

## Lamentations 1 “When It’s Time to Mourn”\*\*\*

Main Idea: Lamentations 1 is the first of five lamentations recorded in the book of Lamentations. This first lamentation shows us what to do when it’s time to mourn, namely, it helps us exhibit three necessary responses when tragedy strikes.

- I. The first lamentation helps us think rightly about our tragedies (1-11).
  - A. Jeremiah verbalizes what happened (1-4).
    1. He sees desertion (1).
    2. He sees betrayal (2).
    3. He sees distress (3).
    4. He sees the collapse of religion (4).
  - B. Jeremiah verbalizes why it happened (5-8).
    1. The destruction was the result of unrepentant sin (5, 8, 9).
    2. The destruction was from the Lord (5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17).
  - C. Jeremiah verbalizes a prayer in the midst of his pain (9-11).
- II. The first lamentation helps us talk rightly to others about our tragedies (12-19).
  - A. He acknowledges he is suffering (12a).
  - B. He acknowledges the Lord’s hand in his suffering (12b-13).
  - C. He acknowledges personal responsibility for the suffering (14).
  - D. He acknowledges the national implications of this suffering (15-16).
  - E. He acknowledges the Lord’s justice in this suffering (17-19).
    1. The Lord decreed it.
    2. The Lord is righteous in all that He does.
- III. The first lamentation helps us pray rightly in our tragedies (20-22).
  - A. He asks for the Lord’s attention (20).
  - B. He asks for the Lord’s vindication (21-22).
    1. He knows that although he has sinned, he’s also been sinned against.
    2. He turns his problem-people over to the Lord.

Implications: We learn some important lessons...

1. God is not anti-emotions. There is a time to weep.
2. When tragedy strikes other people, it ought to affect us.
3. There’s a warning here. God takes sin seriously and so must we.
4. If we’re going to respond rightly to tragedy, we must go to the cross.

This past Tuesday a devastating magnitude 7 earthquake hit the island country of Haiti, killing thousands and, according to the Red Cross, putting three million people (that’s a third of the total population) in need of emergency relief. It’s difficult to quantify a disaster, yet what’s happened to Haiti is major devastation, without question.

How should God’s people respond when they hear of or worse, personally experience national loss? Last Sunday (that’s two days before the earthquake hit Haiti) I announced to you that we were going to begin a new series today in the book of Lamentations. In God’s providence, this series now proves to be quite timely.

As you well know, we’re living in a world where individuals suffer. So do families. At times, communities suffer, too. And sometimes entire nations suffer. The question is, how should we respond when suffering occurs, and specifically, when national suffering occurs?

The sobering reality is that this wasn’t the first and won’t be the last tragedy a nation on planet earth will face. Indeed, nations have experienced tragedies since the beginning of time. So again, how should we respond when it happens?

The fact is, God gave us a book in His holy Word that tackles that difficult question by the throat. It’s called *Lamentations*, and quite frankly, it’s one of the most neglected pieces of divine revelation in our Bibles. When was the last time you heard a sermon, let alone a series from Lamentations?

I’ll be flat out honest with you. This is not a book for the light hearted, and there’s no way to sugar coat its message. This is a book for the heavy hearted. It’s also a book for those whose hearts should be heavy in light of the tragedy that’s all around them in the world. And for this reason this is a book that can serve us well.

I've entitled our series, "*When It's Time to Mourn.*" Ecclesiastes tells us that there's a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time to dance and a time to mourn (Eccl. 3:4). Most of us do pretty well on the laughing part, but the weeping and mourning? We could use some help on that part, I know I could.

Our Savior wept. Isaiah calls Him "a man of sorrows" (Isa. 53:3). Luke 19:41 says He wept over the city of Jerusalem. Hebrews 5:7 says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears." So if we're going to be like our Savior, we need to learn when and how to weep. And unlike any other book in the Bible, Lamentations can help us.

Let's address some big-picture issues before we launch our verse by verse study...

*The Name of the Book:* The Hebrew title of the book comes from the first word of the book, *ekah*, "How!" The Septuagint calls it *Threni* or "Wailings."

