



“The Tension: Lady Zion Alone” Lamentations 1

Today, we begin a short series on *Godly Lament*. It will only take two months, and we’re actually tacking on two Psalms of lament to the end of this series. Now, when you hear the word “lament,” you could be wondering, **“Why would we do a series on lament?”** And, that’s a valid question.

As I thought about this short series, I thought of a few ways in which I think this series will help expand our vision of God and life. First, **this series will lead us to see our need to confess our sins.** When we view God, and life, tritely, we don’t take sin seriously. People either ignore their sin or they minimize it. Even Christians don’t take James’ exhortation to *lament* over their sin. And, in some ways, I think we ignore that exhortation because we don’t know what lament means. We think it means grovel in the dust to earn God’s favor through our sorrow. But that’s not lament. Lament involves weeping, but it’s more. Lament involves seeing God’s holiness which then leads us to humility and agreement with God over our own sin as well as the sins of the community around us. Second, **this series will encourage us to weep with those who weep.** In our culture, and also in our churches, it seems we quickly want to jump to “put on a happy face!” If someone is sad, we think that means they’ve forgotten God’s promises and are living in sin. But that’s not always the case. Someone can have a clear-headed theology and yet feel tension. I think we tend to want to take away that tension quickly with a word of “encouragement,” but maybe we should simply weep with the people and trust that there are lessons that God wants to teach his children in the midst of the tension. Finally, I hope **this book empowers us to have a greater compassion for sinners.** We tend to view people in “victimizer” or “victim” category. If someone is a victimizer in our eyes, then we have the right to look down on them. If someone is not, then we’re “good” with them. But what if people are both? What if, even in the midst of someone’s punishment for their wrongs, they’re also in a sense helpless? Now, please know that when I say “helpless,” I’m not saying that people aren’t responsible for their actions, but I am saying that people suffer the affects of the fall and a fallen world in which there are many things that happen to us that we don’t dictate. In addition, people who are born sinners are bound to their sinfulness and need to be rescued!

So, think of these three points. If we see God as who he is, then we will first recognize our own neediness. Then we will have compassion on others who are broken and weeping. And we will even have compassion on those who have “brought things upon themselves.” This is all a part of godly lament. So, with this understanding, let me give a few points regarding this series. Obviously, this series is a short one, and I’m going to be traveling through Lamentations quite quickly. Each week in Lamentations will be a full chapter. For those of you who might be thinking, “I wish you’d only preach a few verses at a time,” I’m sorry, but I do have reasons for this. The first reason is that the book of Lamentations is a compilation of 5 poems. I’d rather keep the poems all together than separate them. I feel if I separate them, we might begin to “miss the forest for the trees.” I want to ensure that we keep the main point the main point. And, if you want to do further study on this, pick up a sermon manuscript

and go to the last page to look at my Bibliography. There, you can find a couple good resources for you to do deeper study.

Now, as I said, Lamentations is divided up into five poems. The first four are acrostic poems where the poet walks through the Hebrew alphabet. In the midst of explaining the depths of despair and lament, there's order. So, you'll see in chapters 1, 2 and 4 a total of 22 verses. Chapter 3 is an acrostic as well, but the author lengthens the poem. The first letter gets three verses. The second letter another three, for a total of 66 verses. In addition to this, the poet also writes in the form of a funeral dirge. It's almost as if the poet is saying, "Jerusalem is dead." And, in the midst of this funeral dirge comes prayers of pain. Then comes chapter 5. In this chapter, there's no acrostic and it doesn't contain the same meter as the previous four chapters. It breaks the order. And this seems to be done in order to explain the complete despair and chaos of the situation.

Lamentations is a beautifully written book. In addition to its acrostic nature, along with the meter. Each poem highlights the pain in a different way. But the book isn't simply highlighting pain generically. The book is highlighting a specific time in history: The Babylonian plundering of Jerusalem along with the exile into Babylon. This began to happen in the prophet Daniel's day in 605 BC. More took place in 597 BC with Ezekiel and Jehoiachin in 597 BC. Finally, the exile and captivity was complete in 587 BC. The temple is destroyed. God's gracious presence leaves. Why? Because the Israelites had broken the Mosaic covenant with the Lord. They were to obey and follow God, but they didn't – for centuries. And, for centuries, the Lord has been patient. He's warned. He's sent prophets. God's people wouldn't listen. Now, the Lord is giving them over to the pains of the covenant curses.

