Series: The Weary World Rejoices
Title: #1 Grief

Date: November 29, 2026
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LAMENTATIONS 1:1–6

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- Welcome to the first Sunday of **Advent**.
  - Advent means "coming."
  - Over the next few weeks, we get ready to celebrate the coming of Jesus—and look forward to the day he will come again.
- Our Advent series is called *The Weary World Rejoices*.
  - Notice who's rejoicing:
    - Not a world that has it all together.
    - But a *weary* world.
  - Whatever is going on in our lives right now—Christmas says we can find joy in the middle of it.
- To help us see that, we're going to spend the next few weeks in a book of the Bible that might surprise you—the book of Lamentations.
  - We'll look at some of the things that make us weary in this world.
  - And see how at Christmas—Jesus enables us to rejoice in each.

[Transition]

- Today we start with grief.
- Let me pray—and then we'll get into it.

[INTRODUCTION]

Every carol we sing was written by someone living in a weary world.

- In the summer of 1861, Henry Longfellow's **wife** was at home when her dress caught fire.[1]
    - Henry tried to smother the flames and was badly burned, but his sweet bride—she died the next day.
    - That first Christmas, he wrote in his journal: *"How inexpressibly sad are all holidays."*
    - The next year: *"'A merry Christmas,' say the children, but that is no more for me."*
- Then his eldest **son**—who had left home to join the army, without his father's permission—was badly wounded in the Civil War.
- And that **Christmas**—grieving his wife, nursing his son, with the nation still at war—Longfellow heard church bells ringing out and wrote a poem.[2]
    - It begins the way a carol should:

        I heard the bells on Christmas Day
        Their old, familiar carols play.

    - But then it turns:

        And in despair I bowed my head;
        "There is no peace on earth," I said;
        "For hate is strong,
        And mocks the song
        Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

- Longfellow wasn't feeling the Christmas spirit—he was weary in a weary world.

Perhaps you know what that feels like?

- Maybe this is your first Christmas without someone.
- Or maybe it's been years—but the ache comes back every December.
- Or maybe your grief is about a different kind of loss: a marriage, a diagnosis, a child, an uncertain future, a dream that died, or just the weariness of feeling like life isn't going as you planned.

[Transition]

- Here's the good news:
    - We worship a God who understands grief.
    - And more than that—we worship a God who's done something about it.
- So let's turn to Lamentations and see how we can rejoice in this weary world, starting with: 1) The **Cry**—grief…

[THE CRY]

- In 587 BC, the Babylonian army attacked Jerusalem.
    - They burned the city, destroyed the temple, and carried God's people into exile.
    - The **city** of God, **dwelling place** of God, and **people** of God—all in ruins.
- From the rubble, the book of Lamentations is written.
    - The book itself doesn't give us an author, but tradition has long associated it with Jeremiah, often called "the weeping prophet."
    - One thing we know for certain is that in Hebrew, the book takes its name from its first word: *eikah*—which means "How."[3]
    - It's the word you say when you can't believe what's happened.
- **V1:** How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become… The poet depicts the city as a woman—a widow, sitting alone.
- **V2:** She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her.
    - Grief compounds at night—in the quiet, in the dark.
    - Only tears for company—all alone.
- **V3:** She dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place. There's nowhere to settle, nowhere to rest, no home.
- **V4:** The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival.
    - Jerusalem was a city of feasts—full of people singing their way to the temple.
    - It should be a time of celebration, but now everything is empty—nothing but lament, sorrow, grief.

[Illustrate]

- In his excellent summary of Lamentations, Tim Mackie of the BibleProject says that lament allows us to do three things:[4]
    1. It's a form of **protest**—drawing attention to what's wrong with the world.
    2. It's a way to **process emotion**—pouring out anger and grief to God.
    3. It's a place to **voice confusion**—bringing our questions to God.
- Mackie concludes: *"These poems of lament give a sacred dignity to human suffering."*

[Apply]

- If you're grieving this Christmas, be encouraged that this is in the Bible.
    - God didn't edit it out. In fact, he gave grief words—and put them in his book.
    - Which means you don't have to pretend. Not here. Not with him.
- Instead of bottling it up, bring it to him.
    - Say "How."
    - And do the three things we just described: Tell God what's wrong with your world, how you're feeling about it, and the questions you have.
- Whatever's making you weary—you can bring it to God.

