

There's Always Hope

Lamentations 3

(Dismiss Beginner's Church for 3 & 4 year olds)

Election Announcement: On Tuesday, we will vote for the next President of the United States, along with many other state offices, and we will hopefully have a decision on who will lead our country. Some will be happy with who is elected, some will be sad, and some will be angry. Some will no doubt issue dire predictions on what will happen to our country no matter who is elected. It will be very tempting to become anxious and begin to worry. Remember the words of Daniel 12:2, "He (God) changes times and seasons; **he removes kings and sets up kings**; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding."

Be comforted that God is in control. God is not bound by rulers, kings, and presidents. He is not held in check by Supreme Court justices, new laws, or constitutional changes.

And God's church is not choked by evil rulers. As you view history, even when corrupt, wicked leaders came to power, the gospel still went out. It still changed lives, and nothing could stop it. The church is not bound by politicians.

As we approach Election Day, our country will elect a new leader, but one thing will remain the same – God is on the throne, and He is over all of His creation. And because of that, every child of God has hope regardless of the Election Day outcome.

Turn in your Bibles to Lamentations 3. If you don't have a Bible, grab one from the pew in front of you and turn to page 688.

Introduction: You know the feeling you get you think you have reached a dead end in life? You felt like you weren't going anywhere and the future didn't look like it was going to improve? It's a terrible, gutwrenching feeling.

I was hired at a call center several years ago. It was nationwide leasing office. People called us thinking they were calling an apartment complex in California or Texas or Pennsylvania, but it actually got transferred to us in South Carolina. Usually people called to simply find out how much an apartment costs, but it was our job to withhold that information of how much the apartment costs until we got all of their contact information. Do you see how this could be bad?

People want to find out if an apartment costs \$500 a month – they were looking for one number, but they didn't know they were about to go on a 10-step process to collect their information. This was nothing illegal going on, and people didn't have to give us their contact info, but what it really did was just really annoy people. For most of our work day, we would try to calm people down as we worked them through these steps. It's so sad to make nice people angry while on the phone! I realized about 13 minutes into this job that I was not cut out for this. If I make one person angry it takes me about four days to recover – I was doing this a hundred times a day! I needed the money, but I dreaded walking into work each day because time seemed to go so slow. There seemed to be so little hope.

As we look at today's passage in Lamentations, we get some of the same thoughts – except much, much worse. As we go deeper into this story, we will see that hope should be gone.

Historical Background: In order to understand this passage most fully, it is critical to understand what is going on in Israel's day. For decades, God's prophet Jeremiah had been warning God's people of consequences for their sin. He pleaded with them that judgment was coming; God will fulfill his covenant – if His people disobeyed Him, God would punish His children to turn them back to Him. Unfortunately, few listened to Jeremiah's warning. The evil, corrupt Babylonians had taken over the country city by city and had now surrounded the capital city of Jerusalem, and for about two years, they laid siege on Jerusalem in order to complete their conquest.

With the city surrounded, Jerusalem began to lose its ability to function. The people realized that there was no escape from the invading army. Societal norms collapsed. Laws, rules, and even morals were not able to be enforced. As food and supplies inside the city quickly vanished, Jerusalem residents lost all sense of standards, if you read chapter 2 & 4, you will see society collapsing – no food, rampant horrible crime – it was horrific. Throughout this entire process, we see people serving idols and crying out to any god that they thought might help them. Even the king, rather than staying with his people, tried to escape the Babylonian armies that had surrounded the city, but he was captured.

The two year siege finally overwhelmed the defenses of Jerusalem, and the city finally fell. Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians, who looted the town of all its valuables, destroyed the temple, the king's palace, and left the city utterly ruined. The capital of the Lord's people had collapsed and His people were now servants of a godless and perverse empire.

This is the scene that Jeremiah witnessed. He was there. An event like that would be the defining moment in anyone's life. Your country is gone, your city is gone, your way of life is gone, your friends are gone – there is nothing left. Can you imagine what that would be like?

With this in his mind, Jeremiah writes Lamentations. What he writes is naturally sad and sorrowful, but what you wouldn't expect is in the middle chapter 3 – a huge beam of hope. ***In a world blackened by sin and rebellion against God, you can find hope in the Lord by seeking Him through any circumstance.*** This passage is a message for followers of Jesus. If you are a believer, then I hope this message is an encouragement. If you are on the fence about this Jesus stuff, I trust you will see what an amazing God that desire for you to be in his family.

