

Learning the Language of Lament

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 November 2023

Preacher: Dane Helsing

[0 : 00] Now I have the privilege of inviting and introducing our preacher and our speaker for the morning, Dane Helsing. And I know many pastors in our area that I consider dear and precious partners in the gospel.

But not all of them are personal friends of mine. But Dane is someone really, he's a personal friend of mine. We planted around the same time. I think our church has been around seven years or so, and Dane's been around for eight years or so.

And right around that time, we started praying together, Dane, me, and one other pastor who's no longer living and serving in Boston. And that group, after he left, we stopped for a little while.

And then now we're in another group where we're praying together once a month or so, four pastors. And Dane is, as that shows, someone who is dependent on God for his ministry.

He's faithful in the proclamation of the gospel. And I try to invite some of the best preachers to come. And I think Dane, in my humble opinion and estimation, is one of the best pastors in our area.

[1 : 06] And we're grateful to have him here this morning. And so Dane and his wife, Laura, is here as well. And actually, there are three kids. There are daughter and two sons.

As you guys know from just watching me and Hannah, no pastor can do what he does without the support and prayer of his wife. And so, Laura, thank you for what you do. And thank you for being here this morning.

And so, Dane, please come. Preach for us. Well, thank you for so warmly welcoming me. I have heard a lot about your church. I've never been to your church.

As Sean has mentioned, we've met on a pretty regular basis over the last eight years. And I've seen your church through the window of your pastor's heart and through his prayer requests as we share and as we gather on a pretty regular basis.

I've heard a lot about Trinity. And I'm so glad to be here in person, in the flesh, to see and to worship with you. Well, there's a language in the Bible that every Christian must know.

[2 : 08] There's a language in Scripture that we must gain fluency in. And it's not Hebrew. It's not Greek. This is a language that will help you from growing bitter towards God during your times of deepest distress.

This is a language that will help you communicate with God when sorrows like sea billows roll over you. This is the language of lament. I understand that you've worked through some songs and some portions of the Scripture that lament in the last six months or so.

And so hopefully this will be a refresher for you. So I'm thankful to be here to open God's Word with you. A 19th century preacher and seminary professor named William Plumer once wrote this about the language of lament that we find in the Bible.

He writes, The trials of God's people throughout the ages are so uniform that the same laments and songs of sorrow found in Scripture suit every successive generation.

And we're going to examine one of those songs of sorrow in our time this morning. Our goal is to better grasp this glorious resource of lament that we have readily available in our Bibles.

[3 : 35] To gain fluency in this language that is embedded in the Scripture so that we can better process our grief and find our voice to God when we feel as though we've lost our voice.

The onslaught of sorrow and discouragement and despair. So let's turn in our Bibles to Lamentations chapter 3. I know it is your practice to read as God's Word, to stand as God's Word is read.

So please stand with me. Turn your Bibles to Lamentations chapter 3. I know that you have some copies of the Scripture on that back table there. Lamentations chapter 3. I'll read verses 1 through

24.

I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath. He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light.

Surely against me, he turns his hand again and again the whole day long. He has made my flesh and my skin waste away. He has broken my bones.

[4 : 43] He has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation. He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. He has walled me about so that I cannot escape.

He has made my chains heavy. Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones.

He has made my paths crooked. He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding. He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces.

He has made me desolate. He bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver.

I have become the laughing stock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long. He has filled me with bitterness. He has sated me with wormwood.

[5 : 43] He has made my teeth grind on gravel. It made me cower in ashes. My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is.

So I say my endurance has perished. So has my hope from the Lord. Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.

My soul continually remembers and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul.

Therefore, I will hope in him. This is the word of the Lord. So, you can be seated. Well, Jeremiah is likely the author of this prayer.

[6 : 50] And notice, as you read this text, he's not worried about offending God, is he? He does not stuff his emotions before God. He is unrestrained in expressing his feelings to God.

This is what a lament does. You can think of a lament in scripture like a vent to God. A venting of your heart before a holy God.

An unhindered expression of grief before God. We find laments in the Psalms. We see them in the prophets. We see them here in Lamentations. They are a gift to us.

Prayers and songs of lament are a gift from our good God to us in the midst of our grief. They allow us to express sorrow. They give us voice when we don't have one.

