

## Ceaseless Love

Lesson for July 7, 2024

### Unit II: Expressing Hope

#### Adult Topic: Hope Comes in the Morning

**Scriptural Background:** Lamentations 3:16-24; Psalm 30; Jeremiah 52:1-30

**Printed Text:** Lamentations 3:16-24

**Key verse:** *“Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: <sup>22</sup> The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease.”* (Lamentations 3:21-22, NLT)

During the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, German pastor Paul Gerhardt and his family were forced to flee from their home. One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried openly in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of Scripture promises about God's provision and keeping. Then, going out to the garden to be alone, he too broke down and wept. He felt he had come to his darkest hour. Soon afterward, Gerhardt felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence. Taking his pen, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many. "Give to the winds thy fears; hope, and be undismayed; God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head. Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears the way. Wait thou His time, so shall the night soon end in joyous day."

It is often in our darkest times that God makes His presence known most clearly. He uses our sufferings and troubles to show us that He is our only source of strength. And when we see this truth, like Paster Gerhardt, we receive new hope. Are you facing a great trial? Take heart. Put yourself in God's hands. Wait for His timing. He will give you a "song in the night."

*Our Daily Bread, May 7, 1992.*

### Key Terms

1. Affliction (verse 19) – Poverty; misery; depression. Utter loss of hope.
2. Peace (verse 17) – a state of tranquility or quiet: such as freedom from civil disturbance. A state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom.
3. Perished (verse 18) – To die; to lose life in any manner. Deteriorate, spoil. To become destroyed or ruined; cease to exist.
4. Remembering (verse 19) – To have in the mind an idea which had been in the mind before, and which recurs to the mind without effort. To bear or keep in mind; to attend to.

5. **Soul** (verse 20) – The spiritual, rational and immortal substance in man, which distinguishes him from brutes; that part of man which enables him to think and reason, and which renders him a subject of moral government.
6. **Strength** (verse 18) – Firmness; solidity or toughness; the quality of bodies by which they sustain the application of force without breaking or yielding. Power or vigor of any kind.

## **Lesson Background**

Jeremiah is the traditional author, though the book does not specifically note who wrote it. As with Jeremiah, it may have been written in part with the help of his servant Baruch.

The original readers and hearers of Lamentations included the survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem. Shocked and saddened at the loss of their capital city, friends, and family members, Lamentations identified with the people's grief while looking forward to a future hope.

Lamentations consists of five chapters, with each chapter providing a specific lament. In the first four chapters, each verse begins with sequential letters of the Hebrew alphabet as an aid for memorization. Chapter 1 includes two major parts, the sorrow experienced by the writer (Lamentations 1:1–11) and the sorrow of the city (Lamentations 1:12–22).

Chapter 2 focuses attention on the reasons for the Lord's anger. Lamentations 2:1–9 emphasizes the Lord's destruction without mercy on the city of Jerusalem. Lamentations 2:10–19 shifts to the human perspective of the destruction. The chapter closes with a prayer by the author for the city (Lamentations 2:20–22).

Chapter 3 continues to express grief over the plight of the city's destruction. Consisting of sixty-six verses, each verse begins with consecutive letters of the twenty-two-letter Hebrew alphabet, for a total of three consecutive cycles. The first section emphasizes discouragement, the second section offers hope, while the third section offers words of prayer for the city.

Chapter 4 provides details of God's wrath for two areas. Most of the chapter repeats the theme of the Lord's judgment upon Jerusalem (Lamentations 4:1–20). However, Lamentations 4:21–22 shifts to God's wrath upon Edom.

The final chapter breaks from the pattern of the first four, highlighting the prayers of those who remain. The first emphasis of prayer is that the Lord remembers those who have survived the devastation of Jerusalem (Lamentations 5:1–18). There is recognition that the Lord reigns forever and a prayer for Him to restore the people to Himself (Lamentations 5:19–22).

In the verses prior to the lesson (Lamentations 3:1-15), the author recounts how the wicked people of Judah described their relationship with God. In their sinful state the people felt that the Lord had abandoned them. In reality, the people had moved away from God. Because the people had damaged their relationship with God, they felt deep despair.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Hope Lost (Lamentations 3:16-18)

**He has also broken my teeth with gravel:** “What a figure to express *disgust, pain*, and the consequent incapacity of *taking food* for the support of life; a man, instead of bread, being obliged to eat *small pebbles* till all his teeth are *broken to pieces* by endeavoring to grind them. One can scarcely read this description without feeling the *toothache*.” (Clarke)

**With gravel:** “It could be argued that it refers to the type of bread made from the sweepings of the granary floor that Jeremiah must have received toward the end of the siege.” (Ellison)

**He hath covered me with ashes:** “Ashes” have to do with repentance and humiliation. It appears, He has disowned him.

**And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace:** The city was besieged by the Chaldeans, and now the people were taken captive. They could have no true peace, being in a foreign land, in an enemy's country, and out of their own, and far from the place of divine worship. Nor could the prophet have any peace of soul, in the consideration of these things, the city, temple, and nation, being desolate, though he himself was not in captivity.