1. We can hope in the Lord because His love never stops. (3:22)

Explanation: The first several verses in chapter 3 describes the suffering and pain that Jeremiah and his country were experiencing. They were in the midst of God's punishment. The first king of Israel, King Saul, reigned nearly 500 years ago, but this was the worst time in the history of their country. Look at the agony Jeremiah experiences in the first 7 verses of chapter 3. *Read 3:1-7.* Can you feel it? Can you feel what he is going through?

And in verse 18 – Jeremiah believes that he has lost all hope. *Read vs. 18.* He believes he has nothing left. It's gone. The nation had crumbled, the king had been captured, God's people were being deported, and his city lay in ruins.

It is at this point, that something comes back to Jeremiah's mind. Right in his darkest hour he remembers something about God. *Look at vs. 20.* What does he remember? *Read vs. 21.* It is at this point that the tone of the language completely changes because he remembers something spectacular.

But there is more to this verse than meets the eye once you understand the context of the passage. God's people had often rejected Him, they worshipped other gods, and they committed atrocious sins against the Lord. What will God say to them? *Read vs. 22.* God is saying that his love and mercy will not cease for His people. Even in their sin, God did not stop loving his children and continuing to offer them mercy. That compassion, that mercy is drawn from a Hebrew word that has the idea of "loyal love." He will never, ever reject His people. Are we sure that this can be true? Well, Lamentations was written about 600 years before Christ came to this earth. And we can see from

Scriptures that this is true – all the way through the book of Revelation – that God will be loyal to His people.

Illustration: When I was little, I got in a trouble a lot. I remember getting sent to the principal's office when I was attending a Christian elementary school. I am sure whatever I did wasn't my fault, of course. It was my first time ever in the principal's office, and I figured when my parents heard about this, my life was over. Fortunately for me, the principal was not in the office that day; unfortunately for me, my dad wasn't in the office either. He was at home. And I got punished pretty good. But afterward, I was alive. I made it through. I was fed dinner. I didn't meet an untimely death in first grade. In fact, my parents even still loved me. And they loyally kept me as their son despite some serious faults on my side of the bargain.

Application: Do we realize what a comforting thought we have in this verse? A child of God can't do anything to lose the loyal love of God. There could be punishment, there could be discipline, but God's mercy is always there. This is not normal love. Even when we sin badly, God still wants you and is not finished with you. This is supernatural compassion. If one of my friends openly rejected me over and over again, if he mocked me, and he did it for decades, I would highly doubt I would have love and mercy for that guy. But God is loyal when we are not. Do we ever deserve God's love? You want hope? Well, you have it in the loyal love and compassion of God's love.

Transition: Not only can we hope in the Lord because His love never stops, but we can hope in the Lord because faithfulness is constant.

2. We can hope in the Lord because His faithfulness is constant. (3:23)

Explanation: *Look at vs. 23.* Jeremiah realizes, in the midst of complete chaos in his life that God is faithful, and he will *always* be faithful. His mercies are new every morning. That word *new* has the idea of *freshness*. We love the idea of something being fresh. You want fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, fresh flowers. We love a new start. It's a good thing because it's new. Every day he had the opportunity to see God work in His life – again. There was an incredible supply of God's mercy and God's faithfulness. Every day it was new and fresh again! This is relief! Can the believer push God over the edge where he gives up and walks away? Every morning God is there – faithful and merciful. That is good stuff – not as a license to sin, but to praise the name of God and say thank you

Illustration: This isn't some abstract idea. God's constant faithfulness is as real today as it was in Jeremiah's time. We have proof. Many of you heard in

Sunday school this past week the report of the Ukraine mission team. You heard how God was faithful to keep his promises of His Word not returning empty. People turned to Jesus over there despite a language barrier – the mission team saw it. The gospel seed was planted and it grew. God was faithful.

Some of you have gone through rough health issues over the past year. Maybe you didn't always respond well, but God did. You have seen Him work; you have seen Him answer prayer; you have seen His faithfulness.

Some of you could say that you haven't always lived your life following after Jesus, but you turned to Him, and He was faithful to forgive you. His mercy and faithfulness is constant.

I could tell you stories from my life. When we were ready to move to Wisconsin, I had a house to sell in a housing market that wasn't selling houses. I told God that I needed Him. Three weeks later, we had a cash buyer from out of town that wanted our house. Moving here, we had one weekend to find an apartment in Medford. The brand new apartment that we live in now happened to open the same weekend we visited. These aren't accidents. God is faithful.

Do you think we could keep going on this? You better believe it. We could stop the sermon right now, and many of you could finish it up for me. You could tell me how God has been faithful over and over again. Do you think He will stop? NO! We serve a faithful God. His faithfulness does not ebb and flow, but it is constant.

