

This I Call To Mind...

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Date: 01 November 2015

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[0:00] In November, we're going to be looking at different spots in our Bibles, five sermons on hardship, holiness, and our loving Heavenly Father.

And this morning, we're going to start in Lamentations, Lamentations 3. If you're pulling out a pew Bible right now, the Dark Bible, this is going to be on page 1,278, and that Light Bible, page 582.

So, Lamentations 3. When we encounter hardship, we must call to mind our God.

When we are faced with hardship, we must call to mind who our God is and His posture towards us in Christ. Jerusalem was the city of David, the capital of Judah.

It was the center of commerce for Israel, the center of society, social things, political things, and of course, religion.

[1:15] Jerusalem was the location where and which the temple of God was. And it was believed that God Himself dwelt with His people in a unique way in His temple in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem fell after a siege of about a year and a half.

And in that year and a half, the inhabitants of Jerusalem suffered affliction after affliction.

Jerusalem. Forced to go to extreme measures just to stay alive. And by the end of the besiegement, mothers had resorted to the unthinkable.

In Lamentations 4.10, we read that some mothers were boiling their own children for food. It was horrific. It was devastating.

It was an extreme hardship. And as a result of the fall of Jerusalem, the book of Lamentations was written.

[2:34] The book of Lamentations is an eyewitness account of what took place in Jerusalem. Someone who saw firsthand the destruction of Jerusalem.

He lived through the affliction and extreme hardship. His name is Jeremiah, the prophet. And the book of Lamentations consists of five laments.

A lament is an emotional outpouring of one's heart to God. Sometimes they're very raw. They're in response to traumatic experiences.

Biblical laments are emotional grievings to God. We see them throughout the Scriptures. Psalms in particular. Laments are messy.

They cry out to God in the midst of pain, turmoil, and confusion. They are cries of help to God to make sense of things. They're also very instructive.

[3:43] This morning we're going to focus on the lament found in the middle of Lamentations. Lamentations 3. There are five laments. Each chapter in Lamentations is a lament.

And Lamentations 3 is at the center of Lamentations for a reason. It was very purposefully placed there. If you just look over Lamentations, you'll see that Lamentations 1 is 22 verses.

Lamentations 2 is 22 verses. Lamentations 4 is 22 verses. Lamentations 5 is 22 verses.

Lamentations 3 is 66 verses. Lamentations 5 is 22 verses.

Lamentations 5 is 22 verses. Lamentations 5 is 22 verses. Lamentations 5 is 22 verses.

Lamentations 5 is 22 verses. Lamentations 5 is 23 verses. Something happens there. Incredibly instructive for us when we face hardship. It gives hope.

This morning what I want you to see from Lamentations 3 is this. When we encounter hardship, we must call to mind our great God.

[5:15] Our great covenant making God. When we call Him to mind, hope is soon to follow.

And what we're going to see in Lamentations 3 is this played out in four moves. We're going to see a hope lost. Hope lost. And then hope remembered. And then hope rekindled.

And then hope restored. Jeremiah in these 66 verses moves from a hope lost to a hope restored. When we encounter hardship, we must call to mind our God and help. Hope is soon to follow. So let's look at this first point.

Point one. Hope lost. Would you look at Lamentations 3 starting in verse 1? And I'm going to skim this and help you to see something. Jeremiah says, I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath.

[6:21] God, He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light. Verse 4, He, God, has made my flesh and my skin waste away. He, God, has broken my bones. Five, He, God, has besieged and enveloped me.

Six, He, God, has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. Seven, He has walled me about so that I cannot escape. He has made my chains heavy. Verse 9, He has blocked my ways with blocks of stone.

He's made my paths crooked. Ten, He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding. He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces.

He's made me desolate. He bent His bow and set me as a target for His arrow. He drove into my kidneys the arrows of His quiver. Fifteen, He's filled me with bitterness and He sated me with wormwood.

Sixteen, He's made my teeth grind on gravel and made me cower in the ashes. What's going on, Jeremiah? Remember, we're reading a lament.

[7:22] He's in pain because the harshness of the affliction He's experiencing. This is a very honest crying out to God. And He's focused at this moment on the pain and the difficulty of the judgment that God has brought on Jerusalem.

And God brought it. We learn from Deuteronomy 27 and 28, a great passage on blessing and curses for God's people. If God's people would just obey God's voice, God would bless them and live long in the land.

