

Enduring Hope in Great Faithfulness, Mercy, and Love

Lam 3:21-25

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, May 3, 2020

Well, as we mentioned this past week we are resuming our ministries and increasing our teaching with multiple SS classes, worship nights, midweek prayer meeting for missions, many Bible studies by Zoom, and tonight we re-sume our evening service teaching. There's a hunger for more teaching, I was blessed to see over 50 tune in to the first live SS class with John, and over 90 had viewed Bob's class on Nehemiah as of yesterday, dozens more listened on SermonAudio (including some in other countries). Ps 92 says it's good to declare God's love in the morning and His faithfulness at night.

Tonight: a special message on our Fighter Verses to help keep memorizing so we're not just hearing more, but hiding it in our heart, internalizing and applying. In future weeks we'll be continuing the book of James that we left off in our Sunday night teaching and different men will be helping with that, tonight our next memory text in Lam 3 couldn't be timely to meditate on. I hope that that this meditation and our memorization will give enduring hope

LET'S PRAY

How long, O Lord? That's the question of the Bible from the time of Moses to the book of Revelation. Moses asked God how long will the congregation grumble, and to the end times in heaven the voice of the martyrs asks the sovereign Lord how long till final judgment? But in-between believers have often asked how long do we have to endure? How long must it continue like this? How long will we be away from the house of God? How long can govt keep us from corporate worship and how can we get back. How long till we can start to rebuild some of what we've lost? How are we to think, respond?

The book of Lamentations is a book of *how* questions. In fact, the Hebrew name of this book is their word for "How" (*ekah*), a lament, a mourning of loss. It's the first word in the book, it starts chap 1, chap 2, and chap 4. In ch 3 if you look at v. 18, the question comes to an end, how can I endure when I feel like I can't keep going like this much longer, and I don't hear hopeful words from government leaders about the future. How do I keep hope alive?

¹⁸ so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord."

How did he find enduring hope? ²¹ *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:* ²² *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* ²³ *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* ²⁴ *"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."* ²⁵ *The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.*

CONTEXT / BACKGROUND – Destruction of Israel's place of worship and Jews couldn't gather there corporately for 70 years. Many were killed and most were carried off to exile in Babylon. Severeest govt restrictions on what they could eat and do, no corporate worship gatherings for decades, in fact the command was to worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue or face the fiery furnace. Some in the govt weren't content to allow private worship or even prayer in your home, there was a no-pray-at-home order (Daniel, lion's den)

Lamentations is written in that time from the perspective of looking at Israel and the once thriving nation brought to desolation (586 BC). The Bible has a place for lamentation, lament, mourning, asking how to God. Look at ch 1.

READ VERSES FROM STUDY BIBLE

MSB: This book ... teaches all believers how to deal with suffering ... In the first 4 chapters, each verse begins in an acrostic pattern, i.e., using the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 have 22 verses corresponding to 22 letters, while chap. 3 employs each letter for 3 consecutive verses until there are 22 trios, or 66 verses [pinnacle of the book] ... An acrostic order, such as in Ps. 119 (where all 22 Hebrew letters are used in series of 8 verses each), was used to aid memorization [or here perhaps to show the completeness – the “A-to-Z” of suffering]. The structure of the book ascends and descends from the great confession in 3:22–24, “Great is His faithfulness,” which is the literal center of the book.’

GOD IS FAITHFUL (3 ways)

1. first He is faithful in suffering

In verse 19, Jeremiah speaks of wormwood which was a bitter plant, and gall - the idea is a horrible taste in one's mouth that is hard to swallow

But just as a father may give his child medicine that tastes horribly bitter, our Heavenly Father gives doses of pain as His medicine because the end result will be healing in God's faithfulness.

Thomas Watson writes that “Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the [pharmaceutical doctor], make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. So all God’s providences, being divinely tempered and sanctified, work together for the best of the saints.” (*All Things for Good*, p. 11)

We need to trust the Great Physician that He knows what He’s doing, and that He will give us the right dose and will not give us more than we can handle.