What we see in the book of Lamentations is the pain that the people experienced. And what's interesting is that God is non-responsive in this book. All confessions and statements of pain are met with silence. This only increases the lament. And it increases the questions in the authors mind. I would say that **one major question of the book is, Is God's justice just?** There is a confession of sin in this book. There's a confession of faith in God's justice. But that doesn't mean that there isn't still a struggle with God's justice. But there is confidence in his justice because there's also an acknowledgment in this book that God's justice is the seedbed for his mercy. So, **the overarching hope in this book is for God to return to them in compassion.**

One final note before we go further, let me again affirm that this book is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That means there is such a thing as godly lament. There is a lament that is holy and right. But that doesn't mean all lament is godly. As we approach this study, I think the words of John Calvin are very appropriate regarding this book:

The faithful, even when they bear their evils and submit to God's scourges, do yet familiarly deposit their complaints in his bosom, and thus unburden themselves. . . . Let us, then, know that though the faithful sometimes take this liberty of expostulating with God, they yet do not put off reverence, modesty, submission or humility (as quot. in Dearman, p. 435).

Cast your cares, but don't cast off reverence of God. With this, let's pray before we begin reading from Lamentations 1.

I am not going to read the whole chapter at once. Instead, I want to read the first half and later I'll read the second half. I've broken up the chapter into two big points. Again, the big question of the book is "Is God's justice just?" And here we see why the question is asked. We'll first see "Zion's calamity." And then we'll see Zion's Belief and Appeals. So, let's read verses 1-11a first to discover the calamity of Zion.

1 How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. 2 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. 3 Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. 4 The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival; all her gates are desolate; her priests groan; her virgins have been afflicted, and she herself suffers bitterly. 5 Her foes have become the head; her enemies prosper, because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe. 6 From the daughter of Zion all her majesty has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer. 7 Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers from days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was none to help her, her foes gloated over her; they mocked at her downfall. 8 Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy; all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns her face away. 9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future; therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter. "O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!" 10 The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation. 11 All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. "Look, O Lord, and see, for I am despised." ¹

1. Zion's Calamity (vv. 1-11a)

The title of this sermon is "The Tension: Lady Zion Alone." I say "Lady Zion" because in this poem, the Poet personifies the city of Jerusalem (which is, Zion) and compares Jerusalem to a woman. And this woman is all alone. I think we all ought to resonate with this personification of Zion as a woman. There are few things more painful than seeing a woman weep. Not only that, this chapter shows that this woman had children. Seeing the desperation of a woman with her children is heart wrenching. I remember watching a movie years ago that was historical fiction, taking place during the Holocaust. A story of a German boy who befriended a Jewish boy living in a concentration camp. This German boy wanted to help this Jewish boy find his father and so he disguised himself in the pajamas that the Jewish boy wore, dug under the fence and then went to search for the dad only to be herded with other Jewish

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:1–11.

people into a gas chamber. In the midst of this, the German mother realizes her son is missing and she begins to put pieces together as she sees he went to the concentration camp. She sees his clothes on the ground. She sees the hole dug under the fence. Then she knows the gas chamber had been used. The screen cuts to the mom helpless, wailing. I can't even recount the story without tears in my eyes.

This is how we should approach chapter 1 of Lamentations. Five times in this chapter, you read that there is no one to comfort Lady Zion. Five times, you read of groaning. In addition, 16 times, you see the word "all" referring to the devastation of Jerusalem. The word "all" means that the devastation is complete. Three times you have the word "Look" – calling God and others to look upon the all-encompassing devastation and aloneness. And yet, no one looks with compassion. But in reading this book of Lamentations, the Poet is forcing us to look.

And in these first 11 verses, we see four horrifying things that have happened to Jerusalem. The first is

Reversal of Roles (vv. 1-3). Verse 1 starts off with funeral speech. The "How lonely" isn't simply a statement of loneliness, but also a question of *why* to God. It's a painful and sorrowful way to talk.

The city being talked about is Jerusalem. This city was once full of people, now it is lonely. It's now almost a ghost-town. Picture that. Ghost-towns are sad because they show that there once was a thriving community, but for whatever reason, it disintegrated. How much more sad for Jerusalem. This was to be the city of God where he revealed his gracious presence. Now, it's dead?

But not only is it dead. Verse 1 says the city, which once was great among the nations, has become a widow. In our days, there are many more protections for widows than in the ancient world. So, to speak of widowhood speaks to the vulnerability of the nation now. The nation doesn't have a "husband." It's left to fend for itself.

To use another illustration, the author says Lady Zion is like a woman bereft of all her lovers. This seems to add more understanding to the circumstances of the captivity. She had many *lovers*. She wasn't faithful to her husband, the Lord. She sought alliances with other nations to gain protection from them. They brought in idol worship – even sacrificing their own children. King after king followed in sinful practices rejecting the Lord. But what's the end of idolatry? Desertion and enslavement.