**I forgot prosperity:** Or “good”; he had been so long from the enjoyment of it, that he had lost the idea of it, and was thoughtless about it, never expecting to see it any more.

**My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD:** The prophet relates the gloomier and discouraging part of his experience, and how he found support and relief. In the time of his trial the Lord had become terrible to him. It was an affliction that was misery itself; for sin makes the cup of affliction a bitter cup. The struggle between unbelief and faith is often very severe. But the weakest believer is wrong, if he thinks that his strength and hope are perished from the Lord. God will not give strength or hope, to those who rebel against Him.

No wonder Jeremiah and Jerusalem could say this. With God as adversary, what strength is there? What hope is there of either peace or prosperity?

## II. Hope Regained (Lamentations 3:19-24)

**Remember my affliction and roaming:** The miserable affliction of him and his people; the remembrance of which, and poring upon it continually, caused the despondency before expressed. Aben Ezra observes, that the words may be considered as a request to God, and so they seem to be. The prophet, and the people he represents, were not so far gone into despair, as to cast off prayer before God; but once more looked up to him, beseeching that he would, in his great mercy and pity, remember them in their distressed condition, and deliver out of it. For none could do it but himself.

Jeremiah did not prescribe positive thinking for this deep affliction. He actually felt it useful to remember it, to understand it for what it was, and to not pretend it wasn't there.

**The wormwood and the gall:** Figurative expressions of bitter and grievous afflictions.

**My soul still remembers and is downcast within me:** It was good for Jeremiah's soul to sink, to find its bottom point so that he could build on the right foundation.

"It is evident that in the preceding verses there is a *bitterness of complaint* against the *bitterness of adversity*, that is not becoming to *man* when under the chastising hand of God; and, while indulging this feeling, all *hope* fled. Here we find a different feeling; he *humbles* himself under the mighty hand of God, and then his *hope* revives." (Clarke)

**This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope:** For perhaps the first time in the book, hope is allowed. Having sunk low in his soul (Lamentations 3:20), Jeremiah now remembered something that started hope within.

"In a magnificent expression of faith in the unfailing mercies of God, the writer looks to the distant future with renewed hope." (Harrison)

Verses 22 and 23 embody the central thesis of the book of lamentations. When God dealt with His sinful people He exhibited His "compassions". The word translated "mercies" conveys God's love for His covenant people. The word "faithfulness" comes from a root meaning "be permanent, secure, and reliable". From this comes the associated idea of genuine faith; hence, the verb can be translated "believe" (Genesis 15:6). The word here is often translated "faith" but literally means "firmness" or faithfulness. Thus, it is used of the faithfulness of God Himself (Psalms 36:5; 40:10; Lamentations 3:23), and of the need for the believer likewise to be faithful in his life and in his service to God (2 Chronicles 19:9; Psalm 119:30; Proverbs 12:22). The word root stresses that real faith is more than inner belief, even more than whole-souled committal. It is a condition of the soul marked by such a stable character and an attitude of total trust that the believer's whole life is saturated with consistent, responsible service to God (compare 1 Samuel 26:23; Psalm 37:3-6). From the biblical standpoint, true faith results in faithfulness in one's life.

**Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed:** This was one of the things Jeremiah remembered. He remembered that as beat down and defeated the people of Jerusalem and Judah were, they were not yet completely **consumed**. There was still a remnant, and remnant with a promise of restoration. Wherever God leaves life, He leaves hope.

“The vital word in this verse is *hesed* (‘great love’ [**mercies**]), the covenant love and loyalty of the Lord that leads to *rahamim* (‘compassion,’ ‘mercy’), derived from *rehem* (‘womb’).” (Ellison) This Hebrew word, used about 250 times in the Old Testament, refers to God’s gracious love. It is a comprehensive term that encompasses love, grace, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, truth, compassion and faithfulness.