They help us process our feelings. And they guard us from growing bitter toward God. As I mentioned, it's most likely that the prophet Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations.

[7 : 57] Much of the vocabulary, the imagery, the expressions, complements what we read in Jeremiah's larger book, prophetic book.

He's known as the lamenting prophet or the weeping prophets. We read in 2 Chronicles 35, verse 25, Jeremiah is said to have uttered a lament before King Josiah.

Jeremiah was a first-hand witness in the day of infamy in God's people's history. The awful exile. That's the backdrop of this lament in Lamentations 3.

Lamentations 3 is a reflection on the disinheriting of God's people from their place. Lamentations 3 is this literary masterpiece.

I just want to draw out some features of this passage for us before we unpack it. The imagery here is piercing. So, for example, God is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding.

[9 : 02] He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces. Just think of the vivid nature of this imagery. It's almost uncomfortable. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, chewing rocks with your teeth.

These are memorable, soul-penetrating images of grief that have given God's people voice in the midst of their own sufferings. Lamentations 3 is also known as an acrostic, which is a literary piece, a prayer, a poem, or a song that's structured around the Hebrew alphabet.

So, if you look down into your Bibles, you'll see in Lamentations 3, there are 66 verses. And most Bibles have these verses grouped together in sets of three or triplets.

So, verses 1, 2, 3 is set apart. And then 4 through 6, set apart. And then 7 through 9. And on go the triplets. And each of those triplets begins with the same letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

There's 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. So, 22 times three triplets. That gives you 66 verses. So, verses 1, 2, and 3 begin with the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph.

[10:12] And verses 4, 5, and 6 begin with the next letter, Bait, in Hebrew. And on down the line. It's highly, highly stylized. Now, why am I telling you that? I'm telling you that because this is a very thoughtful, intentional, prayerful piece of literature.

It's a prayerful work that Jeremiah didn't necessarily extemporaneously write or pray. He fought through. There's highly stylized writings here.

And I draw that out because I think in the midst of our own sufferings and difficulty, as we're seeking to communicate with God, certainly we need to, on the spot, extemporaneously pray.

But I think there's also value in sitting in the midst of your suffering and processing it with a pen. Journaling. Writing down. Seeking to make sense of your suffering.

Reflecting on Scripture. Paul Miller, in his excellent book, *A Praying Life*, speaks of the benefit of writing your prayers. Of simply journaling. And the way that it will serve as a catalog of God's faithfulness as you return to that journal six months, six years later.

[11:27] Seeing God's hand of faithfulness working you through those challenges. And as a blessing in God's providence to your progeny who might return to your notebooks, your journals.

Blessing them. The benefit of writing down your prayers for yourself and for your progeny. So we see here a thoughtful, intentional prayer.

This morning we're going to focus on verses one through 24. Those verses that we read together. And I'd like to just structure our time together in two parts. First, an honest lament.

In verses one through 20. Followed by a remembrance of mercy. Verses 21 through 24. An honest lament. It's the bulk of the passage. One through 20. Followed by a remembrance of mercy.

There's a marvelous transition that happens in verse 21. And we'll draw that out in time. So let's take a look at the first part. An honest lament. Jeremiah writes in verse one, I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath.

[12:32] The kind of affliction that Jeremiah speaks of here is a disciplinary affliction. We gather this from the word rod. I have seen affliction under the rod.

That is God's rod. God's wrath. Rod is an implement of direction. Certainly in Psalm 23, our sister Bailey read that.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. So it's a tool, an implement of direction. It's also a tool, an implement of discipline as well. Proverbs 13 verse 24. Whoever spares the rod hates his son.

And he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. The rod is a tool of direction and a tool of discipline. Right now, in this passage, God's people are under the rod of his wrath, the rod of discipline.

Well, what disciplinary action is Jeremiah referring to? It's that day of infamy in God's people's history. The awful exile of God's people.

[13:34] 586 BC, they're deported from the land. And we read this. It's warned of throughout the scriptures. That day that the temple was desecrated and destroyed.

Nehemiah tells us that the walls were broken down, destroyed by fire. The land was pillaged. Women were raped. They're lined up and they're headed out of Israel into Babylon.

