



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

26 Jan 2025

“Seasons of Life: Restoration after ruin”

Readings: Lamentations 4:1-2,6,17-18;5:19-22. Rm 8:35-39. Lk 21:19-22

Introduction:

A Time to Mourn, A Time to Hope

Jerusalem, the city of God, has fallen. Its glory was gone, its temple destroyed, and its people exiled.

Otherwise, all is fine.

The heartbreak of witnessing such devastation fills the pages of Lamentations, and today we will explore the final two chapters, **Lamentations 4 and 5**, which reveal the depths of human sorrow, yet point us to the hope of divine restoration.

This reminded me of returning to study in 2011 for a Master’s programme at Wollongong University with international mission in my heart. I was the older student; one subject per semester type of guy, amongst overseas students from all parts of the globe. It was early in the programme when I sensed one student was emotional. I caught up with him at a break and he was heartbroken. He was about to exit and return to his homeland of Syria. He coined the phrase of the Arab Spring uprising before I recognised it.

I was oblivious at the time, and then watched the catastrophe unfold as the Assad regime ruled with an iron fist against his people. The persistence of corruption, sectarian bias, nepotism and widespread bribery that existed in the party, bureaucracy and military, led to popular anger that resulted in the large-scale protests of the Revolution. There are ongoing minor protests calling for government reform still now. This conversation I have never forgotten: now he is a man in his mid-30s. I wonder what his life has been like since that time. Has his spring now sprung?

These chapters help us to wrestle with three monumental questions. Questions my Syrian friend must have been asking;

Where is God when life crumbles around us?

How do we pray when we feel abandoned?

And what hope do we have for renewal when the ruin feels irreversible?

To help us work through these questions, let’s unpack today’s Scripture passage.

Firstly, **The Consequences of Arrogance towards God (Lamentations 4:1–11)**

The chapter begins with a lament over the loss of Jerusalem’s former glory.

Listen to v1:

*"How the gold has lost its lustre,
the fine gold becomes dull!
The sacred gems are scattered
at every street corner."*

Jerusalem was once radiant, likened to gold, but now it lies in disgrace. The imagery of dimmed gold is a stark picture of how arrogance tarnishes beauty. The city’s collapse is not arbitrary - it is the result of the people’s arrogance against God.

As Jeremiah reminds us in **(4:18)**

*“Your own conduct and actions
have brought this on you.
This is your punishment.
How bitter it is!
How it pierces to the heart!”*

As we return to **(Lamentations, Verse 4)** it describes the reversal of fortunes:

*“Because of thirst the infant’s tongue
sticks to the roof of its mouth;
the children beg for bread,
but no one gives it to them.”*

The wealthy, once feasting on delicacies, now scavenge for survival. The suffering is universal, affecting every class and generation. The most sobering verses are 6–11, which attribute the destruction to God’s righteous anger.

From **(4:11)** we read:

*“The Lord has given full vent to his wrath;
he has poured out his fierce anger.
He kindled a fire in Zion
that consumed her foundations.”*

The people of Jerusalem are experiencing the legal, covenant curses foretold in **(Deuteronomy 28:15–68)**.

These consequences reveal the seriousness of turning away from God and the necessary justice of God. Yet even in His judgment, God is not vindictive.

Ezekiel, the prophet declares to the people in **(3:11)**:

*“Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord,
I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways
and live.
Turn! Turn from your evil ways!
Why will you die, people of Israel?’”*

For us today, these verses challenge us to confront the gravity of arrogance toward God in our lives. Arrogance is believing we are in control of the seasons of our lives.

Humility is the call to depend on God and His purpose as He harvests in our life.

Arrogance is apathy, indifference, coldness and neglect toward the grace of God, and in turn, toward the people of God.

Obvious arrogance is obnoxious. The sneaky form of arrogance is pride.

Arrogance raises **‘me’** up.

Humility raises **God** up.

Arrogance repels, humility inspires others to seek God!

Sadly, we all have blind spots.

A blind spot is something we don’t see about ourselves that others do see.

There is always a gap between the self we think we present and the way others see us.

Sometimes we are oblivious that our thoughts, feelings, and intentions can be misaligned with our behaviour. As hard as we may try to keep this incongruence hidden, it “leaks out.”

Humility knows we have to keep turning back to God, bringing our whole selves before Him, as His Spirit transforms us to be more like His Son.

Our holiness, while made complete in Christ, is a work in progress. Seek humility.

From **(Philippians 2: 3-4)** we read;

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
not looking to your own interests
but each of you to the interests of the others.
In your relationships with one another,
have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”*

I urge each of us to read all of **Philippians 2** to be refreshed in the humility and grace of Christ.

Self-awareness is hard. We don't deliberately have blind spots.

Take time to reflect, to pray and to be open to the Spirit's prompting.

Lamentations calls us to reflect on the consequences of pride and arrogance toward God and to seek His forgiveness through humility.

Let's 'Turn, Turn, Turn' to my second thought to reflect on the big questions of life that Lamentations raises.