But if God's people would persist in not hearing and obeying God's voice, God would curse them. And He would send them to the nations.

That's what we see happening here. God's curse befalling His people because they would not obey Him. Right now, Jeremiah sees God as an enemy.

But what we're going to see is that this is a severe mercy. God wants His people to return to Him. He wants to restore them.

[8:31] So in this section, Jeremiah is overwhelmed by the harshness and difficulty of his circumstances. He knows that God has brought the calamity. And right now, he just sees judgment.

He does not see God's goodness. He's no hope. He's more aware of the harshness than the hope. This feels like God is His enemy.

And then verses 17 and 18, it's like the summary of where he's at. He says, My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is. So I say, My endurance has perished.

So my hope from the Lord. Maybe you can relate with this. Here's what he's saying. I've got no peace. I've got no happiness. I have no more strength. I've got no more hope. No peace.

You know how we experience that? You know when you don't want to go to bed at night because you don't want to go to sleep? Because if you go to sleep, you're just going to lie in bed thinking about hard stuff. And so you stay up and you kind of turn on replay after replay of dual survivor or man versus wild.

[9:36] And you're just kind of putting off the inevitable. You don't have any peace. No happiness. Literally, the Hebrew is no good.

When you think about good times, they're in the past. Find yourself saying, I forgot what happiness is.

No more strength. I'm not sure if Jeremiah, when he wrote this, was sleep deprived and anxious. But we all know what it means to be sleep deprived and anxious.

It eats at your strength. And then he says, his hope has perished.

He's no hope, no confidence of a good outcome. He's ready to throw in the towel. He doesn't see how God's going to work here.

[10:35] He's just more aware of these harsh circumstances than his holy God. Can anybody relate with Jeremiah? Can anybody identify with his state of soul?

His state of mind? When things get hard in your life, where do you turn? Where do you look for comfort?

Where do you look for hope? When we encounter hardship, we must call to mind our God.

We've looked at a hope lost. Now let's look at hope remembered. Aren't you glad that Lamentations 3 doesn't end in verse 18?

I'm so glad. In verse 19, he starts talking about, he starts using remember language. Remember my affliction. In verse 20, he says that my soul continually remembers it, my affliction, the hardship.

[11:52] Seems as though that this hardship and misery that Jeremiah is experiencing is all that he's thinking about. It seems as though he's meditating on the mess and he's miserable.

No peace. No happiness. No strength. No hope. The darkness of despair has set in. But in verse 21, something happens and it's like it comes out of nowhere.

Verse 21, we read this. Verse 21 is where this lament turns in its focus.

It turns in its focus from circumstance and hard ones at that and turns to God. A crying out to God.

A remembering of God. Of God's character. And hope soon follows. We'll see it played out. But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

[13:05] Jeremiah is taking a faith-filled stand against an awful monster called despair. Do you guys remember Fellowship of the Rings?

Early on, it's like ancient now. Gandalf and the Fellowship, they're running through the dark mines of Moria.

They're being pursued by a growing horde of goblins and this particularly nasty thing called a balrok. I just like saying balrok.

This balrok is like the embodiment of despair. It's imposing. It's horned. It breathes fire. It's bent on destruction. And lives in darkness.

Well, Gandalf and the Fellowship reach a narrow bridge. The Fellowship moves ahead of him.

Gandalf follows. He turns around and faces the balrok.

[14:09] Remember what he does? Throws down his staff and says, You shall not pass! Lamentations 3.21 is Jeremiah saying, You shall not pass.

Jeremiah turned to face despair. No peace, no happiness, no strength, no hope, no more.

You shall not pass. But this I call to mind. And therefore, I'm not going to spare. I'm going to have hope. But this I call to mind.

Whatever this is, hope is soon to follow. And so we need to ask the question, What is this? What does Jeremiah call to mind that gives him hope in the midst of such devastating hardship?

What creates hope in a Christian? What gives us strength to move on? What is it? Well, in this passage, it's very clear. It's who God is.

[15:22] And his posture towards us. If you look at verses 22. 21 says, But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Who is this God that Jeremiah calls to mind?

It's his covenant making God. A God of steadfast love. Steadfast love of the Lord. The great I am.

And the steadfast love is a deep, rich loyalty towards Jeremiah.

Deep and rich. This steadfast love of the Lord is a love that seeks to do good for those he loves.

He loves. Mercies or compassions in the NIV. Mercies never, never ceasing.

