

Jeremiah's Hope
Lamentations 3:16-33

Lamentations 3. Last week we read about Jeremiah's disappointment with his calling, and even with God. Most of Lamentations is about the same. But there are some famous and important lines in the middle of Lamentations, and they are worth reading and talking about.

Lamentations was written anonymously, which is true of most of the Bible. But Jewish tradition always believed it was from Jeremiah, and it sounds much like Jeremiah. It is written by someone who saw and experienced the same things as Jeremiah. So we will assume that. Even if it was written by someone else, it is still part of God's guidance for us.

Lamentations has five chapters. Chapter 1 is an acrostic. That means that there are 22 verses, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the first word of v1 begins with a Hebrew "a," and first word of v2 begins with a Hebrew "b," third word with Hebrew "c," for 22 verses.

Chapter 2 is the same, another acrostic, 22 verses, first word each verse beginning with the letters of the alphabet in order. Chap. 3 is a bit different, 66 verses, first three vv each begin with a Hebrew "a," next three verses each begin with a Hebrew "b," and so on, through the alphabet.

Chapter 4 has 2 verses for each letter, a total of 44 verses. And Lamentations 5 has 22 verses, but the first words do not go through the alphabet. So, there is some careful poetry built into Lamentations. This means that our section, almost the only hopeful verses in Lamentations, are deliberately put pretty much in the center of the book. These vv are intentionally the high point.

So we'll read 3:16-33, enough to get a feel for how Jeremiah describes his hope. We will look at ten key phrases in our text today.

1, It's all gone. (3:16-18)

¹⁶ *He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.*

¹⁷ *I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.*

¹⁸ *So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord."*

All these things have happened to me, says Jeremiah. So I say: "My splendor is gone, and all that I had hoped from the Lord." Long term disappointment here. So, do you tell yourself things like this? Jeremiah did. "I hoped for things from God, and they didn't happen, and now it's too late."

We have things like this that we tell ourselves on dark days. We probably word it a bit differently. How to you talk to yourself about your disappointment with life and with God?

2, **Yet this I call to mind** (3:19-21)

¹⁹ *I remember my affliction, and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.*

²⁰ *I will remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.*

²¹ *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:*

I remember all my troubles, says Jeremiah, I list all that has gone wrong, I remember it all too well, and my soul is downcast. I am miserable and discouraged. *Yet this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.* This I call to mind. Jeremiah calls something into his mind. This is a deliberate act of steering his mind in a different direction.

This is crucial. We cannot change much about our situation, sometimes a bit, but not a lot, and we often can't change how we feel. BUT we have much choice over what we tell ourselves.

We cannot change circumstances or feelings, but we can call different things into our mind. We can call into our minds things that give us hope. We CAN do that. We told God that we put our trust in him, right? Yes, we told him that. God never told us this would be easy.

Then we may not just let our minds stew in discouragement. Call things into our minds. It is a luxury. Because of the God we have, there is much hope. Use it. I'm not always very good at this myself. But it helps me often enough that I know what Jeremiah is talking about.

3, **Because of the Lord's great love** (v22) *22 Because of the Lord's great love [hesed] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*

“Great love” translates the Hebrew word *hesed*, which we don't quite have a word for in English. It means God's loyal covenant love. In v32 it's called “unfailing love.” The ESV calls it “steadfast love.”

God takes relationship agreements very seriously. If people want to be his children, want him to be their God, and God makes those people his children, he then binds himself to them, to us. He then loves through thick and thin. His compassion never fails. Even if he decides to punish us, underneath his anger is his great *hesed*, his unfailing love, steadfast love.

Hesed is like family love: wives and husbands, parents and children, sisters and brothers. Every family has troubles, but in healthy family relationships there is kindness and forgiveness and compassion. God loves us like that. We are his spouse, his children. His default position is kindness and forgiveness and compassion. Steadfast family love.

His steadfast love never ceases, and because of his steadfast love, his unfailing love, his *hesed*, we are still here. His compassions never fail. ²¹ *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:*
²² *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*

4, **They are new every morning** (3:23a) The hymn says, “Morning by morning new mercies I see.” We may not *see* the mercies, God did not promise that. But he did promise new mercies, new kindnesses, every day. If we look, we may see them! We read in 2 Corinthians 4: *our inner person is renewed day by day*. See it or not, God is at work in us every day, kindly helping.

God made Israel wander in the wilderness for 40 years, because they rebelled against him. Even then, though, God gave them manna every day, always led them to water; God made sure their feet did not swell, and their clothes did not wear out (Deut 8). Do you think he's doing less for you and me? No. Count on it, people, there are new mercies from God every morning.

5, **Great is your faithfulness.** *His compassions are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* In our text, this is the only time Jeremiah speaks directly to God: *your faithfulness.*

See the progression? First: “I say, My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.” Second: “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. they are new every morning.” He's called to mind the reasons why hope in God still makes sense.

And then, third, he's ready to say something directly to God: “O God, great is your faithfulness.” That's a big step from “My splendor is gone, and all I had hoped from the Lord.” By calling God's steadfast love to mind, he sees that there is more to the story. “O God, great is your faithfulness.” Let's call these things to mind.

6, **I say to myself, 'My portion is the Lord'** (v24a) In English we say, “the Lord is my portion,” but in Hebrew it's the other way around. *My portion is the Lord*. I like that. This began with the priests. *The Lord said to Aaron, “You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites* (Num 18:20).

The rest of Israel inherited good fertile land. That was their inheritance. But the priests got God himself. This was true of all the Levites. Moses said, *That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their fellow Israelites; the Lord is their inheritance and their share, as the Lord your God told them* (Dt 10:9; see Dt 18:2, Josh 13:4; Ez 44:28).