“See where Jeremiah gets his comfort; he seems to say, ‘Bad as my case is, it might have been worse, for I might have been consumed, and I should have been consumed if the Lord’s compassions had failed.’” (Spurgeon)

**Because His compassions fail not:** Even in the severity of correction God’s people endured, there was evidence of **His compassions**. There was rich comfort in realizing that the tender affection of God was not completely spent; these **compassions** were **new every morning**.

“The passage is full of beauty, as it deals with that tender compassion of God which had never been absent even in the work of punishment.” (Morgan)

**They are new every morning:** Each dawning day gives mankind hope in fresh mercies and compassions from God. We need a constant supply and God has promised to send them without fail. No matter how bad the past day was, God’s people can look to the new morning with faith and hope.

These **mercies** are always **new** because they come from God. “Our treasures, which we lay up on earth, are the stagnant pools; but the treasure which God gives us from heaven, in providence and in grace, is the crystal fount which wells up from the eternal deeps, and is always fresh and always new.” (Spurgeon)

- Every morning ends the night.
- Every morning brings a new day.
- Every morning brings new provision for the day.
- Every morning brings new forgiveness for new sins.
- Every morning brings new strength for new temptations, duties, and trials.

**Great is Your faithfulness:** All this made Jeremiah consider the great faithfulness of God; that He never fails in sending His mercies and compassions. Even in their catastrophe, God was faithful. He faithfully announced His judgments and performed them, and God would prove to be just as faithful in His promised restoration.

“The prophet addressed him personally and directly: ‘Great is *your* faithfulness’. In the process of remembering God’s attributes, Jeremiah was drawn back into living fellowship and intimate communion with his faithful God.” (Ryken)

**The LORD is my portion:** As in Psalm 119:57, Jeremiah found the key to satisfaction—finding one’s **portion** in the **LORD**. Whatever measure he was to receive, whatever inheritance, whatever future, it would all be found in Yahweh.

“**Portion**” pictures God as One who supplies security. Land and wealth can bring a measure of temporary economic stability, but having the Lord as one’s portion provides lasting and genuine security.

Times may be terrible on the earth, but the LORD is the blessed hope of the believer. He is life eternal.

These are the words of a *satisfied soul*. Jeremiah had no other place of satisfaction, so he was settled with the **portion** received, and that portion was the **LORD** Himself.

“The poet said in effect, that he has had so little of this world’s goods and pleasures because his share has been the Lord.” (Ellison)

**Therefore I hope in Him:** God couldn’t really be his **hope** until he was first his **portion**. This was a pathway to hope for him.

### Lesson Summary

Lamentations 3:16-24 offers profound lessons on suffering, faith, and hope. This passage is part of a larger poem in the Book of Lamentations, attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, expressing deep sorrow and seeking solace in God. Here are some key lessons from these verses:

**Verses 16-18:** The imagery used portrays a sense of being trapped, broken, and deprived of peace and happiness. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and articulate our suffering honestly. Facing pain directly is a crucial step towards healing.

**Verses 19-20:** The speaker reflects on past afflictions and expresses feelings of bitterness and despair. Remembering affliction and wandering leads to deep sorrow and a feeling of being bowed down. It is natural to feel overwhelmed and hopeless during intense suffering. These feelings are part of the human experience and should not be ignored or suppressed.

Despite the deep sorrow, the speaker finds a turning point by recalling God's steadfast love and mercy:

- **Verse 21:** "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope."
- **Verses 22-23:** Emphasizes God's unceasing love and compassion, which are renewed every morning.
- **Verse 24:** Affirms that the Lord is the speaker’s portion, and therefore, he will hope in Him.

The lesson we find is, in the midst of suffering, remembering God's faithfulness and steadfast love can restore hope. God's mercy is constant and renews every day, offering a foundation for hope and endurance.

How can we apply Israel/Jeremiah's experience to our lives from this lesson?

1. **Honest Reflection:** Reflect on your pain and suffering honestly. Acknowledge your feelings and don't be afraid to express them.
2. **Seek Solace in Faith:** Turn to faith and spiritual practices to find solace and strength. Remembering past instances of God's faithfulness can help restore hope.
3. **Embrace Hope:** Even in the darkest times, hold on to the belief that things can improve. Trust in the renewal of God's mercies each day.
4. **Community Support:** Share your struggles with a supportive community. Finding comfort in shared faith and experiences can be healing.
5. **Daily Renewal:** Embrace each new day as an opportunity for renewal and hope. Engage in practices that help you reconnect with your faith and find peace.

In summary, Lamentations 3:1-24 teaches us to face our suffering with honesty, find hope in God's unending love, and trust in His daily renewal of mercy and compassion.