

Lam. 3. – Sermon MSS
Steadfast Love in Uncertain Times

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; ^[a]
 his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
 great is your faithfulness. Lam. 3:22-23

Prayer:_____

In Jer. 52:12-14 we read what happened to Jerusalem in the year 586 BC when the Babylonian army breached the walls of Jerusalem after the city had been under siege for two years and the people were literally starving to death:

¹² ^(G)In the fifth month, on ^(H)the tenth day of the month—that was ^(I)the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, who ^(J)served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. ¹³ And he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁴ And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.

What happened was the unthinkable and the unimaginable to the Hebrew people. Their false prophets had assured them all was good and nothing bad was going to happen. But the reality was that they were in mortal danger: many died and those who survived the slaughter in their city were carried off into captivity to Babylon, where they remained for 70 years.

What happened was a fulfillment not only of Jeremiah's prophecies – he had been warning them that judgment was coming because of their sins, but a fulfillment of even ancient prophecies given by Moses in Deut. 28:15

¹⁵ “But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

And v. 49-50 - ⁴⁹ “The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,⁵⁰ a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

The Historical Context:

The book of Lamentations is an eye witness account of the fall of Jerusalem. But it is more than a historical account, it is a spiritual evaluation – it is an analysis – of why this happened. It is a probe into the underlying causes of this destruction. The root of the problem is that the people had broken the covenant that Yahweh had made with them

through Abraham and Moses and David. They had rejected Yahweh as their king and God, and they had followed the pagan gods of the peoples around them. They had sunk into every kind of sinful practice that was happening in the world around them. They immersed themselves in sin and could chalk up their list of sins with the worst of the pagans, and then some.

The good and gracious God that had been revealed to them through the patriarchs of the faith whom they rejected and took to themselves instead the demon-inspired gods of the heathen nations.

In the introduction to Lamentations in the LXX we read:

“And it came to pass, after Israel had been carried away captive, and Jerusalem had become desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said...” NBC, p.659

Chpts 1-2, and 4 each have 22 verses, corresponding to the number and order of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet; chpt 3 has three verse for each of the 22 letters. Chpt. 5 does not follow this order.

According to Mr. Stephens-Hodge, the Book of Lamentations was read at one of the annual festivals of the Jews on the 9th day of Ab, in mid-July – the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

My friends, the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations are so relevant today because the Hebrews’ rejection of the true God and his standards of righteousness and morality is being repeated by millions of people today in America. But the God of love and faithfulness back then is the same God today. He has not changed. His mercy is still new every morning to those who come in humility and repentance before him.

Today I want us to do three things as we try to get a hold of the message of Lamentations:

I. Consider the Horror of the Destruction of Jerusalem

II. Consider the Reasons for Jerusalem’s Destruction

III. Consider the Steadfast Love of the Lord in the Midst of Destruction and Death

I. Consider the Horror of the Destruction of Jerusalem

A. Horror: Death and Destruction was rampant everywhere:

2:20-21 - Look, O LORD, and see!

With whom have you dealt thus?

Should women eat the fruit of their womb,

the children of their tender care?

Should priest and prophet be killed

in the sanctuary of the Lord?

²¹In the dust of the streets
 lie the young and the old;
 my young women and my young men
 have fallen by the sword;
 you have killed them in the day of your anger,
 slaughtering without pity.

B. Horror: Some of the people had even descended into cannibalism:

4:10 - ¹⁰The hands of compassionate women
 have boiled their own children;
 they became their food
 during the destruction of the daughter of my people.

This was a fulfillment of Moses' warning in

Deut. 28:53 - ⁵³"You'll eat your own children—the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God gave you—on account of the siege and the distress with which your enemy will oppress you.

C. Horror: Wholesale abuse of various groups of people:

5:11 - Women are raped in Zion,
 young women in the towns of Judah.
¹²Princes are hung up by their hands;
 no respect is shown to the elders.
¹³Young men are compelled to grind at the mill,
 and boys stagger under loads of wood.
¹⁴The old men have left the city gate,
 the young men their music.
¹⁵The joy of our hearts has ceased;
 our dancing has been turned to mourning.

d. Horror: The desecration of the holy places in the temple:

1:10 - 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

e. Horror: Their enemies gloated over Judah's destruction:

1:21b - All my enemies have heard of my trouble;
they are glad that you have done it.

2:15-16 - All who pass along the way
clap their hands at you;
they hiss and wag their heads
at the daughter of Jerusalem:

"Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?"

¹⁶All your enemies
rail against you;
they hiss, they gnash their teeth,
they cry: "We have swallowed her!
Ah, this is the day we longed for;
now we have it; we see it!"

f. Horror: The nation has been carried off into exile:

1:3 - ³Judah has gone into exile because of affliction^[a]
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.