Application: Sometimes though, as we enter into a rough stage in life, we want immediate relief. We want God to come in and quickly end our struggle. God does not promise that. Jeremiah went through decades of pleading for his people to turn from their wicked ways. And maybe you are in a circumstance right now where you can't see exactly how it is going to work out. Grab on to vs. 23 and trust in a faithful God. Jeremiah was in the exact same situation. He couldn't see the end of how this was all going to work out for his life, but he remembered that God was faithful and he could hold on to that through it all.

Transition: We can hope in the Lord because his love never stops (even for sinners like His children), his faithfulness is constant, and number 3, because His is good to His children.

3. We can hope in the Lord because He is good to His children. (vs. 25)

Explanation: *Read vs. 25.* Another reason we can hope in the Lord is because he desires good for His children – to those children that wait on Him. What does that mean – to wait on Him? It means you will trustingly allow God to control your life. You are waiting on Him. Jeremiah was in the midst of the most serious trial of his life, and he remembers that if He waits on God to finish what He is doing, Jeremiah will not be disappointed. If you wait on God and trust Him, you will not be disappointed in the results.

We often do not want to wait though. We are convinced many times that what is going on in our lives is not good, and we lose our trust in God's plan. We are impatient with our status in life ("Why can't I have that right now?"), we are not content with our standing. We want the good without the waiting. But the verse is not finished, is it? We are to wait on God, and while we are doing that, we seek Him. That's our focus, and that is our goal. He will do good for his children, but we need to wait on Him and seek Him.

Illustration: Now that I am father, I understand this more than ever. I do my best to hold off on Carson illustrations, but well, you have to have one in here somewhere. Melissa and I love making Carson happy. We love making him smile and laugh. We enjoy watching him run around and discover new things. But there are some things that we won't let him do. He fights going to bed in order to play longer – even as he is fighting sheer exhaustion. But we are going to put him to bed because that's what he needs. We do things that he loves, and we do things that he does not particularly like because we want the best for him. He may not understand why he has to go to sleep each night at a certain time, but it will be good for him in the end. He may not understand why we don't let him chew on an electrical cord or why we don't let him stick his finger in a socket, but if Carson waits, he will see this is good for him. May the children of God wait on our spiritual Father? Can the believers here trust Him to guide us? A believer needs to be patient in his circumstances, waiting on the Lord while seeking Him.

Big Application: Why do you hope in the Lord? Why do you seek after Him? Why should you do that? I think that the answer is found in vs. 24 – *The Lord is my portion*. What does that mean exactly? The word *portion* has the idea of an inheritance or what you are looking towards. You hope in the Lord because He is what you get at the end of all of this – He is the believer's portion and inheritance. A true Christian seeks after God because that is what they want. You see – sometimes we miss the boat here, folks. We are looking for happiness and stress-free living in our 80 years on earth, rather than living for Jesus and the million billion+ years as part of God's eternal kingdom. The

believer's inheritance is eternal, but we often live for the temporal. We don't get to keep anything on this earth, but the follower of Jesus gets to keep everything in our portion and inheritance.

That's when you realize that Jeremiah has unlocked the secret to this – he lost his country, his city, his way of life, his people – and it was understandably heartbreaking. But as he mourned through chapter 3, he recalled this principle to his mind – I am not living for any of the things I have lost – God is my portion.

So while we are on this earth – we will experience tough times – it is a fact that you all know very well. So while we are here, God offers His love and compassion (even after much sin), He offers mercy and His faithfulness, and He will show His wonderful goodness to us if we wait and seek Him. But we know this life, with all its glitz and glamor, with all of the things that call out to us, with all the lusts that want our eyes and our time, it's not for us. We live for our portion and our inheritance. It allows the believer focus through the good times and the bad. ***In a world blackened by sin and rebellion against God, you can find hope in the Lord by seeking Him through any circumstance.***

Conclusion: Do you remember that story I told you about my job at the beginning of the message? It seemed hopeless, but God provided hope. What happened? While people yelled at me on the phone, I studied and memorized Bible verses. I only ended up staying there for two and a half months until the Lord provided me another job, one that was much better. While I worked there, I lived in an apartment above a garage and saved every penny I could from those paychecks. I used that money to buy an engagement ring for this wonderful girl that I knew named Melissa that I couldn't wait to marry. It turns out that God had plenty of good for me.

But even if none of that happened, even if I was still working that job, even if I didn't get the ring, or even the girl, my thoughts turn to an old song – The Solid Rock.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,

My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

That's all we need. Through any circumstance, our hope is there. There will be sadness. There will be sorrow. Our hope is greater for those that seek the Lord.

Kevin will lead us. Those that are serving communion, please come and prepare. Sing out if you know where you hope is placed this morning.