*The Setting of the Book:* In 586 B.C. the Babylonian army captured and destroyed the capital city of Jerusalem, killed Judah's king and princes, put God's chosen nation's children in chains, and hauled them off into exile. You and I can't even imagine how bad it was. We're talking about suffering on a national scale unlike anything that's ever happened in our country. I should mention that the Jews customarily read this book on the ninth day of Ab, in mid-July, which commemorates the destruction of their beloved temple.

*The Author of the Book:* Who wrote the book? The text itself does not say, so the book is anonymous. According to tradition, Jeremiah wrote it. That's based on comments like this one in Jeremiah 9:1, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people." We're told in 2 Chronicles 35:25, "Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments."

The *Old Testament Survey* by LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush says if the author was not Jeremiah, then Judah was fortunate to have another man of such remarkable gifts to help deal with the losses.<sup>[1]</sup> I think it was Jeremiah, but whoever penned this book did so, it seems, right after the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army, while the smell of death was still fresh in the air.

*The Purpose of the Book:* So what's the purpose of the book of Lamentations? The book is a grieving guide. In His mercy God gave His people a book to help them know how to respond to their suffering, and in this case suffering which was the result of their own sin. Through His prophet, He shows them how to mourn corporately, and in their mourning how to return to Him through repentance and confession of sin.

*The Acrostic Structure of the Book:* In the Hebrew text, the book is actually a series of five acrostic poems. Chapters 1 & 2 have 22 verses (for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet) with three lines of poetry per letter. Chapter 3 is a triple acrostic with 66 verses. Chapter 4 has 22 verses with two lines per letter. In chapter 5 there is no acrostic, yet it too has 22 verses, each verse containing one line.

Why the acrostic? It accomplishes a couple of objectives. The first is to comfort the grieving people. How so? The nature of the acrostic is that it communicates a limiting factor. It starts with the first letter *aleph* and ends with the last letter *tav*. Put yourself in the people's shoes. They were living a chaotic nightmare that felt like it would never end. It seemed like there was meaningless, endless judgment and misery coming their way, like waves pounding the seashore. But not so. The acrostic helped them get a handle on the reality of their situation. The very structure of the acrostic says, "There is a limit to all this. It will end."

But the acrostic poems do something else. They force us to mourn thoroughly, and that's something we resist. When life is hard, we don't want to face the hard questions as to why it might be hard in the first place. We just want to get on with life, and so we gloss over the situation, or make jokes about it, or put a positive spin on it. But the book of Lamentations won't let us do that. By using five individual acrostic poems, Jeremiah forces us to go over the painful story again and again and again and again and again.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Lord willing, we're going to do just that. We're going to take the five poetic lamentations one by one in the next five weeks. This series will help us go deeper—we're going to get to know God in a deeper way, and ourselves, and our need for a Savior. This morning we begin with the first lamentation which shows us that when it's time to mourn, we need to exhibit three necessary responses. We need to *think rightly*, *talk rightly*, and *pray rightly* about our tragedies.

## I. The first lamentation helps us think rightly about our tragedies (1-11).

Take a look at the pronouns and you'll notice a definite shift in the middle—and that's because the poet mourns in two ways in chapter one. In verses 1-11 he uses third person "he" in order to express what happened to Jerusalem. Then in verses 12-22 he shifts to the first person "my" in order to personalize what happened to Jerusalem.

I am indebted to Walter Kaiser's commentary on Lamentations, *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering*, and

will be referring to it frequently in this and future studies. Kaiser suggests that in the first half of the chapter the poet speaks on behalf of Jerusalem who is personified as a woman. Then in the second half, he uses the first person pronoun to let Jerusalem speak for herself.

In the first segment of lamentation number one, Jeremiah (or whoever it was) puts into words three painful subjects in order to help his people think rightly about their tragedy.

**A. Jeremiah verbalizes what happened (1-4).** “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies. After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress. The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed feasts. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her maidens grieve, and she is in bitter anguish.”