[Transition]: And as you do that, know that he'll do something about it. 1) The **Cry**; and now 2) The **Coming**…

[THE COMING]

- One of the hard messages of Lamentations is that the people at that time were being punished for their sin.
    - It's important to remember that this isn't usually the case with grief.
        - Sometimes pain is the consequence of things we've done wrong—from a simple hangover to the brokenness that followed our affair.
        - But most of the time, it's not—don't be too quick to jump to that conclusion.
    - But we don't want to duck the fact that it was the case for Israel here:
        - **2:17:** The LORD has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago.
        - For centuries, God had warned his people what would happen if they turned away from him, and now they were experiencing exactly that.
- But intriguingly, this very fact gives the author hope.
    - Why? Because it demonstrates that God is faithful to his word.
        - And as he was faithful in keeping his promise to judge…
        - So, the poet reasons, he will also be faithful to his promise to save.
    - This confidence takes us to the book's most famous verses: **3:22–24:** 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."
- But—hold the tension with me—this confidence didn't erase all his grief or doubts!
    - You know what that's like, right?
    - Hope one morning, grief the next; faith one morning, fear the next!
- So it is in Lamentations.
    - The poet swings from one to another.
    - Until the book ends with a prayer and a question: **5:21–22:** Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.
- Do you see how these verses capture the tension?
    - He believes God can restore them.
    - But he doesn't know that he will: *Maybe God has rejected us?*
        - And that's the last line of the book.
        - No answer. The question just hangs there.
- **Until Christmas.**
    - Nearly six hundred years later, God answered—not with a word, but in a person: in Jesus.
    - The answer to Lamentations' last question is *no*: God has not rejected us—he has come for us.

[Transition]

- Which takes us to our final point: 1) The **Cry**; 2) The **Coming**; and now 3) The **Comfort**…
- What does Jesus's coming mean for our grief this Christmas? At least two things.

[THE COMFORT]

1. **He gets it.**
   - In your pain, in your heartbreak—remember that Jesus understands.
     - He wasn't born into a happy world—he was born into this one.
     - He doesn't stand at a distance from our grief—he enters it.
   - He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief **(Isa 53:3)**.

[Illustrate]
- In fact, the Bible tells us three times that Jesus wept.[5]
  1. He wept for a **friend**. Lazarus (Jn 11:35).
  2. He wept for a **city**. Jerusalem (Lk 19:41).
  3. He wept as he faced the **cross**. Gethsemane (Heb 5:7).[6]
- For a friend, for a city, facing the cross:
  - Jesus is the true and greater weeping prophet.
  - He knows grief from the inside.

[Apply]: Which means—he gets us.
- Whatever you're facing this Christmas, Jesus understands.
- And that makes all the difference in the world:
  - Sometimes when you're in a hole, the best thing is to have someone in there with you.
  - Isn't that the message of Christmas?
    - Jesus doesn't shout advice from heaven.
    - He climbs down into the hole—into this weary world.
- Whether anyone else gets it or not, Jesus does.
  - Take your grief to him, pour out your heart to him.
  - He's with you. He knows what it's like. You're not alone.

Our Jesus—he gets it, he understands.

2. **He'll end it.**
   - Jesus didn't just come to join us in our grief—so we can be eternally sad together!
   - Yes, he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief **(Isa 53:3)**, but don't forget the next verse: surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows **(Isa 53:4)**.
     - He didn't just enter our grief.
     - He came to do something about it.

[Illustrate]
- On the cross, Jesus carried the very things that make us grieve—sin, and death, and all that's broken.
- And he buried them in the deepest hole of all—his own tomb.
- But you know what he did next: on the third day, he climbed back out again.
  - Death had done its worst, but it could not hold him.
  - Because grief didn't get the final word in his story—it won't in ours either.