An awful day. An abysmal day. And a day that was a direct consequence of their persistent rebellion against God.

Their disobedience. For centuries, they'd been rebelling against God. And God long suffered them, with them, through those times. They lived in defiance of God's word. Routinely following their neighbors, the nations that worshipped idols.

God had been so gracious to them. God had been so gracious to them, calling them unto himself, delivering them from bondage. And they're so quick to run into idolatry. And God graciously warns his people of this disaster some 900 years before it happened.

[14:38] Through Moses, Deuteronomy chapter 28. If you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God, the Lord will bring a nation against you from far away. From the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle.

A nation whose language you do not understand. A hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. They shall besiege you in your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land.

The Lord will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. This is God graciously warning his people of the consequence to come for rebelling against him.

He long suffered for them 900 years before finally orchestrating, overseeing the events of the exile. Now, this is the backdrop of Lamentations 3.

This is what Jeremiah mourns over and helps his people, facilitates their mourning over this consequence. Now, there are times in our lives where we just simply don't know the source of our suffering and our affliction.

[15 : 49] Unexplained suffering to no fault of our own. And some of us, some of you are in the midst of that right now. There are other times where we do have a direct tie to our consequences from our behavior.

And sometimes it's a combination of both. Lamentations 3 speaks of behavior-induced discipline and affliction.

Suffering as a result of our own sinfulness. A disciplinary action at the hand of God as a result of our disobedience to him. And the good news of this passage, as you track through, is that no matter the severity of your sin, no matter how far you've fallen, look, there's mercy.

God gives mercy to sinners no matter how far they've fallen. That's where this passage heads. That's the dynamic, glorious transition that happens at the end.

Affliction is not the end of the story for repentant people. Mercy is. That's where this passage is headed. That's where Jeremiah takes us.

[17 : 01] Before we make that transition, though, let's camp out in the imagery of the lament. This honest lament before God. Verse 3, Jeremiah says, Surely against me, that is God, he turns his hand.

Now, the open hand of God in the scriptures is a picture of provision. He is giving generously, abundantly, doling out to his people with an open hand.

But this image here, notice what happens. He turns his hand. In other words, he's turning off that provision in order to shock the senses of his people to repentance.

He turns his hand of provision to shock them out of their sinfulness. Verse 4, he has made my flesh and my skin waste away.

He has broken my bones. This wasting away of flesh and brokenness of bones are images in the Bible of suffering as a result of sin. For example, David, in his prayer of confession, in Psalm 32, says, When I kept my sin silent, my bones wasted away.

[18 : 11] Verse 7, Jeremiah says, He has walled me about so that I cannot escape. He has made my chains heavy. This imagery of imprisonment. Our sin shackles us.

It enslaves us. It imprisons us. And only God can liberate us from that house of slavery. He alone holds the key to unlock the heavy chains that shackle us.

Verse 8, Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. A feeling of forsakenness is what Jeremiah is communicating here. The awful silence of God in the midst of our suffering.

Do you know what that's like? Prayers for relief seemingly falling on deaf ears. We find this feeling of forsakenness in other laments of the Bible.

Psalm 13, How long, O Lord? How long? Will you forget me forever? Psalm 22, perhaps the most well-known lament in the Bible. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[19 : 13] Why are you so far from saving me? From the words of my groaning, Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, but I find no rest. This feeling of forsakenness.

This imagery is intense. Verses 10 and 11, He is like a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding. He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces. Jeremiah and his people feel hunted down by God.

Like a bear hunts its prey down. Verse 12, He bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. Picture an archer bending his bow, aiming at his target, and letting that arrow fly.

Jeremiah and his fellow countrymen feel targeted by God. Well, let's just pause for a moment and picture this. God is a ferocious bear lying in wait in a bush for his people to go by that he might maul them.

God is a skillful hunter, setting his sight on his people, bending his bow, about to release the arrow into their side. How do you feel about these images?

[20 : 23] If you're like me, you ought to feel uncomfortable. Is this how God is? These are shocking, seemingly sacrilegious images of God. How could he say these things?

Oh, but friends, this is the liberty of a lament. God can handle it. All of it. In fact, he wants us to vent to him because the worst alternative is turning inward on yourself, retracting in your prayerfulness to him, and growing bitter.