I’ve never gone into shock, not yet anyway, but often when a person experiences tragic loss, they shut down and lose a sense of reality. To help his people think rightly about their tragedy, Jeremiah puts into words the painful truth about what just happened to them. Here’s what he sees, four things.

1. *He sees desertion (1).* “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!” We’re talking about the city that God chose to make His dwelling place, beloved. We’re talking about the city of David, a man after God’s own heart. This is the city where people had come for centuries to offer sacrifices to God in the temple, where they found forgiveness and hope. But no longer! Now the place is deserted. As Kaiser explains, “Jerusalem is personified as a woman who has been forsaken by her friends, massacred by her enemies, left bereft of her former glory, and now stands comfortless and without any ‘resting place.’”<sup>[3]</sup>

2. *He sees betrayal (2).* “All her friends have betrayed her,” says verse 2. “They’ve become her enemies.” And for the first of five times in this chapter Jeremiah repeats declares, “There is none to comfort her” (verses 9, 16, 17, 21). As Kaiser observes, “In this exceptionally vivid depiction of the desolation of Zion, the city of God, this one phrase rings like the heavy gong of a funeral bell.”<sup>[4]</sup> Deserted! Betrayed! That’s what Jeremiah sees when he looks at the city. And...

3. *He sees distress (3).* “All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.” There was nowhere to hide. Zedekiah tried, if you’ll recall. The king fled into the desert to escape the Babylonian army, was captured and forced to watch his sons executed. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he died (2 Kings 25:4-7).

4. *He sees the collapse of religion (4).* “No one comes to her appointed feasts,” he says in verse 4. They couldn’t. The temple was gone. There was no place to come and worship the Lord, no place to find atonement for sins, no place to hear the Word of God, no place to enjoy the fellowship of His presence. Just when they needed the House of God the most, it wasn’t there.

That wasn’t negative thinking. That was reality. That’s what had happened, and if God’s people were ever going to recover from this, they had to face it. And then this...

**B. Jeremiah verbalizes why it happened (5-8).** “Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe. All the splendor has departed from the Daughter of Zion. Her princes are like deer that find no pasture; in weakness they have fled before the pursuer. In the days of her affliction and wandering Jerusalem remembers all the treasures that were hers in days of old. When her people fell into enemy hands, there was no one to help her. Her enemies looked at her and laughed at her destruction. Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns away.”

*Her foes have become her masters.* That summed up the predicament of God’s people. But why did it happen? What was the cause of Jerusalem’s fall? Jeremiah points out two causes, one immediate and the other ultimate.

1. *The destruction was the result of unrepentant sin (5, 8, 9).* “The LORD has brought her grief *because of her many sins,*” says verse 5. “Jerusalem has sinned greatly,” says verse 8. “Her filthiness clung to her skirts,” says verse 9. That’s why the nation collapsed, and it was no surprise. The Lord had been telling His people for centuries, all the way back to Mount Sinai almost nine hundred years prior (see Deut. 28:15), “If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.”

God has made it very clear. The soul that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:4). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Whatever a man sows that shall he reap (Gal. 6:7).

That’s what the prophets had been telling the wayward Israelites for centuries. If you don’t repent and return to the

Lord, you will surely perish. Amos and Hosea told them in the eighth century B.C. So did Isaiah and Micah, and later so did Jeremiah himself, as in Jeremiah 3:14, “Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband.”

But they would not return. And so, as a result of their unrepentant sin, the destruction came upon them. Are you justifying sin in your life, my friend? You say, “Nothing has happened yet. I don’t think what I do really matters to God.” Oh, but it does. In fact, Jeremiah makes it quite plain as to the ultimate cause of this catastrophe.

2. *The destruction was from the Lord (5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17).* Verse 5 says, “The LORD has brought her grief.” And later in the poem he emphasizes this over and over, as in verse 12, “Is any suffering like my suffering...that the LORD brought on me?” Verse 13, “From on high He sent fire...He spread a net for my feet...He made me desolate.” This was no quirk of karma. This destruction which was the result of Judah’s unrepentant sin was ultimately *from the Lord*.