VERSE 20 - *My soul remembers* (ESV adds “continually”)

My soul ... is bowed down within me (NASB, ESV)

Sinks within me (NKJV) or “is downcast” (NIV) or “depressed” (HCSB)

Jeremiah feels crushed “and confused, hunted and haunted, bitter and bewildered, hopeless and humiliated. But then his mood changes radically...” (Courson, 2:593)

VERSE 21

It is at the darkest hour that the light can shine most brightly. This section in Lamentations moves from the lowest valley to the highest mountain. The more he looked at himself, the more hopeless it got – the more he looked around him, the more he despaired, but now he looks to God and that gives him great hope

Notice that even as we pray, a transformation takes place within us

Prayer doesn't change God so much as it changes us. We see this a lot in the psalms that are laments as well, they pour out their heart and emotions to God, and then they come back to what God has said about Himself, and what is true about God, and they praise and uplift the attributes of God. So if you've ever experienced some of the same anguish and feelings you see in the scriptures, take heart, but don't stop there, you always need to keep reading. Don't just be comforted by the fact that Bible writers experienced some of the same struggles and emotions that you do, *keep reading* so that you see how they dealt with them by God's grace, that's where the greater comfort is.

Jeremiah ‘did not allow himself to get stuck in its mire. Just as he was pulled out of the miry cistern, so also was he gradually pulled out of this sense of total despair. The man who at one time said that God had shut out his prayer was once again praying to be remembered.’ (*Preacher's Commentary*, 19:356)

We as human beings may have time of great discouragement, or even depression – it is then that we must remember and trust and cling to God's attributes and character.

Our hope is not based on our circumstances or what we can see or our feelings, it is based on what we recall and know about God. We dwell on His attributes and what we know to be true about him, and that is what the author does in the following verses.

Psalm 77:7-11 (NASB95) 7 Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again?

8 Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion?

Selah ...

11 I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; Surely **I will remember** Your wonders of old.

We need to remember the deeds of the Lord and His wonders of old. So often in the Psalms they rehearse God's dealings

So we saw that God is faithful in trials, now:

2. God is faithful in steadfast love.

READ V. 22 **Hesed** – “lovingkindness” (NASB) or “steadfast love” (ESV) or “great love” (NIV) or “mercies” (NKJV) or “**faithful love**”

God is faithful in His steadfast **lovingkindnesses**. The plural form, used here, recalls many acts or perhaps the riches of divine love

‘Not merely love, but loyal love; not merely kindness, but dependable kindness; not merely affection, but affection that has committed itself ... love gives itself in covenant and gladly promises devoted love in that covenant; the covenant partner then rests in the security of that promise and may appeal to it’ (Dale Ralph Davis, *I Samuel*, p. 207)

This Hebrew word appears 26 times in 26 verses in Psalm 136, with the repeated refrain: “His **mercy** endures forever” (NKJV) or “His lovingkindness is everlasting” (NAS)

Psalm 136:1-26 (NKJV)

- 1 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His **mercy** endures forever.
- 2 Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His **mercy** endures forever.
- 3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His **mercy** endures forever:
- 4 To Him who alone does great wonders, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 5 To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 6 To Him who laid out the earth above the waters, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 7 To Him who made great lights, For His **mercy** endures forever—
- 8 The sun to rule by day, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 9 The moon and stars to rule by night, For His **mercy** endures forever.
- 10 To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 11 And brought out Israel from among them, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 12 With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 13 To Him who divided the Red Sea in two, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 14 And made Israel pass through the midst of it, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 16 To Him who led His people through the wilderness, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 17 To Him who struck down great kings, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 18 And slew famous kings, For His **mercy** endures forever—
- 19 Sihon king of the Amorites, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 20 And Og king of Bashan, For His **mercy** endures forever—
- 21 And gave their land as a heritage, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 22 A heritage to Israel His servant, For His **mercy** endures forever.
- 23 Who remembered us in our lowly state, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 24 And rescued us from our enemies, For His **mercy** endures forever;
- 25 Who gives food to all flesh, For His **mercy** endures forever.
- 26 Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His **mercy** endures forever.

So God is faithful in suffering, in His steadfast love, now thirdly:

3. God is faithful in His sustaining mercy

Again not just mercy, but plural *mercies*, the plural emphasizing God's manifold or abundant multifaceted and undeserved and unearned graciousnesses toward us. Some translations have "compassions" in Lamentations 3:22 – the word used of a mother and her baby (*raḥāmîm*; from a word related to the womb, it describes the tender, caring love of a mother). In fact it's used in the familiar story of Solomon and the two women who were claiming a particular baby as their own, the true mother 'yearned with compassion for her son' – that's God's love to His children

VERSE 23 – "They [His compassions] are new every morning"

Jeremiah 31:3 Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The Lord of hosts is His name:

36 "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the Lord, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever."

The very fact that the sun still comes up and the moon and the stars are still in place and the fixed order of sunrises every morning is a reminder of God's faithfulness to Israel, and there's a new reminder every morning.

