

But I Have Hope

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Scripture: Lamentations 3:1-18

A little preamble about Lamentations – this book was written by Jeremiah, also known as the weeping prophet, because for forty years he told the people of Judah that they were going to be punished by God, that God was going to let them go into exile. And they didn't listen. He wept before them, he cried before them, he told them to listen to God and they never did. For forty long years, this is what he did. Then one day the Babylonians came and they completely razed Jerusalem to the ground – the temple, the palace, the walls, buildings – everything was rubble. Lamentations was actually five dirges or poems about the death and destruction of a city, outlining the tragedy that came over Jerusalem. It's a requiem to Jerusalem.

*I am the man who has seen affliction Because of the rod of His wrath.
He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.
Surely against me He has turned His hand Repeatedly all the day.
He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away he has broken my bones.
He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship.
In dark places He has made me dwell, like those who have long been dead.
He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; he has made my chain heavy.
Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer.
He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.
He is to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in secret places.
He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces; He has made me desolate.
He bent His bow and set me as a target for the arrow.
He made the arrows of His quiver to enter into my inward parts.
I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their mocking song all the day.
He has filled me with bitterness; He has made me drunk with wormwood.
He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust.
My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness.
So I say, "My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord."*

What a paragraph of somebody crying out in absolute despair and desolation to the Lord! It's one thing to read this particular passage in the context of Jeremiah, Jerusalem and its desolation and rubble; but it's another thing entirely to take this position that he finds himself in and place it upon our own lives. Forget the Babylonians, forget what led to this happening to Jerusalem and Judah, forget all of that and ask ourselves the question: Do the things that he is talking about apply to me?

Let's go down that list: -

- **Afflicted**
- **Walking in darkness.** Is that how you feel? You get out of bed every day and you don't see the light at the end of this tunnel. You get out of bed and you just go through the motions.
- **Surrounded by bitterness and hardship** – is that a good definition of your life today?
- **Made my chain heavy** – what a descriptive line! It's like you are walking around and you have chains that are pulling you, and each step is drudgery.

- **God does not hear my cry; He shuts me out.** I wonder whether that's something that some of you believe that God doesn't hear you anymore.
- **Ways are blocked and paths are crooked** – is that how you sense your life, that everywhere you go you find a wall? You long for a straight path that will take you to a place that you ought to be in, but there are only crooked paths.
- **Desolate, lonely, dejected** – is that the condition of your life?
- **Laughing stock** – do you feel that others are laughing at you, at your situation, perceived or not.
- **Filled with bitterness** – are you bitter? What a tragedy if you are, because bitterness only harms you. Nobody else. It's like rust that eats through the strongest steel because it eats from within.
- **Forgotten happiness.** Such a powerful line! And what a travesty that if we go through life without moments of happiness, where the smile has been taken away from us and there is no joy. No situation that we encounter can bring a smile to our lips and the song has died out a long time ago.

I believe that many of you are in this position today because God placed this passage of scripture on my heart. And God doesn't make mistakes. If God has placed this scripture in front of you and is inviting you to be a part of all that was said, He is not going to leave you there. God may ruffle the waters of our lives, but He always cleans up the mess that comes up to the top.

So let's look at this passage and see how do we traverse this place. How do we navigate through this particular area of our lives? Maybe this has always been your Achilles heel. Maybe you are not completely immersed in it. Maybe there is an area of barrenness in a part of your life, and that's an area that you don't go to. You say: That's something that I have accepted as a part of my life. It's a place that gives me no joy. There's no peace if I enter there. It's just a desolate place – barren, dry, arid. There's no fruit in that area, yet I am carrying that along with me. Maybe that's where you are this morning. What does the Word of God tell you in that situation?

3:19-26

Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.

Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me.

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.

The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail.

They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.

It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord.

What does God offer in response to this kind of absolute desolation – either completely or partly in our lives?

We Recall.

He says, "This I recall to my mind," which means to bring back to your mind the things that God wants you to think about. And what are those things?

- **The Lord's love and kindness. They never cease.**

I don't know whether you think about God's love, whether you are able to put a mental picture about the moment when you felt God's love. Sometimes we have trouble with that. But I have always been drawn back to Mark 10:19-21 where Jesus

is talking to the rich young ruler. And Jesus tells him, "You've got to keep all the commandments," and he replies, "All that I have done." And Jesus tells him, "Sell all you have and give to the poor, and come follow Me." and he is unable to do that. But there is a line that says (v21) 'Jesus loved him.' The one who was not going to do what Jesus wanted him to do; and Jesus loved him.

That gives me so much of consolation that, whatever my situation, the love that God has for me is constant and will never ever go away. His love and His kindness will never cease. So recall to your mind, moments when you felt the love of God and the kindness of God in your own life. Bring that back. Look at those mental pictures. That is what Jeremiah is says, "Recall! This I recall to my mind a much more wonderful place where we experienced the goodness of God."

All of us, without exception, can go back to that position in our lives when we can call back a place when we experienced the love and kindness of God.

– **His compassions never fail.**

He is a compassionate God and His compassion extends to where you are this morning, beloved. Don't think that you are excluded from God's compassion. You're not!

I keep getting drawn back to Jesus feeding the five thousand! He couldn't bear to see them go back hungry. They had been with Him and He had to do something. He saw a situation and He wanted to extend help. That's what compassion does. The Bible says that His compassions never fail; they are new every morning. Get up in the morning and ask the Lord – Lord, Your compassionate eye, what will it bring to me this morning? You can confidently ask Him because that is what His Word says: His compassions are new every morning.