1:18 c - my young women and my young men
have gone into captivity.

g. Horror: Jeremiah's own personal grief is overwhelming:

2:11 - ¹¹My eyes are spent with weeping;
my stomach churns;
my bile is poured out to the ground
because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
because infants and babies faint
in the streets of the city.

At times like the following, Jeremiah seems to be speaking as a representative of his people.

3:1-6 I am the man who has seen affliction
 under the rod of his wrath;
 2 he has driven and brought me
 into darkness without any light;
 3 surely against me he turns his hand
 again and again the whole day long.
 4 He has made my flesh and my skin waste away;
 he has broken my bones;
 5 he has besieged and enveloped me
 with bitterness and tribulation;
 6 he has made me dwell in darkness
 like the dead of long ago.

These types of texts can also be understood as prophecies, of pictures of the coming Messiah's suffering on the cross under the wrath of God in place of his people:

3:12-18 - 12 he bent his bow and set me
 as a target for his arrow.
 13 He drove into my kidneys
 the arrows of his quiver;
 14 I have become the laughingstock of all peoples,
 the object of their taunts all day long.
 15 He has filled me with bitterness;
 he has sated me with wormwood.
 16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
 and made me cower in ashes;
 17 my soul is bereft of peace;
 I have forgotten what happiness^[a] is;
 18 so I say, "My endurance has perished;
 so has my hope from the LORD."

1:20 - "Look, O LORD, for I am in distress;
 my stomach churns;

*“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
 Look around and see.
 Is any suffering like my suffering
 that was inflicted on me,
 that the LORD brought on me
 in the day of his fierce anger?”*

I. Having Considered some of the Horror of the Destruction of Jerusalem...

II. Consider the Reasons for Jerusalem’s Destruction

a. Reason: *The Righteous Judgment of God*

1.) *On his own people*

2:17 - ¹⁷The LORD has done what he purposed;
 he has carried out his word,
 which he commanded long ago;
 he has thrown down without pity;
 he has made the enemy rejoice over you
 and exalted the might of your foes.

3:39 - ³⁹Why should a living man complain,
 a man, about the punishment of his sins?

2.) *On the wicked enemies of Judah:*

3:64-66 - ⁶⁴“You will repay them,_[c] O LORD,
 according to the work of their hands.
⁶⁵You will give them_[d] dullness of heart;
 your curse will be_[e] on them.
⁶⁶You will pursue them_[f] in anger and destroy them
 from under your heavens, O LORD.”_[g]

b. Reason: *The Lord’s wrath has been poured out on Israel because of her sin:*

1:5 - ⁵Her 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.

2:1-6 - How the Lord in his anger

has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!
 He has cast down from heaven to earth
 the splendor of Israel;
 he has not remembered his footstool
 in the day of his anger.

²The Lord has swallowed up without mercy
 all the habitations of Jacob;
 in his wrath he has broken down
 the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
 he has brought down to the ground in dishonor
 the kingdom and its rulers.

³He has cut down in fierce anger
 all the might of Israel;
 he has withdrawn from them his right hand
 in the face of the enemy;
 he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob,
 consuming all around.

⁴He has bent his bow like an enemy,
 with his right hand set like a foe;
 and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes
 in the tent of the daughter of Zion;
 he has poured out his fury like fire.

⁵The Lord has become like an enemy;
 he has swallowed up Israel;

c. Reason: Even the religious leaders were sinful

4:13 - ³This was for the sins of her prophets
 and the iniquities of her priests,
 who shed in the midst of her
 the blood of the righteous.

d. Reason: The Sovereign Purposes of God will be carried Out:

3:37-38 - ³⁷Who has spoken and it came to pass,
unless the Lord has commanded it?

³⁸Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
 that good and bad come?

I. We Considered the Horror of the Destruction of Jerusalem

II. We Considered the Reasons for Jerusalem's Destruction

III. Consider the Steadfast Love of the Lord in Every Circumstance

A. Yahweh's love is steadfast in every situation:

3:22-But this I call to mind,
 and therefore I have hope:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;^[b]
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

The words "unfailing love" (3:22) are translated from a Hebrew term related to the Hebrew word for "stork," suggesting a mother's love and faithfulness. It can be translated "loyal love" or "covenant loyalty." *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*

²⁴"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
 "therefore I will hope in him."

²⁵The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
 to the soul who seeks him.

²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD...

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³¹...For the Lord will not
 cast off forever,

³²but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
 according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

³³for he does not afflict from his heart
 or grieve the children of men.

B. Because Yahweh's love is steadfast, he can be called upon in prayer:

1:20 - "Look, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my stomach churns;

c. Because of his covenant, we can expect the punishment and exile to end:

4:22 - ²²The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished;

he will keep you in exile no longer; ^[a]

5:21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!

Renew our days as of old—

I. We Considered the Horror of the Destruction of Jerusalem

II. We Considered the Reasons for Jerusalem's Destruction

III. We Considered the Steadfast Love of the Lord in Every Circumstance

For Jeremiah and people of his mindset, his spiritual maturity and sensitivity, what happened to Jerusalem and to its people was unimaginable, and when it happened, for those who still survived, it was an emotional and psychological blow that knocked them all to the ground in horror and disbelief. But it was real, the worst things that could ever happen, happened.