So, people, imagine you are talking with someone else: What did you get in life? I got the Lord. What did you inherit? I inherited the Lord. When everything was divided up, what did you get? I got the Lord. Jeremiah says this to himself. “I say to myself: ‘my portion is the Lord.’” He's talking to himself. Learn from the Lord's servants who've seen dark days: *I say to myself, “my portion is the Lord.”*

Paul writes: *I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.* I consider, I calculate, I do some accounting, I consider everything, I consider the Lord. Everything is garbage if I can know Christ, gain Christ, be joined to Christ.

“My portion is the Lord, my share, my inheritance, is the Lord, my slice of the pie is the Lord.” Jeremiah lost everything, and so did Paul. They both encouraged themselves like this.

This I call to mind: the Lord has unfailing love, steadfast love. His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. God, great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, My portion is the Lord.

[And it's worth knowing that God returns the favour. 25x in the OT, we read that God's people are his inheritance, his treasure. He's our share, our portion, and we're his. I looked them up.]

7, I will wait for him (v24b-25), *I say to myself, “My portion is the Lord, therefore I will wait for him; Why? The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.*

Jeremiah's situation had not changed, but he's been talking to himself about God and the big picture. He can even say, “God, great is your faithfulness,” and mean it. So he is going to wait for God. God is faithful, he has God, so he's going to wait. *I say to myself, “My portion is the Lord, therefore I will wait for him.”* Still talking to himself: “I will wait for him.”

Why? V25 - *The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.* He started off: *I say to myself: My splendor is gone, and all that I had hoped from the Lord.* That is still true, but Jeremiah has thought about God for a while, and Jeremiah knows that if he hopes in God and seeks God, this is not over, because God will reverse all that. God will be good to him.

And as of v25, Jeremiah is talking to the rest of us. He's now encouraging us: *The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.*

I say to myself, “My share is the Lord, my inheritance is the Lord, therefore I will wait for him; The Lord is good to all you who hope is in him, to all you who seek him.

8, It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord (v26). Has that ever even been done? We put our hope in the Lord, and count on him, and seek him. But wait quietly? *It is good to wait quietly for the salvation Lord.*

What he means is that deliverance from distress is surely coming, so relax. *The Lord is good to all who hope in him, to all who seek him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.*

On Wednesday night, at our midweek Bible and Prayer, Ps 74 describes the troubles of the faithful, then says: “*none of us knows how long this will be.*” Then early in Ps 75 God says, “*I choose the appointed time.*” We don't know the time, but because we know God, we know beyond any doubt that he will rescue us. We know. It is good to wait quietly for this.

We know God. His compassions never fail. His great love never fails. His great faithfulness never fails. He will certainly bring good to us that we've not seen yet.

vv26-30 It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.

This is obviously an older person speaking, an old servant of God. Jeremiah says it is good for a man or woman, while still young, to be put in a place where life goes against them and their only hope is the Lord. They suffer loss and disgrace while still young, and so they sit alone in silence, hoping in God, seeking God, waiting for God to turn things around for them.

This is not how our society portrays youth, not at all. But this is what Jeremiah thinks. He thinks it is good to figure this out while we're still young. And often enough, people do. *It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.*

9, No one is cast off by the Lord forever (v31). *Vv31-32 For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love [hesed].*

This is the second time our text uses *hesed*, God unfailing love, steadfast family love. Because you know the Lord God Almighty, you know that this will not last. He will bring grief, but then he will show compassion. His unfailing love is so great, his steadfast love, that it is guaranteed. Quiet yourself with this. Trouble will not last. You and the Lord together, without this grief.

You can tell that in this section, Jeremiah thinks we should not difficulties so hard. God brings grief, then he will show compassion. So don't fight the grief so hard. "Submit to the Babylonians." The grief is bad enough without anxiously fighting it.

People, I don't know that I can do what Jeremiah is saying here. Maybe. But he is saying it to all of us. If you find a way to improve your situation, take it, by all means, it is help from God. But there is also a place *to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.*

10, God does not afflict from his heart (v33) The NIV says *For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.* But the Hebrew word "heart" there, and the ESV has: *The Lord does not afflict from his heart, or bring grief to anyone.*

Do you get this? When he brings grief, his heart is not in it. When he brings affliction, his heart is not in it. God has his reasons, and he will do what he does. But when he brings grief or affliction, his heart is not in it. At some level he's not enjoying this, glad when it's done.

I saw my dad spank me or my brothers when his heart was not in it. He thought it was necessary, but he wished it was not. I did not always get that feeling, and he certainly never said anything like that, but sometimes it seemed pretty clear to me. God does not afflict from the heart. He does not like this either. It is not time yet for deliverance, he knows this must go a bit longer.

But his heart is not in it. The Lord does not afflict from his heart, or bring grief to anyone.

“Is not Ephraim (i.e. Israel) my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. My heart yearns for him. I have great compassion for him” (Jer 31:20). God does not enjoy your grief or affliction.

It is all gone, my splendor, and what I hoped for. Yet this I call to mind, and I have hope. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not afflict from his heart, or bring grief to anyone from his heart.

PRAYER:

O God, we hope in you, we seek you, we wait on you, we're counting on you. You are our portion, our share, our inheritance. You are all we have. We praise you for your steadfast love, your unfailing love, for your compassions that are new every morning, for your great faithfulness, for your loyalty to us. Thank you that you are good do those who hope in you. Thank you that you do not afflict from the heart.