

A Steadfast Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 October 2021

Preacher: John Lau

[0 : 00] Have you seen an emotion wheel like this one on the screen? How many ways do you think we can describe the emotion of angry, sad, or feeling bad?

Or let me put it another way. If someone say, I feel lonely, isolated, abandoned, vulnerable, victimized, fragile, despair, grief, powerless, guilty, ashamed, remorseful, depressed, empty, inferior, hurt, disappointed, or embarrassed, which emotion do people typically lump these emotions under?

These 18 emotions, they often lump under sadness, and often is when we are overwhelmed with sadness.

We lost all our hope. We want to complain about our situation and point our fingers at the blames of our sufferings.

Instead, we would be more appropriate to ask the question the writer of Lamentation posed in chapter 3, verse 39. Why should the living complain when punished for their sins?

[1 : 21] To help us to lament about what we are facing? Today, I want to take you on a journey with the director of Lamentation to find hope in despair and in darkness.

To find our hope in God. If you open our St. Paul's app, you will see the three points for today. Hope eclipse, hope emerge, and hope everlasting.

From chapter 1 to chapter 3, verse 18 in the Lamentations, the 62 verses are like dark shadows moving across and eclipse our light shores.

All become dark when the writer say in verse 19 to 20, His soul is downcast within him, holy and utterly hopeless because of the desolation to his hometown Jerusalem.

The book of Lamentations is a gift from God for us to connect with him. The writer invites us to join God's grieving over sins and destruction of his creations.

[2 : 46] Barry Webb, a well-known Bible scholar, pointed out that grief itself, by its very nature, is a somewhat formless thing.

We need external help to address it. You might have experienced this yourself, especially some grief that hits you very hard.

Maybe a tough breakup, or someone very deep to you died, or watching a loved one dealing with debilitating sickness. As your mind moves in circle, repeatedly returning to the source of grief, unable to leave it, unable to resolve it, was it hard to identify precisely how you feel?

Lamentation is written in a form that allows grief to be fully exposed and expressed, and yet, at the same time, sets a limit to it.

These poems explore grief in its many various aspects, viewing it first from one's perspective, and then from another, and yet another.

[4 : 03] That is why there are seemingly many repetitions within the book, especially in the first 62 verses, as we slowly eclipse into complete darkness.

At one stage, the writer is observer, describing Jerusalem's personified suffering and desolation, and speak out on her behalf to cry out to God for help.

And it's during those pleads for God's attention to the suffering, he confessed and admitted that the sufferings are deserved treatment of the sin of rebellion and disobedience, because the Lord is righteous.

At another stage, he tries to be a comforter, to describe and understand what God is doing among them. All he saw was God's anger and acting like an enemy against his people.

Instead of protecting and holding back the destruction, God plundered and removed all they had. The city wall, the temple, things they trusted for protection and pleasure were all utterly destroyed.

[5 : 18] They have nothing they can live on. People were dying everywhere due to famine, and even considering cannibalism for survival. Their utter hopelessness drives the writer into darkness, as if all the sufferings and griefs become personal to him, and God is punishing him with the rod of his wrath.

In chapter 3, verse 1 to 9, he feels God has locked and imprisoned him in darkness, besieged him, and surrounded him with bitterness and hardship.

And even he can get out in verse 10 to 18, God lay a bear and a lion ready to mangle him. And the hunter that should shoot the arrow at the predators was aiming his arrow at him.

It was utterly hopeless and dark, and it was at this point, in the dark, the writer finally sees what God is doing and fully connects with God in his grieving process over sin and its destruction.

The whole range of human sorrow is explored. Deserted, widowed, enslaved, bittered, betrayed, exiled, restless, distressed, lonely, grief, wandering, afflicted, laughed at, despised, naked, filthy, dishonored, shamed, desisted, crushed, held down, slain and slaughtered.

[6 : 50] The aid to sad of sorrow is laid in front of the reader in these 62 verses of Lament. By the structure and pattern of these verses, grief is shaped and led to a conclusion where hope emerges.