The Call to Lament (Lamentations 4:12–5:18)

Chapter 4 transitions from describing the city's devastation to mourning the failure of its leaders. From **(verse 12)** we read;

*"The kings of the earth did not believe,
nor did any of the peoples of the world,
that enemies and foes could enter
the gates of Jerusalem."*

Jerusalem's leaders, including priests and prophets, had arrogantly failed their people.

They ignored God's warnings and led the nation into idolatry and corruption.

This echoes the indictment in **(Jeremiah 23:1–2)**:

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord.

Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people:

"Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them,

I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the Lord."

The people are now left to grapple with the consequences of this betrayal. Do they continue to disclaim ownership or do they choose to turn back to their God?

Chapter 5 shifts to a communal lament—a prayer that expresses the collective pain of God’s people. In **verse 1** we hear them cry out in desperation:

*"Remember, Lord, what has happened to us;
look, and see our disgrace."*

This prayer is raw and honest. The people recount their suffering:

(Verse 2): Their inheritance has been given to strangers.

(Verse 5): They labour under oppressive conditions.

(Verse 11): Their women and children have been violated.

(Verse 12): Their elders are no longer respected.

No-one has been missed. All generations are affected.

Lament is a deeply humble, Godly response to suffering, taught to us through the Word of God.

It is not merely complaining—it is bringing our pain, confusion, and grief before God **in faith**.

(Psalm 62:8) encourages us:

*"Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge."*

The act of lament allows us to hold together the tension of grief and trust. We see this tension in the plea of **Lamentations 5:19–20**:

*"You, Lord, reign forever;
your throne endures from generation to generation
Why do you always forget us?
Why do you forsake us so long?"*

The people affirm God’s sovereignty even as they question His apparent absence.

This paradoxical faith is echoed by Jesus on the cross in **(Matthew 27:46)**

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Remember, lament is not the opposite of faith; it is total faith that **refuses to let go of God**, even when His ways are mysterious yet wonderful.

My third thought to reflect on the big questions of life that Lamentations raises.

The Promise of Restoration (Lamentations 5:19–22)

The book of Lamentations ends on a note of unresolved tension.

The final verses plead with God to restore His people.

From **(verse 21)**:

*"Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return;
renew our days as of old."*

This prayer is both hopeful and hesitant.

The people long for restoration but are unsure if it is possible.

Yet, even in their uncertainty, they turn to God, trusting that He alone can redeem them.

The hope of restoration is rooted in God’s character.

As we saw in the pivotal verses of **Lamentations 3:22–23**;

His mercies are new every morning, and His faithfulness is great.

This hope is reaffirmed throughout Scripture.

As I read the following verses, see if you can recognise the ever present faithfulness of God to His people throughout every season.

- In **Ezekiel 37:11–14**, He promises to breathe life into dry bones, bringing His people back from death to life.
- In **Jeremiah 31:33–34**, God promises a new covenant, writing His law on the hearts of His people and forgiving their iniquities.
- In **John 3:16**, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- In **Revelation 21:5**, He declares, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Spring has sprung forever more!

Ultimately, the promise of restoration is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Through His death and resurrection, He bore the full weight of our sin and made a way for us to be reconciled to God.

As **2 Corinthians 5:17** proclaims:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

Restoration begins when we turn back to God. Just as the people of Jerusalem prayed in **5:21**,

“Restore us to yourself, O Lord”.

We too must seek Him with humble, repentant hearts.

No matter how broken your life feels, God’s grace is sufficient to redeem and restore.

This restoration is the new life that Spring brings.

Conclusion: The seasons of our life; From Ruin to Renewal

The book of Lamentations ends without resolution, even paradox, did you notice in our Bible reading?

Verse 22:

*“unless you have utterly rejected us
and are angry with us beyond measure.”*

Verse 21 - there is hope in restoration, followed by **verse 22**, where the people are still unsure of what God will do. Maybe God is their hope, maybe not!

However, the overall message of Lamentations is clear: even in the ruins, there is hope.

God’s faithfulness endures, His mercies are new every morning, and His promises of restoration are sure. For us today, Lamentations challenges us to take arrogance seriously, especially the polite, socially appropriate arrogance that we can so easily hide or keep private. We are called to bring our sorrows and brokenness in honesty before God, and to cling to His promises of renewal. Most importantly, it points us to Jesus, who in perfect humility, entered into our suffering to bring us eternal restoration.

So, whatever season you are at in your life, let these words from 5:21 guide you:

“Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return!”

Trust in the God who turns ashes into beauty, mourning into joy, and ruins into renewal. He is faithful. We have explored the seasons of life over the past four weeks in summer, autumn, winter and spring.

My prayer is that in each season of your lives, you will be able to navigate going forward with the place of lament recognised and used to deepen your faith as you trust in our eternal God!

Yes, the spring has sprung with a wonderful verse of Scripture to capture this series in Lamentations.

I finish with **Isaiah 43:19**:

*“See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.”*

Praise be to God!

Amen.