



**Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,**

**05 Jan 2025**

**“Seasons of Life: Hope in the Midst of Despair”**

**Readings: Lamentations 3:19-26; 2 Corinthians 1:3-6; John 16:20-22**

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## **Introduction:**

Good grief, does Lamentations equate to a Happy New Year?

We have spent a number of weeks looking at lightness and darkness, both in our Isaiah series and in our Advent sermons. We continue this theme this January as we look at the book of Lamentations: a book that encourages us in moments of darkness, to cry out to God.

Just like Jesus on the cross, as we read in Matthew (27:46), “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”

Imagine for a moment a family living in a peaceful, thriving town. The streets are filled with laughter, the markets buzz with life, and their home is a place of joy and security.

Am I describing your experience of Kiama, especially in this season of summer we are enjoying now? This was the life of all those living on the edge of the Indian Ocean before Boxing Day, 2004, when a tsunami surprised many countries and communities, taking 230 000 lives in this one incident. Such tragedy, such lament. It is 20 years since that disaster.

There was a TV show recently remembering the tsunami and documenting how people have moved from lament to joy. There was an interview with an Australian lady who travelled to Sri Lanka at the time to assist in the recovery. She offered hope, saying that one droplet of water at a time, would eventually fill a bucket. Hope reawakens slowly, but drop by drop, communities and individual lives have been rebuilt.

The summer swells of the sea. All those affected must have wondered?

*How did it all come to this?*

*Why did this happen?*

*Where is God in this tragedy?*

Imagine those affected people putting their heartbreak into words; expressing their sorrow over what was lost, their anger at what went wrong, and their longing for hope.

This is what we find in the book of Lamentations—a raw, honest cry from a nation that has lost everything. The city of Jerusalem, once vibrant and full of life, lies in ruins. The people are devastated, their future uncertain. Yet even in their pain, they turn to God, wrestling with their grief and searching for hope.

Lamentations is a part of Scripture that often goes unnoticed, yet carries profound lessons for us as followers of Christ. The book of Lamentations is a heartfelt cry of grief, a poetic masterpiece, born out of the ruins of Jerusalem, after its destruction by Babylon in 587 B.C. Drop by drop, the Temple would gradually be rebuilt from the ruins, but there were lessons to learn along the way.

The book contains five poems, and each constitutes a chapter. The metre of the poetry is melancholy, suitable for a solemn funeral procession. The poet uses acrostic structure, in which each verse begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

In Poem 3, the acrostic effect is tripled, as all three lines in each stanza begin with the same successive letter. The acrostic structure is used to express the full range of human suffering—from A to Z.

But this isn't a chaotic outburst. It's a formal, intentional outpouring of grief that moves from despair to hope, teaching us that even in our darkest moments, we can cry out to God.

Who would have thought that the formulae of mathematics would be so apparent in the symmetry of these chapter verses 22, 22, 66, 22, 22!

Do I point this out as one of two ex-maths teachers, now your Pastors or is it because of a devotional gift I received for Christmas from members of KAC?

It is a unique structure in Lamentations reminding me of the 66 books in the Bible! **(Don't get me started! 😊)**

For centuries Jewish people have read Lamentations on the ninth day of the month of Av known as (*Tisha B'Av*). Doing this in remembrance of a number of national tragedies that took place on that date in various years, including the destruction of the first and second Temples.

Unquestionably one of the most traumatic moments in the whole history of the Israelite people.

At first glance, this book may seem like an overwhelming lament, but as we journey through it together, we will discover a message of hope, renewal, and God's unshakable faithfulness.

### The Cry of "How":

In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations is called "Ekaḥ," meaning "How"! It's the first word of the book and captures the heartache of the prophet as he looks upon the devastation of Jerusalem.

*"How lonely sits the city that was full of people!"* (Lam. 1:1). This cry isn't just about physical destruction—it's about spiritual desolation, loss, and the weight of sin.

We've all experienced moments when we've asked, "How could this have happened?" Maybe it was the loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, or a season of personal disappointment. Lamentations invites us to bring these questions before God, not in defiance, but in honest lament.

**Why?**

**How?**

**Why now?**

### The Author and the Message:

While the book doesn't explicitly name its author, many scholars believe it was written by the prophet Jeremiah, a man who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem firsthand. The vivid descriptions of suffering, death, and starvation in chapters 1 and 4 reflect the perspective of an eyewitness. Yet, Lamentations is more than a historical account; it is a deeply personal expression of grief and a communal lament for a society that has lost its way. The Poet could find no adequate comparison for the suffering.