Do you see the mercy of God in this? God gave His people a book to help them know how to respond in the midst of their suffering, even suffering which was the result of their own sin. That’s important for us to see, for we too are sinners. And we too need to do what Jeremiah is helping his people do when we suffer. First, we need to face the reality of what’s happened, and then *why* it happened. Is there sin in our lives? Are we unfaithful people who need to return to our Savior and husband?

I’ve spent hundreds, more like *thousands* of hours counseling hurting people as a pastor. I’ve met with dozens and dozens of people who were in the midst of their own personal tragedies, and my observation is this. We tend *not* to do what Jeremiah is calling on his people to do. We don’t face the reality of our situation. We don’t ask the hard questions, like *How bad is it really? Why am I in this situation? Is it because I got a raw deal from other people, or have I brought this on myself, at least in some measure? And if I have, to whatever degree it’s true, am I willing to repent and seek the Lord’s mercy so that He might receive what He deserves from my life, broken though it is?*

At this point in the dirge, it’s as if Jeremiah can’t take contain himself any more. I mentioned that he used the impersonal third person pronoun in verses 1-11 to express what happened to Jerusalem. But what happened to Jerusalem happened to Jeremiah, too! He experienced personally the very things he’s been describing. So watch what he does next. Watch how he inserts some personal pronouns “I” and “my” into his lament in verses 9-11, “Her filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her future. Her fall was astounding; there was none to comfort her. ‘Look, O LORD, on **my** affliction, for the enemy has triumphed.’ The enemy laid hands on all her treasures; she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary— those you had forbidden to enter your assembly. All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. ‘Look, O LORD, and consider, for **I** am despised.’”

Do you see what Jeremiah just did?

**C. Jeremiah verbalizes a prayer in the midst of his pain (9-11).** At the end of verse 9, “Look, O LORD, on my affliction.” And at the end of verse 11, “Look O LORD, and consider, for I am despised.”

This is so important because, quite frankly, not everyone benefits from suffering. A lot of people become embittered and hardened by their suffering. What’s lacking? They fail to do what Jeremiah is doing. They might even come to grips with what happened and why it happened, but they fail to turn to God in the midst of what’s happening. Oh, they may demand answers from God, and probably His help too. But they refuse to humble themselves in His sight. Instead, they approach the divine bench like a prosecuting attorney who’s displeased with the verdict that the judge just issued. What they need to do, as did Jeremiah, is to cry out to Him as a child, “Look, O LORD!”

When it’s time to mourn, three things are needed, and God helps us do them in this first lamentation. First, we need to *think rightly*.

## II. The first lamentation helps us talk rightly to others about our tragedies (12-19).

And that’s what suffering people do, don’t they? They talk about it to others. But have you noticed how prone we are to talk *wrongly* about our suffering? We do it in lots of ways. Sometimes we minimize our pain with a stoic façade, “No, I’m not hurting. I’m just fine!” Or we talk like we’re the only people on the planet who are suffering. Or we give wrong impressions about why we’re suffering, by blameshifting, or by telling only the facts that make us look favorable, so as to elicit people’s sympathy but not their appropriate rebuke.

In the second movement of this lamentation Jeremiah helps us talk rightly to others about our suffering. To facilitate this, he changes the pronouns to make it personal and acknowledges the truth about five subjects.

**A. He acknowledges he is suffering (12a).** “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering...?” The writer says he is suffering. If it’s Jeremiah, is he talking about his own suffering or as many feel, is he speaking as Jerusalem personified? Or maybe both. Who is he talking to isn’t clear

either. Who are “all you who pass by”? Apparently he’s referring to the nations that watched, even gloated, as the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem.

But the point is, he acknowledges the suffering that resulted. The next point is key.

**B. He acknowledges the Lord’s hand in his suffering (12b-13).** “Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that *the LORD brought on me* in the day of his fierce anger? From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet and turned me back. He made me desolate, faint all the day long.”