A point of complete darkness where everything necessary has been said, at least for the time being, and a mourner can fall silent without feeling he has been suppressed or stifled.

In this sense, the structure and the pattern of the man have more than aesthetic significance. It also has a therapeutic and pastoral significance.

After 64 verses of expressing deep sufferings, hope finally offered. This hope has nothing to do with what humans can do.

It is all based on God's grace. The remembering up to 3, verse 19 and 20 is involuntary, driven by circumstance, as the writer described what he saw and how he felt.

[8 : 05] However, the call to mind of chapter 3, verse 21 is a deliberate choice the sufferer has made.

In his choice, hope emerges, and hope emerges because the writer recalls, repents, and returns. Reading verse 21 to 24, 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. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, the Lord is my portion, therefore I will wait for him.

Yet this I call to mind reflects a sudden change of perspective, like something had hit the writer. He called to mind the realization that people are not entirely wiped out, we are not consumed, that the destruction was on the city and possessions, on things that have become their idols, but not on all the people.

Himself, as a remnant, is a living proof of God's great love and compassions. These two words, in original language, were plural, reflecting the multiple occasions when God demonstrated his great love and compassions.

[9 : 30] They are more than enough to comfort and deal with the suffering that the writer has faced. Hope emerges with recalling and realizing that even to be able to lament is a gift, for to weep is to be alive.

And to that extent, being able to lament is based on God's grace. They are new every morning, similar to the light that emerged from the shadow after the eclipse.

The light of the new dawn always emerged after each night, just like what Jackie just shared with us. Eclipse has always been transitional.

Sooner or later, the shadow will pass. The dark shadow will move off our light source and hope emerge. All other character and attributes of God rise to the writer's mind in quick succession after the writer's call to mind God's great love, compassion, and faithfulness.

With that, the glimmers of hope grew brighter and brighter. The writer calls to mind the truth about God and finds God's promise and confidence are still valid.

[10 : 51] The joy of discovery is conveyed by the beauty and freshness expressed in the rest of the chapter. Verse 25, 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. The theme of a yoke is not new in lamentation.

Chapter 1, verse 14 says, My sins have been bound into a yoke. So, and the writer said, It is good for man to bear the yoke while he is young. He implies that the earlier we realize our inability to stop

sinning and accept the responsibility and consequence of our sins, the earlier we will find hope in our despair.

Verse 28, 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 will strike him and let him be filled with disgrace. When we sit alone in silence, submit ourselves under God, not fighting him or those he used to correct us.

[12:10] As we bury our face in the dust as our sign of repentance, there we will see hope emerge. The darkness will move away.

We read on from verse 31, For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion. So great is unfailing love, for he does not willingly bring affection or grief to anyone.

God's anger was real, but not hasty or irrational. It did not nullify the essential truth about him, which had been revealed in history, especially in the Exodus.

Judgment was part of the confident relationship, but did not bring it to an end. The writer remembers that God himself guaranteed the continuance of our relationship with him by his character.

We read on in verse 37, who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it. It is not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamity and good things come.

[13:25] At this point, the writer realized one fundamental thought humans have been doing and asked the question I mentioned earlier, why shall the living complain when punished for their sins?

His answer was, instead of complaining, we should examine ourselves, confess, and repent. Verse 40, let's examine our ways and test them.

Let's return to the Lord. Let's lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven and say, we have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgotten, forgiven.

After we recall and remember God's character, hope will continue to emerge as we repent of our sin. Only when our laments include confession of sin does it fully come to grip with reality and allow the love, compassion, and faithfulness of God to heal what is broken and make restoration complete.

Lament without confession of our sin is merely a complaint. And after we repent and return to the Lord, we can trust in God's judgment because God has not found delight in crushing all the prisoners of the earth, nor depriving anyone of justice, nor subverting a person in a legal dispute.

[14:54] His steadfast love never ceases and his mercy never comes to an end. Hope emerges as we return to God for he heard our plea and come near when we call him and he say to us do not fear.