[16:27] Never come to an end. New every morning. The mercies that Jeremiah has in mind here is not just judgment and then you're done.

The mercies that Jeremiah has in mind here is judgment, yes, but restoration after. God is merciful. He doesn't leave us there.

Then he says, great is your faithfulness. Do you remember all the he's at the beginning of Lamentations 3? He did this. He did this. He did this. He did this.

And now he's saying, great is your faithfulness. He's gone worship. He's gone exaltation. He's called to mind his God and he is thinking about the great faithfulness of his God. That God is reliable. That God is trustworthy. That God is steady. That God is the rock. And then he says, the Lord is my portion.

[17:37] And then, Billy touched on this last week. The Lord is our inheritance. He's bound himself to us.

That's what Jeremiah is calling to mind right now. Do you know what all these characters have in common? Steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness. These are attributes of God that have to deal, that get highlighted when he makes a covenant with his people.

When he binds himself to a people. These things pop. Exodus 34, 6-7. God reveals himself to Moses. When the covenant is renewed, that he is a God of steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness. Jeremiah is calling to mind who God is and his posture towards him. God has bound himself to Jeremiah. God is for him.

Therefore, his hope is in the Lord. Now, the covenant that Jeremiah has in mind, he's talking about the Mosaic covenant.

[18:55] The covenant that God established through Moses. And that is a covenant that has to do with sacrifices and a priesthood. And so, the sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant were the shedding of blood of bulls and goats.

And it had to happen a lot. Because we know from Hebrews that it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to put away sin.

And so, it was repeated over and over and over again. It was a bloody mess at the temple in Jerusalem. Over and over and over again. There was so much sin. There was so much blood. Sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice. It was only temporary. It was only a temporary sacrifice. And then the priesthood under the Mosaic law was sinful men who needed sacrificing for.

And then they would die. And then they would need to get more priests. You know what Hebrews said? The book of Hebrews says? That covenant has been made obsolete with the coming of Jesus and the new covenant.

[20:01] God has bound himself to us in Christ in a new and better way. God has been made. Sacrifice. Not the blood of bulls and goats. It's the blood of the God man Jesus shed for us.

And that one shedding of his blood accomplished an eternal redemption that's been secured. It's done. It's a better sacrifice.

And a better priesthood. Jesus is our great high priest. He doesn't need blood to be shed for him. He is perfect. He is eternal.

And he's eternal. He's alive today. You know why I'm telling you this? Jeremiah took hope in the covenant making God with the Mosaic covenant.

Do you know what that means for us? We have a greater hope. We have a greater hope. Because God has made a better covenant with us. God is for us.

[21:06] And he has secured that by the blood of Jesus. Who's alive and making intercession for us right now. You know what this stuff is?

This is gospel goodness. This is God's kindness and goodness to us in Christ. That he's bound himself to us this way.

And you know what it does? It ends up giving us hope. Because God is committed to us no matter what happens. When we remember who God is and his posture towards us in Christ, new covenant, hope will follow.

In Christ, we know that God is for us. That he's a God of steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness. He's our portion.

And it's been sealed in Jesus for us. Even when things get hard and confusing. A hope remembered.

[22:22] When we remember our God, we will remember hope. He's for us. For our good. Hope lost. Hope remembered.

Hope rekindled. In verses 25 through 27, we see hope in Jeremiah rekindled. The promise of God's goodness and the need to wait.

Look at verses 25 through 27. The Lord is good to those who wait for him. To the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Did anybody notice a word repeated three times? It's the word good. Do you know what? That's new for Jeremiah.

Because in verse 17, he had forgotten what good was. And now that he's reminded himself of who God is, he's starting to talk about goodness.

[23:22] The Lord's goodness. He was warming up to the very idea that God had good for him. So here's Jeremiah.

Who knows? Maybe he's standing in the very rubble of Jerusalem. And he has the growing confidence that the story is not over. God is still good despite the hardness he's in.

God is good all the time and all the time. God is good abounding in steadfast love to us. Look at verses 31 through 33.

For the Lord will not cast off forever, but though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. Think covenant.

For he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. The hardship that Jeremiah was experiencing, and even what we've been experiencing, it's for a season.

[24:29] God is not being hard on his people because he likes to be hard on his people. God doesn't bring affliction because he likes to cause people affliction.

If and when he afflicts us, it is for our good. The destruction of Jerusalem was a severe mercy of God, ultimately aimed to bring his people back to himself.