*"Your wound is as deep as the sea" he says to Lady Zion (2:13).*

Yet in talking about it, addressing the readers, turning to God, confessing, lamenting, accusing, trusting and hoping, he produces poetry of amazing density and intensity.

So, can it **literally** be 'good grief'?

### Hope in the Heart of Lament:

In chapter 3, we find the key passage of Lamentations, a glimmer of light in the midst of darkness. The author declares:

***"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
23 They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness." (Lam. 3:22-23).***

These words remind us that even when we face tragedy or uncertainty, God's mercy and faithfulness remain constant.

We need to hold on.

Our faith in Christ requires consistency.

The author, while acknowledging the justice of God's judgment, clings to hope because he knows the heart of God is not to destroy, but to redeem.

This passage challenges us: Do we trust in God's faithfulness, even when life feels hopeless? Can others who do **not** lean on Jesus, see this practiced through us as His disciples?

Can we, like the author, declare that God's mercies are new every morning, even when we are surrounded by loss?

### **Let Us Now Look Together at the Structure of Lamentations:**

The book unfolds in five chapters, each offering a unique perspective on suffering:

1. **Chapters 1 and 2** describe the overwhelming grief of Jerusalem's destruction.  
The city mourns her loss of people, property, and hope, and cries out to God, though often in protest.
2. **Chapter 3** shifts the tone. Here, an individual voice emerges, offering counsel to Jerusalem.  
This person reflects on their own suffering, recognises God's justice, and ultimately declares trust in God's mercy and faithfulness.  
It is in this chapter that we find the reminder that hope can exist in the midst of despair.  
This is a lesson for all of us: even when circumstances seem bleak, we can trust God's plans for us.
3. **Chapter 4** returns to the communal lament, acknowledging the justice of God's discipline while also taking comfort in the promise that suffering will not last forever.  
This chapter teaches us the importance of repentance, for through repentance we draw closer to God and find hope for renewal.
4. **Chapter 5** concludes the book with a community prayer. The people cry out to God as their only source of help and cast their future entirely into His hands.  
This chapter reminds us that no matter how far we feel from God, it's never too late to turn back to Him in faith. God does not forget our tears.  
When we weep together when our hearts are broken, God is weeping with His people.

***He hears our lament!***

**The Take-Away Message for Today.**

Lamentations isn't just a book for ancient Israel; it's a book for us.

**Let's surf the wave together in this Summer of our lives.**

It speaks to the universal human experience of suffering and loss, but also to the hope that can only be found in God. Through its laments, we learn key lessons in the seasons of each of our lives:

**Confession and Repentance Are Vital:**

Like Jerusalem, we all fall short of God's glory.

But when we confess our failings and turn back to Him, He is faithful to forgive and restore us. Do not forget, remember His mercy always!

**God's Mercies Are New Every Morning:**

No matter how dark the night, God's love and faithfulness are constant. His mercies are a fresh start every day.

**Hope Triumphs Over Despair:**

The final word in Lamentations is not judgment but hope.

God's plans for His people are always redemptive, even when we endure hardship.

God's voice is always active through the Spirit.

Seek and you will find! God's faithfulness is unshakeable!

**God's Sovereignty Is Our Assurance:**

Lamentations, like the Psalms, affirms God's control over all things.

Even in times of suffering, we can trust that He is working for our ultimate good.

This is the flow of lament to joy, lament to joy.

**Prayer Is Our Path to Restoration:**

The prayers in Lamentations—both individual and communal—teach us that honest, heartfelt communication with God draws us closer and closer to Him.

Romans 12:12) *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."*

**Lamentations is a masterpiece of poetry, theology, and human emotion.**

It teaches us that even in the midst of great suffering, we serve a God who is faithful, merciful, and just. And it assures us that He is not finished with us yet. He is transforming us to be more like Him until He returns. As we close, let us reflect on these powerful words from Lamentations 3:24:

***"I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."***

May this be our declaration today and every day.

Jesus is coming and summer is here! Jesus, conquering the waves in the sea of our summer lives. I encourage you in two ways each week in this season of your faith.

*Firstly*, read Lamentations each week.

*Secondly*, take time with the reflection questions provided and engage with what God is doing in your life.

AMEN!