He can handle your lament. Bring it. Vent it. Tell him about it. It's the power of a lament. Laments are not primarily seeking to communicate truths about God, but rather the truth about the lamenter's feelings.

Therein lies the power and the usefulness. Laments seek not to communicate facts about God, but rather the feelings of the lamenter. This is a vent of Jeremiah on behalf of his people.

They're often unrestrained, unhindered, and Jeremiah's lament is no different. Well, God is not a ravenous beast lying in a bush waiting to pounce on his people.

[21 : 38] He does not hunt his people down like a skillful hunter, but in the midst of our suffering and our affliction, it can certainly feel like he's doing that. God doesn't hunt his people down.

Oh, but he does pursue them and press upon them through conviction. He places his strong and heavy hand of conviction upon us, which certainly feels unpleasant when we're placed under it. David writes in Psalm 32, For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up by the heat of the summer. In the midst of his silence, his unconfessed sin, he feels the hand of God pressing upon him.

God is pursuing him in grace with the goal of his repentance. It can feel unpleasant, though. The heavy, convicting hand of God that pursues us in our sin, that presses upon us through conviction. Laments are prayers of grief that primarily seek to communicate truth about how the lamenter is feeling in the moment of grief.

[22 : 50] Unrestrained, uncensored expressions of grief to God that often paint him in an unflattering light, as we see here in Lamentations 3. And God loves it.

He welcomes it because his people are praying to him. Their eyes are looking to him. That is the gateway of restoration. Eyes on God.

Fix your eyes on Jesus. In the midst of your suffering, eyes on God. That's the trajectory of restoration.

And that's what Jeremiah is inviting us to do. Brothers and sisters, lament give us license to come before God as we are. Not to polish ourselves up, not to pick ourselves up from our bootstraps. You need to go to God as you are. Tell him what you're going through. He wants to hear it. He can handle it. Lamenting to God serves as a guard against growing bitter towards him.

[23 : 52] Because notice, when you're lamenting, what's your trajectory? It's toward God. It's a Godward direction when you're lamenting. Yes, those truths are heavy, seemingly sacrilegious, but your trajectory is toward God.

You're looking to him. You're speaking to him. What's worse is when you're turned inward and going the other direction, retracting. Prayerlessness. One of the symptoms of bitterness toward God is prayerlessness.

And can I ask you, in the midst of your own difficulty, how would you assess your prayers to God? The concern point is prayerlessness.

And I know that we might even have the words, but let's open up the Bible. Turn to Psalm 13. Turn to Psalm 22. Turn to Lamentations chapter three. Let this be your voice when you don't have it.

Beware prayerlessness.

It's the root of bitterness. One of the glorious truths that we find about God in this lament and others like it is that God is sovereign over our suffering.

[25 : 02] God superintends our suffering. Yes, in his anguish, Jeremiah speaks in exaggerated terms about God in the lament. God is a bear lying in wait for me, but it's unmistakable whom Jeremiah credits for the source of this.

Who is in charge of it? Who's overseeing this affliction? Jeremiah knows supremely well that it is God's hand that has orchestrated this disciplinary measure.

God is orchestrating these dreadful events. He's not the author of evil, but he certainly superintends evil, has the power to bend evil, to accomplish his good purposes redemptively in people's lives.

That's what we see here. Jeremiah knows it. God is superintending all of this. He is sovereign over your suffering. You must believe that in the midst of your affliction.

God superintends all of it. It will guard you from walking away from him. This is medicine for the soul. I know at first glance it seems hard to swallow that God is orchestrating our suffering.

[26 : 17] Can't he just remove it? Well, yes, but he's doing something through it to be patient, turn to him. He's at work. He's accomplishing his good purposes.

What would be terrible news is pointless suffering, purposeless suffering. That is cause for despair. Affliction in our lives beyond the reach of God's hand working in it.

That would be awful news. And those are the alternatives that atheism and agnosticism offer us. Pointless, purposeless suffering. The Christian gospel, the Christian God, offer a better alternative. Yes, it's painful, but God is superintending all of it, accomplishing his good purposes through it. God is sovereign in our suffering. It's medicine for our souls when we can wrap our hearts and minds around this truth in those painful times.

Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, spoke extensively about the good news of God's hand in our suffering. He was well acquainted with suffering, bedridden in depression, multiple weeks, had to take long leaves of absence on the French coast just to get his mind and his head clear.

[27 : 33] He writes this about God's sovereign hand in his suffering. Oh, it would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have ever had an affliction which God never sent me.

That the bitter cup was never filled by his hand. That my trials were never measured out by him, not sent to me by his arrangements of their weight and quantity. If you drink the river of affliction, near where it pours out upon you, you will find it bitter and offensive to the taste.

But if you will trace that river back to its source, where it rises at the foot of the throne of God, you will find it waters to be sweet and health-giving. As long as I trace my pain to accident, my bereavement to mistake, my loss to another's wrong, my discomfort to an enemy, and so on and so on, I am of the earth earthy and shall break my teeth with gravel stones.

But when I rise to my God and see his hand at work, I grow calm. Many in our culture look to suffering and heartache in this world as evidence that God does not exist, that he's not involved in our world.

That's just false. The Christian God is sovereign over our suffering, and you see it from Genesis to Revelation, what he's doing providentially in our pain.

[28 : 56] Trace that river back beyond the source of your suffering all the way up, all the way up to the throne of God. He's working. He's good.

Trust in him. Cling to him. Verses one through 20, Jeremiah prays in honest lament.

Lament. And then we see a glorious transition in verse 21. An honest lament, notice, becomes a remembrance of mercy. Do you see what happens here?

There's a three-letter word, a conjunction, very basic, but it's the most beautiful word in all the Bible. But. But. My circumstances are abysmal, but this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. What a glorious transition. One of the most beautiful words in all the Bible is that three-letter conjunction, but.

[30 : 04] This passage parallels a passage in the New Testament that many of us are well acquainted with, that likewise captures a glorious transition. Ephesians chapter two, verses one through five.

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived, in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Can it get any more bleak and discouraging? Oh, but look what's coming. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he has loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. God is the author of glorious transitions, abysmal circumstances, but because of God, great transition.

That's what we see here. My circumstances are dreadful, but this I call to mind, Jeremiah says, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never, ever ceases.

[31 : 13] His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Well, how can Jeremiah declare this truth in the midst of his devastation? We need to ask that question. What has happened in these verses?

What is going on here? Well, notice Jeremiah's circumstances haven't changed. He and his fellow people are still in exile. They're living in a foreign land under foreign kings.

away from their beloved Jerusalem. His circumstances haven't changed, but his perspective has. His mindset has. Jeremiah remembers the mercy of God.

He calls to mind God's faithfulness to forgive. He remembers God's mercy. God is good and merciful. Jeremiah knows God has been faithful throughout the ages to his people.

He's acquainted with the Hebrew scriptures, the prophecies that have come before him. He sees God's goodness as he remembers. His circumstances have not changed. His perspective has.

[32 : 12] He's now remembering God's mercy. Remembering and requesting God's mercy is the pathway to restoration and affliction.

Even in their captivity in Babylon, God showed them mercy each day. God was providing for them even in their exile. We see this in Jeremiah's prophetic book in Jeremiah 29.

God has been so good to them. He instructs his people to seek the welfare of the city. He says in Jeremiah 29 verse 5, build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce.

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on his behalf. For in its welfare, you will find your welfare. Just reflect on that. God has deported his people.

They're in a foreign land. But notice his goodness there. They have crops. They have food. They have clothing. They have shelter. In the midst of their pain, God is providing. Can I ask you, in the midst of your pain this morning, how is God exceedingly good to you?

[33 : 14] Did you have breakfast this morning? Do you have clothes on your back? Do you have shelter over your head? These things that we just pass by and take for granted. God is exceedingly good to his people, even in their pain, especially in their pain.

Remember his mercy. They are new each day. Your circumstances may not change, but your perspective ought to when you think of God's goodness and his mercy.

How has God been good to you today in the last three hours? Recount his blessings. Consider his mercy. While in exile, God communicated this promise to his people through Jeremiah.

A very well-known verse that's oftentimes taken out of context, but let's read it in context. Jeremiah 29, verses 10 and 11. For thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you.