That's what we see in Deuteronomy 30. God brings the severe mercy to humble his people so that they repent and that he restores them.

God is being faithful to his word. He's good all the time. In the words of William Kuyper, a hymn writer who wrote *God Moves in Mysterious Ways*, he says this, Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace.

Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour.

[25:39] The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. What William Kuyper is eloquently telling us here is our need to wait upon the Lord in hardship.

Did you notice the words wait? 25, the Lord is good to those who wait for him. It's good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

It is good for man to bear the yoke in his youth. Isn't it hard to wait? It's hard to wait. It's hard to wait, period. And it's really hard to wait when things get hard.

It's hard. It's hard to wait on the goodness of God. And instead of waiting on the Lord when we're faced with hardship, we can give way to our fight or flight instinct.

When things get hard, we might want to bow up and look for someone to blame. Or we might want to bolt and say, see you later. When things get hard, we need to resist the urge to fight or flight, but respond by faith.

[27:00] Trusting in our God, looking to him, waiting upon him. We wait and bear. So what does waiting on the Lord look like? What does that involve?

Well, we've already been told some things here. And so very briefly, four things. Calling him to mind. Chapter 3, verses 21 through 24. Calling our God to mind when you're faced with hardship and you're thinking, I want to bow up or I want to bolt.

Call your God to mind. God of steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness. In verse 25, we're told to seek him from your soul with your whole heart.

When things get hard, turn to God with everything you got. That might look like a lament. In verses 40 and 42, what we see is when things get hard, test and examine your ways.

See if there be any sin in you and confess it to God. God uses hardship very uniquely in the life of a Christian to bring about holiness.

[28:15] We see as well in verse 41 that when we are faced, what does it mean to wait on the Lord? We lift up our hearts and hands to the God in

heaven. We worship him when things get rough.

Matt Redman has written a bunch of wonderful songs and we sang one last week, Blessed Be Your Name. I just pulled this out of it. Blessed Be Your Name on the road marked by suffering.

Though there's pain in the offering, blessed be your name. We worship God still when things get hard. Though you slay me, yet I will praise you. How can we sing such things?

How can we talk this way? Here's why. Because God has bound himself to us in Jesus. He is for us, even in hardship.

He's for our good. And we are to wait upon him and look to him. Behind a frowning providence, he hides his smiling face.

[29:22] Brothers and sisters, he is good for us. He is a good God. He's bound himself to us in Jesus. He's for our good.

I'm just going to make this last point ever so brief. We've looked at a lost hope. We've looked at a hope remembered. We've looked at hope being rekindled.

God is good. We're to wait upon him in between. And now hope restored. Do you remember how Jeremiah started Lamentations 3? Oh, he's doing this to me.

He's doing this to me. He's doing this to me. He's like a bear. He's like a lion. He's like an archer. He doesn't have my good. And at the end of Lamentations 3, we read this.

Look at verse 55. I called you on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. 56. You heard my plea. 57. You came near. 58.

[30:24] You have taken up my cause. 59. You have seen the wrong done to me. 60. You have seen all their vengeance. 61. You have heard their taunts. 64. You will repay them. You will give them dullness of heart.

Your curse will be on them. You will pursue them. Do you see the shift that's taking place? At the beginning of Lamentations, Jeremiah was thinking that God is after him. At the end of Lamentations, he believes that God is for him, and he's going to deliver him from his enemies.

It's a major shift. Now, the question that we got to count is, what accounts for the shift? Jeremiah renewed his mind on who his God was.

He remembered that God is a God of a covenant that he's made with him, and God is a God of a covenant that he's made with us in Christ. The key to this passage is 21 through 24.

We call to mind who our God is and remember his posture towards us, and hope will follow. Can I just add this one piece?

[31:37] That when Jeremiah penned these words, Jerusalem lay in ruins. But he's a heart of hope that he will see the goodness of God in the land of the living.

God is for us in Christ Jesus. He is as committed to this church as he has ever been. We will look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

We will wait on the Lord. We will be strong and take heart. We will wait on the Lord. So when we encounter hardship, we must call to him, and we can be confident that hope will soon follow.

Let me pray for you. God, we are so glad you are a God who has revealed yourself to us and bound yourself to us in Christ Jesus, that we can be confident that you are for us even in the midst of difficulty, even in the midst of confusion.

God, we look to you. We call you to mind. And therefore, we have hope that, God, you are good to us in all things.

[33:04] And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.