Hope emerges when we recall who God is and repent of our sins and return to God. In my community group, someone brought up an essential prerequisite for us to call to mind the character of God is we need to know God.

That is why as a body of Christ we make growing in our relationship with God by having four or more devotional a week our goal. By regularly learning under God and submerging yourself in his word, we store up what we can call to mind in our darkness.

If we have nothing in our tank when you find no hope in yourself, where do you look for hope? For hope to emerge in our darkness, for the Holy Spirit to remind us of the teaching of God, we need to regularly come under God's word and store up things that the Holy Spirit can recall and remind us of.

That is why we should aim for four or more devotions per week to learn from God. Hope eclipses and emerge is a pattern of our life that every human will face and continue till we die.

[16:32] Based on the faithfulness of God to his promise to maintain a relationship with those who trust in him, we can wait in hope for darkness to pass.

Hopeful waiting is justified because hope is dependent on who God is rather than on what we can do for ourselves. God is the everlasting hope.

God always does what he says he will do. In contrast to people, God does not act capriciously.

Human beings are inconsistent and unreliable, but not the God of the Bible.

The God of the Bible is everlasting. He's immutable, which means he is entirely and totally consistent. In concise theology, J.R.

Parker explains that God is totally consistent because he is necessarily perfect. He cannot change either for better or for the worse.

[17 : 36] Because God is not in the time or confined by time, he is not subject to change as we are. Far from being detached and immobile, he is always active in his world, constantly making new things sprung forth.

But in all this, he expresses his perfect character in perfect consistency. God's unchanging unchangelessness or changelessness does not involve unresponsive indifference to what goes on in this world.

He is not cold-hearted towards our suffering and not be moved by them. The immorality of God's character is precisely the guarantee of his adherence to the words he has spoken and the plans he has made.

God's immorality is the reason why when people return to him, when they confess and pray and trust in him, God changes his attitude towards them and they have hope everlasting.

God promised not only that he'll dash some of our hope but he'll give you better one. Trials are coming into your life.

[18 : 57] If you know God's character, you can trust him. God's grace help us to discern God's plan in our suffering. The unchanging character of God are your hope everlasting.

reading from verse 57, you come near when I call you and you say do not fear. You, Lord, took up my case.

You redeemed my life. Lord, you have seen the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause. God had come near in the flesh.

He took up our case by Jesus, who is the light of all mankind, that shines in the darkness. In Matthew chapter 14, silent, verse 22, the disciples of Jesus was in a boat in the dark of night, buffered by waves and wind against them.

Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them, walking on the water. They were terrified and cried out, and Jesus immediately said to them, take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.

[20 : 15] It was still dark, maybe in the trite light, where Peter could not see clearly. So he replied, Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.

He stepped out onto the water, after hearing Jesus answer, come. He had to rely on the voice of Jesus to walk towards him, because the light of the dawn had not fully shone.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, and he cried out, Lord, save me! And immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

You of little faith, why do you doubt? I can imagine the dawn of light shining through as Jesus reached out and caught the sinking Peter, who was crying out, Lord, save me!

The light of hope shined through as Peter and Jesus climb into the boat, and the wind dies down. In our suffering and pain, in our sorrow, allow yourself the time to sit in silence and describe what you see and how you feel.

[21 : 37] Take as long as you need. Do not suppress or stifle any of your emotions. After you remember all that God has allowed happening to you, in that darkness, call to your mind the great love and compassion of the everlasting God.

In his everlasting hope, you can say to God, Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on all the trouble and sufferings, to step into the sea of uncertainty and worries.

Even if it's dark and I cannot see clearly, I will follow your voice to find you. And if you get afraid while walking towards Jesus and begin to think, cry out, Lord, save me, Jesus' saving hand with the hole from nail on the cross will reach out in the light of hope to catch you.

The everlasting hope will emerge and shine through after each eclipse and darkness because great is the faithfulness of our everlasting God. Our benification pastor, Nick, has recorded a song to help us reflect on God's great faithfulness and give us something to call to our mind.

So let's listen and reflect and join in praise to our King of Kings.