As Jeremiah talks to others about his suffering, he talks rightly about its origin. He doesn’t attribute it to bad government (which Judah had), or the Babylonians’ aggression (which was a reality), and certainly not to fate. He sees the Lord’s hand in it, and particularly he says it’s an expression of the Lord’s *anger*.

Does it surprise you to hear him say that God expresses anger, *fierce* anger? The psalmist goes so far as to say that God is a righteous judge “who expresses his wrath every day” (Ps. 7:11).

What’s that say to us about God? As Abraham Heschel rightly observed, “God is...moved and affected by what happens in the world and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath. He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment.”<sup>[5]</sup>

If a godly man found out his 17-year-old son deliberately defied the law for the third time in a month by driving while intoxicated, what emotion would be triggered by his son’s actions? There would probably be some anger, right, anger that would prompt him to go on a mission of love to rescue his son from his folly. But what if the dad did *nothing*? His lack of anger would not only be inappropriate but would communicate his lack of love, wouldn’t it?

In reality, as Walter Kaiser rightly points out, “Anger is God’s sign that He still cares.”<sup>[6]</sup> If He didn’t care, He wouldn’t show anger. He wouldn’t do anything but watch the rebels in Judah go on sinning. But as strange as it first sounds, to recognize God’s anger in this lamentation is to affirm that He hasn’t given up on His people. He’s going after them because they matter to Him, and they matter to Him because He loves them.

The psalmist made this connection in Psalm 30:5, “For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”<sup>[7]</sup>

We need to talk rightly to others about third subject, as did the poet here.

**C. He acknowledges personal responsibility for the suffering (14).** “My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand.”

It’s an evidence of the grace of God when a person faces up to his or her sins. As children of Adam, our natural instinct is to minimize, or sidestep, or redefine the severity of our sin. Left to ourselves we resist the words, “I was wrong. I deserve what I got.”

Which is what makes Jeremiah’s confession so stunning. He confesses “my sins” as the cause of this judgment. *My* sins? Wasn’t Jeremiah a godly man? Yes, but he was a sinner too, a godly sinner, but a sinner. And as such he identified with his people and took responsibility for initiating this corporate confession.

That’s what true spiritual leaders do. They identify with the people under their care and take ownership for what they’re facing, for why they’re facing it, and for what they need to do about it.<sup>[8]</sup> Which brings us to the fourth subject...

**D. He acknowledges the national implications of this suffering (15-16).** “The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah. This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.”

This is no ordinary tragedy, if there is such a thing. This is a tragedy with national implications. Judah’s army is decimated, her young men crushed, her children destitute, and there is no one left to bring comfort. And the only thing the remnant of survivors can do about it is cry.

By the way, does confession of sin mean that God cancels the consequences of sin? Not always. While the book of Lamentations helped God’s people confess their guilt to God, they still went into captivity.

It’s true for us, too. When there’s confession, there’s forgiveness and the guilt stains are gone, says 1 John 1:9, washed away on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But what about the consequences? If you’ve destroyed your liver with alcohol, God will certainly forgive you if you’ll confess your sin to Him. That’s His promise, but He’s not obligated to give you a new liver. A new body in the life to come, yes, and grace for dealing with a diseased liver until then, but the present consequences may still remain.

There’s one more subject that Jeremiah clarifies.

**E. He acknowledges the Lord’s justice in this suffering (17-19).** “Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her. The LORD has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes; Jerusalem has become an

unclean thing among them. The LORD is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command. Listen, all you peoples; look upon my suffering. My young men and maidens have gone into exile. I called to my allies but they betrayed me. My priests and my elders perished in the city while they searched for food to keep themselves alive.”

Did you catch what he just affirmed about the nation’s suffering? Look again at verse 17, “The Lord has decreed for Jacob that his neighbors become his foes.”

1. *The Lord decreed it.* What’s more...

2. *The Lord is righteous in all that He does.* That’s verse 18, which according to Kaiser is the key verse of the chapter. When we’re suffering, we’re so prone to attack God and justify ourselves. Jeremiah refuses to do that.

Why had this tragedy happened to the nation? Was God on vacation? No. Was He unkind? No. He is righteous. We are wrong. We are in trouble because of our sin.