We have to remember this in our own lives, too, Ventura. As individuals, and as a church family, we cannot be people who tolerate sin. Many of us are often tempted to think that sin will give what we want. "Lusting after a man or a woman will fulfill my longings," Or, "lying to get ahead is no big deal." "Ceasing to grow in the Word isn't that bad. I'll just fill my mind with whatever the world advertises to me." Listen carefully. Sin never just wants you to taste it. Sin doesn't even want you to partake of it more and more. Sin is like a venus fly trap. It will let you partake for a while, but in the end, it will swallow you whole. That's what we see in Lady Zion. These lovers seemed to care for her. She enjoyed them. But now, their true colors are revealed. This is the nature of sin. And Lady Zion is now experiencing the full force. Her loves are enemies. Not only does she receive no help from them. They despise her. So her weeping is bitter. Tears seem to be never-ending.

The consequences of adultery with sin and also her widowhood are revealed in verse 3: she has become a slave. Verse 3 is unique in using the male word for Jerusalem while still calling her a "she." But "Judah" is important. Judah was the one from whom royalty was to come and be established. But the kings were presumptuous with God's promises and now Judah has become enslaved. She was once a princess. Now

she's a slave. This word for "princess" simply refers to royalty. She was royalty. While a small nation, she was a nation nonetheless. But now, she's left like a widow, left in slavery, and practically dead. This is what the Babylonian exile did to God's people. So, we see the reversal of roles, but we also see:

Desolation (vv. 4-6). Where people once traveled to visit Lady Zion with joy for festivals, no one comes any longer. No one enters the gates. They're desolate. But for those within the city, the priests and young women, there's groaning and affliction. There's no hope for the religious. There's no home for the women. The enemies have taken ownership of Lady Zion, and they have ripped Lady Zion's children from her arms.

Look at this woman. Enslaved, widowed, practically dead and her children have been taken away as slaves. Verse 6 says that all her majesty has departed. And no man protected her. The princes were like deer in the face of pursuers. Just to make sure you understand that metaphor, do deer run and hide when pursued or do they face their attackers? They run and hide. That's what the men of the city did, but they did it because they themselves had no strength either.

Behold Lady Zion. Alone. Forsaken But in the midst of this description, the Poet gives a reason why this has happened. Look at verse 5: because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. . .² Why is all of this happening? Answer: it's happening because of the multitude of her sins. But it's not just passively happening. The text says the Lord himself is afflicting her. You can't get around this wording. In God's sovereign control over all of his creation, the events taking place under Babylon are actually God's hand of punishment for the people's desecration of the covenant they entered into with the Lord. In Jeremiah 25:9, God even calls Nebuchadnezzar his servant. Nebuchadnezzar is the servant to bring about desolation.

But here is where greater confusion enters in. God is just. Nebuchadnezzar is unjust, and he is unjustly treating Jerusalem. How can God be just and Nebuchadnezzar be his servant? How can God be just in the midst of injustice? These types of questions begin to bubble to the surface when we see the next section and ponder Lady Zion's shame.

Shame (vv. 7-10). Oh how shame envelopes us. And shame often comes in the form of reminding us of what we once had. Remember the good 'ol days? And truly Lady Zion had many kindnesses given to her in the past. The phrase "precious things" can refer to simply monetary treasures or it can refer to all things precious. I tend to lean that direction. It's all things precious, including monetary treasures. Lady Zion rehearses to herself what she once had and what is now *all* lost. And her enemies now gloat over her. She's not only alone. She's mocked.

Now, verse 8 comes in to remind us that all of this is happening because Jerusalem sinned grievously, but the shaming taking place might feel to the Poet and even to Lady Zion to be too extreme. How could God allow this level of shame? If God is just why does he allow Babylon to do what it does? At this point, you could say, "What? They're enslaved. They have been living in sin for centuries. They deserve the punishment. Yep. True. Got it .

But get what the Poet writes in verses 8-10. Jerusalem sinned and became filthy. All who honored her now despise her. Why? They have seen her nakedness. The verbiage of these verses seems to fall in line with ancient practices for when a spouse committed adultery in certain cultures. In other cultures,

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:5.

women's skirts were lifted to expose them publically in order to shame them for being unfaithful. They did this before an even more painful fate occurred. By the way, this is part of the picture of even Ezekiel 23. What we have is a grotesquely sad picture of a woman who ran to many lovers and sought refuge in them and in cruel irony, these lovers shame her. And these lovers destroy her. The shame and destruction is so unbearable, this woman, in tears remembering former days and longing for her children, can only groan and look away as nations taunt her.