I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans for peace and not for evil to give you a hope and a future.

[34 : 22] This was God's promise to his people in pain, in exile. Notice what they're called to cling to. The same thing we're called to cling to in our pain. The word of the Lord.

It was a promise of the Lord given through his prophet Jeremiah that the people were to cling to. This too shall pass. This season will end and God will bring us to a place of restoration.

They're prompted to cling to the Lord's word and so are we in the midst of our pain today. Cling to the word of the Lord. Pick up your Bible and let it sustain you, especially in the midst of affliction.

They're clinging to the promise of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah who spoke of restoration. But friends, it would be partial restoration.

When they left their place of exile, went back to their beloved Jerusalem and began to rebuild the temple. When that temple was erected, there was great rejoicing, but there were also great tears as well from the older gentlemen who remember the glory of the old.

[35 : 25] It was partial restoration. Just one horizon of fulfillment of restoration. But we know the prophetic word has multiple horizons of fulfillment. And the greatest horizon is the restoration coming through the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

That's where ultimate restoration happens. That's the end game of God's promises. And we see the person and the work of Jesus Christ throughout this heavy lament.

Let me just trace you through this really quickly to see the goodness of your Messiah of Jesus Christ. It's embedded all over Lamentations 3.

The supreme display of God's steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness is through Jesus Christ and see the echoes of it in Lamentations 3. Verse 1, I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath.

Jesus bore the full outpouring of God's wrath that was reserved for us. Jesus took it. In our place condemned, he stood. Verse 8, Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.

[36 : 34] What was Jesus' cry at the cross? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Verbatim quoting Psalm 22, another lament. Jesus knows what it is to feel like his prayers are falling on deaf ears.

Verse 13, He drove into my kidneys the arrow of his quiver. The soldier's spear pierced the side of Jesus as he hung on the cross. Verse 14, I have become the laughing stock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long.

Jesus was taunted by the Roman soldiers. They put that crimson robe around him and paid homage to him as a false king. The passerbys mocked him.

You saved others, yet you can't even save yourself. The other criminal on his side, the one that wasn't repentant, reviled him. You saved others, yet you cannot save yourself.

Verse 15, He has filled me with bitterness. He has sated me with wormwood. Verse 19, Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall. This wormwood and gall are bitter plant extracts at times used for medicinal purposes.

[37 : 37] They're symbols of bitterness and affliction and pain in the scripture. And what was held up to Jesus' lips as he hung on the cross? Bitter gall to dull his pain.

Jesus Christ fully endured the affliction in verses 1 through 20 so that you and I could know the mercy in verses 21 through 24. That's the reality.

Just trace the steps of your Savior through 1 through 20. He knew it to its infinite degree so that you and I wouldn't have to. He endured the affliction in verses 1 through 20 so that you and I could know the mercy of 21 through 24.

Jesus was forsaken so that you and I would not have to be. Jesus' prayers went unanswered at the cross so that our prayers could be answered today. Jesus Christ received the full outpouring of God's wrath so that we could receive only mercy today.

Friend, you never ever have to wonder if God's going to give you mercy because that question has been forever answered at the cross where mercy poured out in its most abundant measure.

[38 : 52] So in the midst of your pain, look to the cross. That's the source of God's mercy, the source of his faithfulness, the source that says he'll never leave you. Look to the cross where mercy poured out, paid your debt, the mountain of your debt and mine, died for our sin and for anyone who would trust in him, repent of their sin, he grants them forgiveness and everlasting life.

There's no greater message. There's no greater hope. Believe it, trust in it, cling to it all your days. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies never come to an end. They're new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Amen.

Let's pray together. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for the gift of your word that you've preserved throughout the millennia and given to us as a treasure, as a support to us in the midst of heartache.

Thank you for the gift of lament in the Bible where we confess we wish we didn't have to use it, but in reality, in a fallen world, in our own sinful hearts, we will need this resource routinely.

Guard us from prayer from helplessness, from growing bitter. Help us to voice the full content of our hearts to you no matter what. Draw us ever nearer to you.

[40 : 19] Thank you for the cross that forever answers the question of whether or not you'll be merciful. You are. Great is your faithfulness. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.