The Lord is right, beloved, always right. We may not understand what He’s up to, but we can affirm without question that He who is righteous is right in all that He does.<sup>[9]</sup>

Think rightly. Talk rightly to others. Finally...

### III. The first lamentation helps us pray rightly in our tragedies (20-22).

As he did earlier, Jeremiah once again turns the pain into prayer and asks for two things.

**A. He asks for the Lord’s attention (20).** “See, O LORD, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Outside, the sword bereaves; inside, there is only death.”

**B. He asks for the Lord’s vindication (21-22).** “People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done. May you bring the day you have announced so they may become like me. Let all their wickedness come before you; deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint.”

Notice what the poet affirms, for Judah’s sake, in the final verse of the acrostic.

1. *He knows that although he has sinned, he’s also been sinned against.* That’s often the way suffering works. Had Judah sinned? Yes. But so had the wicked Babylonians in the way they treated the Jews. Jeremiah’s response?

2. *He turns his problem-people over to the Lord.* A wise example to follow.

### Implications: We learn four important lessons in this first lamentation.

1. *God is not anti-emotions. There is a time to weep.* Listen to Kaiser again, “In contrast to the stoical philosophies of the heathen, which demand that wise and intelligent men and women should be altogether emotionless, never rejoicing when there is good news or despondent when there is misfortune, Jeremiah teaches us in Lamentations 1 that such emotions, properly controlled, are not obnoxious to God. He, in fact, planted the ability for such emotions in us.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Romans 12:15 plainly says that we are to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” Both responses are commanded, rejoicing and weeping. Why don’t we weep more?

2. *When tragedy strikes other people, it ought to affect us.* Even if the tragedy is self-imposed, as in Judah’s case? Yes.

A few years ago, right after Hurricane Katrina, I had an interesting conversation with a man at the Wheelersburg football game. After the fellow learned I was a pastor he asked me about the reason for what happened in the hurricane that destroyed New Orleans. “I heard there were 200,000 [he used a derogatory word depicting gross sinners] in that city,” he commented. “Do you think God was judging them?”

How would you respond to that question? I told the man, “God is holy and hates *all* sin, yes that includes the sins of the people in New Orleans, but also *our* sins...And He will deal with sin for He is holy.”

3. *There’s a warning here. God takes sin seriously and so must we.* Kaiser’s question is worth pondering, “If God has done this to the people He called the ‘apple of His eye’ (Deut 32:10), what will He do to the nations and peoples of the world today?”<sup>[11]</sup> We need to take sin seriously, in our own lives and in the world around us. How do we do that? By facing it, and then by taking heed to a fourth lesson.

4. *If we’re going to respond rightly to tragedy, we must go to the cross.* The book of Lamentations shouts to us, “Sinners need a Savior!” And praise God, what sinners need, God Himself provided! Nearly six centuries after Jeremiah penned this lamentation, the man of sorrows, Jesus the Christ, came into the world, went to the cross to pay sin’s penalty for all who would believe in Him, and then three days later He conquered death. Today God offers salvation to all who will come to His Son and embrace His cross. So let’s come!

\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] *Old Testament Survey*, p. 618.

[2] I'm indebted to Eugene Peterson's insight at this point; see his quotation in Kaiser, p. 16.

[3] Kaiser, p. 43.

[4] Kaiser, p. 43.

[5] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 2, p. 4.

[6] Kaiser, p. 34.

[7] Nehemiah 9:17 says that God is "slow to anger."

[8] Daniel did the same thing in Daniel 9:4-6. So did Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1:6-7.

[9] We see this theme elsewhere in Ex. 9:27; Ezra 9:15; Neh 9:33; Deut 32:4.

[10] Kaiser, p. 44.

[11] Kaiser, pp. 43-44. And then Kaiser quotes Nagelsbach: "Truly, since the Lord could destroy Jerusalem and entirely lay waste Canaan, without being unfaithful to His promise give to the Fathers, even so He can remove the candlestick of every particular Christian church, without breaking the promise given to the church at large, that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matt xvi.18)."