As we get this picture in our minds, we understand the Poet when he says that her fall is terrible. She's alone. No one to comfort.

Then, interjected in this Poem, Lady Zion speaks. Up to this point, the Poet has been narrating. But now the woman herself doesn't just tell you what's happening. She tells you how she's feeling. Look at verses 9-10 with me again: "O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!"¹⁰ The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation.¹¹ All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength.³

Yes, she has sinned. But Lady Zion wants the LORD to look on her affliction. The wording her suggests confusion. The Lord made a covenant and also stated that he promised Israel's enemies to be subdued. Israel's enemies wouldn't take over God's presence either. God would punish them. How is it then that Israel's enemies are conquering? Is God just in this?

Even in the descriptiveness of Lady Zion's words, there are connotations of sexual abuse here. The word "hand" here was also used in Hebrew as a sexual euphemism and it's more than likely the case here because it fits the context. The nations sexually abused her. Not just one, but many nations. How? By violating all the precious things God gave to her.

Now, in the wording the woman uses, she's wondering, "How can God allow this type of discipline? If God is just, the enemies cannot win." There has to be something more she's missing. She is missing something, but at least she cries out to the Lord in her confusion.

Metaphorically, she's been abused sexually and then verse 11 gives one more detail of Lady Zion's fall:

Starvation (v. 11a). Everyone left give up anything for food. What good is treasure if you're dead? They hope to revive their strength, but the poem doesn't leave much hope for food reviving the people. The starvation speaks to them that they're starved of God and they need him!

Do you see the devastation that sin brings? Do you see and even feel the horror of Lady Zion? Now we will move into hearing more from Zion herself. While the Poet does insert some narrative, too. But in this section, we will hear Zion's understanding of why this has all happened, along with her appeal for mercy.

2. Zion's Appeals and Beliefs (vv. 11b-22).

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:9–11.

The end of verse 11 and beginning of 12 say, “Look, O Lord, and see, for I am despised.”¹² “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow. . . .”⁴

Lady Zion is crying out for someone to look at her. Imagine the scenario – a woman in the streets, exposed, weeping, crying out for someone to help and just notice her. What would you do? I hope all of you would be drawn to help her, but I imagine some of us might be skeptical and nervous and we’d go the other way (depending on what type of area we were in).

In just a little while I’ll comment on her pleas to the Lord. But for now, let me talk about her pleas for other human beings to notice. By the lack of response from others (and other nations), Jerusalem is essentially saying, “Am I nothing to you?” But not only that, Jerusalem isn’t playing a game of “my pain is worse than any other pain that has existed,” but instead the statement simply means that the pain is unbearable and horrendous. And, in the midst of this pain, does anyone have compassion?

Now, at this point, I want to ask you if you have pity on this woman. Some people wouldn’t because they would say that she sinned and got what she deserved. If that’s you then you’re missing godly lament. I love what one commentator wrote on this: **If we cannot condone her sin, are we to condemn it in a way that aligns us with the mocking enemies? Surely not. Surely the Poet is stretching us out in tension between our heads, which tell us to face the facts and consequences of Israel’s history, and our hearts, which cry out for pity and mercy on a sobbing woman (Wright, p. 65).**

This should be our response in a world of brokenness. Sometimes, I fear that we have more hatred for people’s sin than we have compassion on the people themselves. Our compassion should match, and go beyond, even our hatred for sin. Just as an example, I’ve been in churches where people are very globally missions-minded, paying money for people to share the gospel to tribes with all sorts of sinful activities. But those very same people look at their own town or nation, and instead of having compassion and wanting to reach them with the gospel, they lambast them. They don’t weep over their city, state or nation. They are only appalled. That is not godly lament. Ventura, we should be a people who sorrow for and have compassion on a world around us that is experiencing the pangs of the fallenness and punishment this world brings. We should be *looking and beholding them and caring for them*. Even as we look at Jesus’ example, he went to the weak, the poor, the sick, the sinful. Is this a part of your life or do you seek to get away from those types of people? We have the message of the gospel and should be there with the hope of Jesus!