– **His Faithfulness.**

Recall to your mind when He has been faithful. The Bible tells us that God cannot but be faithful, because that is His nature. Even when we are not faithful, He is faithful. And we are His children, beloved. You are a son/daughter of the Most High God. Wherever you are, a faithful God is still watching over you. The Bible tells us that His eyes rove to and fro across the world looking to strongly support those whose hearts are committed to Him, because He is a compassionate God.

I want you to notice two wonderful bookends to these three things in v21 and v24 – "Therefore I have hope." When I recall these things in my mind, hope springs back into my life. For all of us who bear His name this morning, we can never, ever get to a point where we say, "I have no hope." And because we believe in one for whom nothing is impossible, we learn about suicides that happen all around us. A horrible statistic of suicide is that ever 40 seconds, somebody in the world takes their life. Every 40 seconds, somebody in the world has said, "I have no hope." That can never be your place or mine because of who we believe in. he says, "When I recall these things to my mine, I have hope."

We Wait For Him.

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him. Sometimes, that is the most difficult thing for us to do, especially when we are in this situation. When we are in this place where nothing seems to be happening, and everything negative is happening, we try to make something happen. I am always reminded that when we do that, we run the risk of settling for an Ishmael instead of an Isaac. There's wisdom in God's word, in saying 'Wait!'

And how do we wait?

– **Silently.**

I was reminded of a song that we sing:
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!

That's whom we need to go to; for us to say, "Holy Spirit, would you calm me down? Would You give me patience? Would You help me to wait? Let me see the things that I need to see. Help me not to take things in my own hands and try and accomplish something. Oh Lord, God, would You help me?"

– **Patiently.**

Psalm 40:1-3 is a beautiful reminder to us of waiting patiently for God.

*I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry.
He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay,
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;*

He set my feet on solid ground and maybe, you're just tired of treading in this miry clay that you are in, longing to be on solid ground. He says, "As I waited patiently for the Lord, this is what happened – He set my feet on solid ground."

What is the consequence of waiting? Isaiah would put it in context for us when he says, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." In the beginning, we read 'My strength and my hope have gone.'

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

I know this is a verse that we have heard ad nauseam, over and over again, so much so that as soon as we hear – 'They that wait...' we've already tuned off, because we know it all. But take a moment and just look at the words 'renew your strength'.

Check and see – are you low on strength this morning, the strength to overcome, the strength to look forward to a day?

Then he says, "You will mount up on wings like eagles, you will soar, beloved. You will run and not be weary, and you'll walk and not faint." Weary, faint – all of these things disappear when you wait upon the Lord.

We Seek Him.

v25b: The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.

Sometimes our kneejerk reaction to troubled times is to draw away from God. We stop reading the Word; we spend less time in prayer. We just about make it to church and go through the motions of singing and doing everything else. But deep inside there is a wall that has been created, and we sit in a place and say, "Lord, when You're ready, I'll be ready." Yet the Bible tells us to seek the Lord in the context of what we are going through, actively go after Him, get more immersed in His Word, talk to Him more, lean on Him more.

I love Psalm 34 where it says in vs. 4-5:

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.
Those who look to Him are radiant, and their faces are never covered with shame.*

Did you hear that? Faces are radiant and they are never covered with shame. God's promises for you if you are going through these troubled times. His Word for you is that there'll be radiance upon your face; there will not be shame.

vs. 6-8: *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.*

*The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.
O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him!*

Is He your refuge this morning? Do you need to come out of hiding and find Him, and crawl into His lap and say, "I'm going to just sit here." If some of you can't wrap your minds around that kind of picture, but go as you would to a dear friend and say, "In Your presence, I know that I don't need to say anything to you. I just want to be there Lord. Would You hold me during this time? Would You carry me through this time? I am worn out, I have nothing left and I'm scraping the bottom of the barrel. Lord, all these terms – desolate, joyless, no happiness – all speak about me. I need You this morning because I need to have hope. I need my strength renewed."

He offers us three things from the Word:

1. Recall.
2. Wait.
3. Seek.

Even through this troubled time, He will hold you by the hand and lead you through.

I want to close with this hymn by Joseph Hart.

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy
Weak and wounded, sick and sore.
Jesus ready, stands to save you,
Full of pity, love and power.

Come, ye thirsty, come and welcome
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.

Come, ye weary, heavy-laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall,
If you tarry 'til you're better,
You will never come at all.

I will arise and go to Jesus
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Saviour
Oh, there are ten thousand charms.

Beloved, you don't need to be alone in your situation; you don't need to be without strength. You don't need to be without hope as long as God is your Father. If you are a son/daughter of the Most High God, God comes to bat on your behalf during this time. He will carry you through.

Beloved, that's good news for us this morning. Good news! I can't emphasize it more. There just needs to be a change in the way we look at our situation, that we get back to where we need to be – recall, wait and seek, and just trust God to take us through.

I was moved as we sang 'Just As I Am' and I'd like for us to sing that in closing again. That's such a beautiful song, but I like this line, "If you tarry till you're better, you will never come

at all." Sometimes, we think that we've got to fix it before we come, but God is the fixer, beloved. He's the One who can and will fix it.

Just as I am without one plea; I come – is the perfect way for us to come this morning. I want to invite you to stand as we sing this song, and then I want to invite you, if you're in a place where you're just reeling under that first paragraph that we spoke about and you're saying, "That's me; that's where I am," I want to invite you. Even as we sing this song, would you take steps of faith and come to this altar and say, "I'm not where I needed to be but I want to be where You want me to be. I want to seek You this morning. Lord, just as I am without one plea, I come. I stand here (or kneel, or sit)." Take those steps of faith and say, "Lord, I am leaving the place where I am and coming to the place where You want me to be, right there with You. I submit to You, Lord. Would You come and do something in the situation that I am in?" so as we sing, if you feel the need to come to the altar, I beg of you, come and let the Lord work and minister into your life during this time.