Jesus entered our grief—but he also conquered it.

[Apply]

- That's why we lit the hope candle this morning, and that's why Paul says that we grieve with hope **(1 Thess 4:13)**.
    - We grieve—because things are not as they should be.
    - But with hope—because one day they will be.
- As Jesus came, so he will come again.
    - Remember the widow in Lamentations—sitting alone with tears?
    - When Jesus returns, he will wipe away every one **(Rev 21:4)**—and the weary world will be made new.
- Our Jesus—he gets it, and he'll end it.

[THE CLOSE]

[Grieving]: If you're grieving this Christmas:

- You don't have to rush. Hope doesn't mean you grieve less. It means you don't grieve alone—and it won't last forever.
- Bring your tears to him, let him sit with you, and let others sit with you too.
    - That's one of the ways God comforts us—by using his people to remind us of his presence.
    - Reach out to a friend or family member and tell them this season is hard.
    - If you feel like you don't have anyone—reach out to us.
        - Come and talk to me after the service or email care@cspc.net.
        - We'd count it a privilege to sit with you.

[Everyone]: If this isn't a year of grief for you, maybe this is the year you can bring that kind of comfort to someone else?

- Look for someone in your life who needs that this week.
    - Who has an empty chair at their table this Christmas?
    - Who's facing their first Christmas after a diagnosis, a divorce, a loss?
    - Who's struggling with something—a neighbor, a coworker, a friend?
- And don't worry too much about saying the right thing.
    - **Eric Wolterstorff** was just twenty-five years old when he died in a mountain-climbing accident.
    - In the years that followed, his father, Nicholas, processed his grief in a series of short reflections, which he later published as *Lament for a Son*.
    - In one section, he advises on what to say to someone who's suffering:

    "Your words don't have to be wise. The heart that speaks is heard more than the words spoken. And if you can't think of anything at all to say, just say, 'I can't think of anything to say. But I want you to know that we are with you in your grief.' … To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench."[7]

    - So just sit with them—let your presence say: You're not alone, and this won't last forever.

[Unbeliever]: And if you're here this morning not sure what you believe about Jesus—here's a question worth sitting with: Where else will you take your grief?

- Do you have to carry it yourself? Or attempt some kind of stoic acceptance?
- Don't you long for more?
    - To know that you're not alone in your grief.
    - To know that one day it will end.
- Only Jesus can do that. That's who he is:
    - Not a God who stands at a distance from your grief.
    - But the God who enters it and gives you hope.
- And you can come to him—he will not turn you away.
    - Remember Lamentations' last question—*Has God rejected us?*
    - No, Jesus was rejected on the cross—so that you never have to be.
- Will you come to him today?
    - He'll save you as you are, be with you in your grief, and give you the hope that one day all your tears will be wiped.
    - That hope means the world to me, and I want that for you.

[CONCLUSION]

- For all of us this morning, remember Longfellow? His carol started well, then took a dark turn:

    And in despair I bowed my head;
    "There is no peace on earth," I said;

- Well, because of Christmas, that's not where the poem ends:

    Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
    "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
    The Wrong shall fail,
    The Right prevail,
    With peace on earth, good-will to men."

- Longfellow didn't stop grieving. But he heard something louder than his grief.
- That's the good news of Christmas this morning:

We can rejoice in this weary world because Jesus has conquered grief.

Endnotes

[1] Details of Longfellow's life are drawn from Hymnology Archive, "I heard the bells on Christmas Day," accessed here 11/20/26.
[2] The poem was first titled "Christmas Bells." It is traditionally dated to Christmas Day 1863, while Charles was recovering at home; some scholars date it to Christmas 1864.
[3] The same cry opens chapters 2 and 4.
[4] See Tim Mackie, BibleProject, *Lamentations*. Transcript accessed here 11/19/26.
[5] I owe this insight to C. H. Spurgeon, *The Lamentations of Jesus*, accessed here 11/20/26.
[6] Hebrews 5:7 is usually read as describing Jesus's experience in Gethsemane.
[7] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 34.