There was no deliverance. God's purpose of righteous anger and judgment on sinful men and women had come to fruition. The people of Judah paid a heavy price for their sin: they were completely wiped out by a foreign, pagan army. Their city was burned, its protecting walls were thrown down. The pride of their nation, their priesthood and law and temple worship ceased. There was no longer a temple standing where they could offer sacrifices for their sin.

Their secular life, their social life, their family life, their religious life – all these things were wiped out as the Babylonian army scaled the walls and began swinging their swords at children and pregnant women and every person they could find. They torched the city and set it on fire. And they tore down the protecting wall around the

city. Destruction was complete as they marched a few thousand captives off to force them to live in Babylon.

Yet what was the conclusion of Jeremiah and no doubt other godly men and women? In spite of all that happened, Jeremiah declared:

22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;^[b]
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

How could Jeremiah exhibit such confidence, such trust in God?

1. His people, the Jewish people, were nearly wiped off the face of the earth. Remember, the northern 10 tribes had been scattered years before when the Assyrians invaded and carried off the people, never to be reconstituted a nation again.

But Jeremiah remembered God's promise to Abraham:

Gen. 12:2 – "I will make you a great nation..."

And Jeremiah's spirit was revived. He knew God would keep his promise. He knew that through Abraham's descendants a great company of people would come into being.

That people would ultimately be the people of God, those who came by faith to God, as Abraham had come. Those who would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God's promises would not fail, but they would actually be fulfilled in a greater way than Abraham or Jeremiah could have imagined.

2. And then there was the loss of the King. Zedekiah had been appointed king by the Babylonians when they were exerting influence over Judah before the invasion. Then when it happened he fled and city, was captured, his sons were killed in front of him, his eyes were put out, and he spent the rest of his life as a captive in Babylon.

What about the promise to David, found in 2 Sam. 7, that he would always have a descendent on the throne of Israel?

But Jeremiah remembered the promise of God and he took heart. The nation would have a king. Jeremiah didn't know how it would happen, but he trusted in the promise and word of God.

So he took heart: the steadfast love of God and his faithfulness would never fail. That king would be ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. And Jeremiah took heart because he remembered the blessings and curses that Moses had pronounced in Deuteronomy 28 – the blessings for obedience of the people and the curses that would befall them if they rejected Yahweh and went off into idolatry and sin.

And so he saw God's promise again fulfilled. God did what he said he'd do.

Yet Jeremiah was still alive. God's mercy had preserved him and a few thousand of his people. There was still life, still mercy, still hope. As God had promised to curse disobedience, he had also promised to bring blessing in mercy. He took heart again. God would keep his promises.

He remembered the great covenant promise of God throughout the Bible, that God would have a people for his own name's sake and they would be his God.

He didn't know how it would happen. But he knew it would. So he took heart and declared:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;^[b]
his mercies never come to an end;

We too are living in perilous times. The corona virus is raging through the stores and the gathering of people throughout our city. But none of this changes this fact:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;^[b]
his mercies never come to an end;

No matter what may befall us, we as Christian people, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, always make the same confession of faith that was revealed to Moses as he hid in the cleft of the rock and Yahweh passed by him and declared:

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” Exo. 34:6-7

Let us never give up, never fail to make the good confession, no matter what the circumstances of our lives:

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

We, too, like the ancient people of Jerusalem 600 years before Christ, have sinned, we have worshipped our own idols and engaged in our own sins. We deserve destruction and punishment and wrath.

But there is a Savior who came to bear our sins and take their punishment on himself. Let us always run to him and trust in him. Join me in making the good confession:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;^[b]
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

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1. God is just and holy and righteous.
2. Divine discipline of his sons is a sign of his love:
Indeed, it is one of the surest proofs of sonship, “because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Hebrews 12:6). Being chastened by suffering draws the believer into closer fellowship with God the Father. PGR
3. **Willful sin against the Lord will reap it’s just punishment. It is dangerous to flaunt ourselves sinfully before the holy and righteous Judge.**
 - a. **God is a jealous God and will allow for no rivals.**
4. **Our only hope is to flee to Christ – to cry out in prayer.**

*Arise, cry out in the night,
as the watches of the night begin;
pour out your heart like water
in the presence of the LORD.
Lift up your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint from hunger
at the head of every street.
(Lamentations 2:18–19)*

Let us pray:

"Our Father and our God, we are so grateful that no matter what happens, no matter how tough the situations in our lives may become, your steadfast love never ceases, your mercies never come to an end. Every morning there are new! How great is your faithfulness to us your people. Thank you for being the Rock of our salvation to whom we may continually go. In Jesus precious name we pray and thank you. Amen."