linda about this)

It is a great change.

But there is an element of grief and loss as well.

It is the death of a way of life.

You will always be a parent from here on out.

It is the death of that old life - life without kids (freedom, sleep, alone time, going to the bathroom by yourself without an audience.)

Promotions in jobs - maybe it causes you to move across town/state/country

Getting Married - death of singleness

Retirement - death of working life (should be), change in productivity

Adulthood - you gotta grow up eventually, death of childhood

There are many, many examples.

Even when they are good changes, we must take the proper time to acknowledge and even grieve them.

I want to suggest that we are in just such a time at Ecclesia right now.

We are in a time when things are changing.

Our financial situation is changing.

Our makeup is changing.

Our vision and focus is changing and becoming more focused.

The Dawnings team that has been meeting is looking at those changes and praying for the Holy Spirit to guide us to God's vision for Ecclesia.

I really think that many of these will be good changes, healthy changes, life-giving changes.

But . . . We must take seriously the need to grieve.

Often, when someone pushes back or objects to a proposed change, they are often not necessarily objecting to the change itself.

Instead, they are really saying, "We need to stop and grieve this change."

Maybe we need to express some anger that things are going this way.

Maybe we need need to sit and weep.

Maybe we need someone to just come and sit with us for a little while so we can process and lament together.

Maybe we need someone to just come up and say, "I know that this hurts.

I share your pain."

"The gold has lost its luster."

Things are never going to go back to the way they were.

Christianity is a faith of letting go.

What did Jesus say?

If you want to follow me . . . sell everything you have

If you want to be my disciple . . . take up your cross.

If you want to save your life . . . lose it.

We have to turn the page on one chapter so we can open the page on the next.

We have to say goodbye to yesterday . . . so that we can say hello to God's tomorrow.

We have to die with Christ . . . so that we can be resurrected with him as well.