GREAT – **Psalm 36:5** "Your love O Lord reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness reaches to the skies". Every sunrise and sunset reminds us of that. For Israel in the wilderness new manna was provided every morning as evidence of God's mercy and lovingkindness. God was faithful to give them each day their daily bread from heaven, fresh and new every morning

Psalm 92:1-2 (NASB95) 1 It is good to give thanks to the Lord And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; 2 To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning And Your faithfulness by night

Part of the way God's mercy is seen every morning is the very fact that we wake up alive – what an amazing astonishing thing it is that God allows us to live another day! And Psalm 92 says we should thank Him for that and sing praises to Him for things like that. We don't know when all this will end but we know His mercies will never end. Bad as things are, it is owing to the mercy of God that they are not worse. There's a lot of how and why questions out there, but we should ask how is God so gracious to me? Why is He so merciful to me, a sinner? How longsuffering He is to my sins. PTL

Great is thy faithfulness. Illustration: TMC graduation, sang this song, very moving, reflecting on how God's faithfulness had guided my life

***NOTE: In the context here, God's faithfulness is displayed in the fact that He has done exactly what He promised, including judging unrepentant Israel.

"The judgment itself was a witness to the fact that God had not abandoned His people."
(Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1:217)

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it*

So we've seen that God is Faithful, now in closing HOPE IN HIM

v. 24 *The Lord is my portion*

Notice already you see the change in Jeremiah as he has reoriented his thinking to God's attributes and character. God is, not will be, is now my portion – He is my inheritance, He is all I need, I find satisfaction in Him and Him alone, not in my circumstances.

Therefore I have hope in him

Hope here is a confident expectation based on God's goodness and sufficiency, we find all our happiness in our good and faithful God

v. 25 *The Lord is good*

In the Hebrew, the word "good" comes first in verse 25, 26 & 27 for emphasis. This is all about God's goodness

This word "good" is the same used in Gen 1:1–2:4, where the creation is described as being "good."

Notice the "good" defined here is further explained as including:

- waiting silently (v. 26) [in other words without complaining, v. 39]
- bearing a yoke (v. 27)
- grief (v. 32)
- whatever leads to repentance (v. 40)

Rom 2:4 "*the goodness of God leads you to repentance*" (NKJV)

'Lamentations 3:25–27 reveals some qualities of genuine faith: (1) belief in God's goodness to those who trust in him; (2) confidently and without complaint waiting for God's help; and (3) willingness to accept hardship and testing, knowing that they strengthen faith. Those who truly trust in the Lord do not complain or despair even when in trouble ... Those who learn in youth to bear suffering are better prepared for the hardships that may come in old age. (NAC, 16:474)

But verse 25 does not just say the Lord is good, this goodness is for a particular kind of person – who WAITS for and SEEKS God

Ps 37 says ‘*Wait for the Lord and keep his way ... Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.* (v. 34, 7 NAS)

Notice in Lamentations 3:25, it does NOT say the Lord is good to everyone – it those who wait for Him, AND those who seek Him. A good place to start is do you seek the Lord? And in counseling with people, if you start first by talking about their relationship with Christ, sometimes the deeper problem is that they've never truly sought the Lord, they're not saved

Isaiah 55:6-7 (NASB95) 6 Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

GIVE GOSPEL HERE

In Romans 8:28, the promise of all things working together for good is also qualified and limited to those who love God, to those who are saved / called. God sovereignly works all things but does so without being the author of evil, or the direct agent of sin, man is responsible for his actions but God is absolutely in control.

Thomas Watson published *All Things for Good* in 1663, one year after he and about 2,000 other pastors were ejected from their churches by the Church of England and suffered great hardship and suffering. He speaks from personal experience, but more importantly from a deep understanding and love of God and Scripture, of how this truth was not only theoretical but his heart confidence was in the good God who works all things, including sinful actions and suffering, for His glory and our ultimate good

“No vessel can be made of gold without fire; so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honour, unless we are melted and refined in the furnace of affliction ... As the painter intermixes bright colours with dark shadows, so the wise God mixes mercy with judgment” (p. 26)

“Luther [who ministered during a far worse black plague] said that he could never rightly understand some of the Psalms, till he was in affliction ... A sick-bed often teaches more than a sermon. We can best see the [ugliness of our] sin in the glass of affliction. Affliction teaches us to know ourselves. In prosperity we are for the most part strangers to ourselves. God makes us know affliction, that we may better know ourselves” (p. 27)

“Afflictions work for good, as they are the means of loosening our hearts from the world. When you dig away the earth from the root of a tree, it is to loosen the tree from the earth; so God digs away our earthly comforts to loosen our hearts from the earth.” (p. 29)