But I digress some. Let’s get back into the text and see why Zion is making her appeal to people to care about her. What we’re going to see here is not simply Zion saying, “Look at my problems,” but we are going to hear her beliefs about how the problems came to be in her life. Let’s read the rest of the chapter, starting at the end of verse 12:

Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.¹³ “From on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all the day long.¹⁴ “My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail; the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:11–12.

withstand. ¹⁵ “The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst; he summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah. ¹⁶ “For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed.” ¹⁷ Zion stretches out her hands, but there is none to comfort her; the Lord has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should be his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them. ¹⁸ “The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering; my young women and my young men have gone into captivity. ¹⁹ “I called to my lovers, but they deceived me; my priests and elders perished in the city, while they sought food to revive their strength. ²⁰ “Look, O Lord, for I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death. ²¹ “They heard my groaning, yet there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it. You have brought the day you announced; now let them be as I am. ²² “Let all their evildoing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groans are many, and my heart is faint.”

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Lady Zion references the day of God’s fierce anger, which is more than likely a reference to the day of the Lord. This day was a day to signify God’s victory over his enemies. And yet here, Lady Zion is stating that this day is experienced in Jerusalem. Fires, nets and yokes were all part of besieging a city. And defeated soldiers were trampled dead or alive. All of these things are mentioned in verses 12-15.

But what’s very intriguing is how Zion speaks of these events. She could have said “We were trampled,” or, “Babylon attacked us.” But she does something different. If my counting is correct, sixteen times, Lady Zion refers to the Lord as the one ultimately responsible for the pain she’s experiencing. The Lord sent searing pain, like fire, to her innermost self. God set the net. God turned her back. God left her stunned and weak. God trampled on her like he would an enemy.

Some people might read this and think, “That’s not what God would do. God’s loving!” God is loving. God is also just. And while we can’t always reconcile in our minds these two things, we must remember that God’s rejection and punishment is a matter of weeping! In verse 16, Zion says this is why she weeps. Verses 16 and 17 continues to express the pain experienced. But this pain is happening at God’s decree. And therefore, she has *no one* to comfort her. If God is against her, she has nothing to cling to. So, she calls out to people, but they won’t look. Verse 19 says she calls out to lovers. They don’t care for her. She even calls to priests and leaders, but they are desperate, too.

It’s in the midst of this kind of season that you will either turn from God or cling to him. Some people turn from him because they say, “If he’s going to do this, then I don’t want him.” While others will recognize that their only hope is in God. They can’t figure everything out nor do they know why God is doing what he is doing. But they do know that they sinned against him and they rebelled and they are reaping the fruit of their own actions. While at the same time, they know God is merciful and gracious and is the only rescuer and hope.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:12–22.

This is what we see in Zion. Instead of blaming God, she confesses God is right. That means, God is just. Remember this statement. Justice is where she goes back to. Justice is the seedbed of hope. And, if God is just, then he will always do right. So, she at least knows and confesses that she rebelled for centuries. Then, in verse 20, she calls for God to look on her plight. With a churning stomach and a heart that has been wrung out because of her rebellion, she again speaks to the additional pain not only from within, but from other nations. The enemies are not only silent. The enemies not only do not comfort. But the enemies *delight* in what God has done. The day God decreed came about and they're happy. Then, we read at the end of verse 21: now let them be as I am. ²² "Let all their evildoing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groans are many, and my heart is faint." ⁶

The point is this: If God is just and punishes Jerusalem. God will remain just and punish his enemies. So, is God's justice just? Answer: it had better be or else there is no hope whatsoever. Is God going to be compassionate? That is Lady Zion's hope and appeal in these words. In punishing his enemies, Zion will find rescue. Even though Zion may not understand everything. Even though Zion is in immense pain, Zion essentially says, "Where else can I go. God alone can give comfort." And so, we have Lady Zion with hands open wide, confessing her sins and her belief in God's justice. Will he answer? The poem here ends on that note.

But what does all of this have to do with us now? Lamentations isn't just a chapter of the Old Testament relegated to the BC years. As we read through this, we should see glimpses of New Testament hope in Jesus. Zion is described as being shamed and naked, experiencing the wrath of God. And not even a thousand years later, outside of the city of Jerusalem, Jesus would be shamed and naked, taking the wrath of God on the cross. And why did he do this? To set us free from our sinfulness and reconcile us to God. In being set free to know and love God, Jesus now says to us that his burden is easy and light. We're not walking with the heavy yoke of idols. In addition, someday, when Jesus comes again and the Day of the Lord happens – we will be his friends (not his enemies).

Are you Jesus' friend? Do you trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Or, do you think you're all good and fine on your own? Someday, he's coming and he will judge! Don't be like Israel taking God for granted. Even for some here who have grown up in church, don't think that just because you go to church and do nice things, that you're all set and fine. God wants you, not merely your rituals. Trust the One who takes all shame and sin. Trust that God is just and worthy of your trust. I pray that all of us would be his friends and know his welcome.

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⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), La 1:21–22.