

# Hope Encouraged by God's Kindnesses

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning and a very warm welcome to you. We're privileged to bring you this service once again from Stornoway Free Church this morning. And wherever it is you are and watching from wherever you're situated, we pray that once again God will bless us as we come to him through his word and prayer and praise.

Now we're going to begin by reading first of all from the scriptures. That's from the book of Psalms and Psalm 36. Psalm 36 in the book of Psalms will read through the whole psalm.

It's a psalm of David and he calls himself in the title the servant of the Lord. Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes, for he flatters himself in his own eyes, that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good.

He does not reject evil. Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God. The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house. And you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life. In your light do we see light.

O continue your steadfast love to those who know you. And your righteousness to the upright of heart. Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me.

Nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the evildoers lie fallen. They are thrust down, unable to rise. May God add his blessing as we once again read his word.

Now let's join together in prayer as we come before God in prayer. Almighty God, gracious and eternal Father, we thank you today once again that we have this privilege of coming before you, of speaking directly with you through the mediatorship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 3 1 ] We thank you today, O Lord, that this is our privilege every time we come. We pray that you would always remind us that it is a privilege to come before you in worship.

A privilege to know you and a privilege to know your steadfast love of which we have been reading. We ask your blessing today through your Holy Spirit to rest upon us. We pray that you would guide our hearts and our minds as we come to you through your word.

And as we take your word to ourselves, we give thanks that you still speak to us through it, that it is your address to us and our circumstances today.

We thank you, Lord, for the sufficiency of this word, which in your wisdom you have devised for every generation of human beings, so that whatever advances there may be from one generation to the next, whatever regressions there may be from one generation to the next, whatever changes take place in our individual circumstances or in our lives as communities, you have already taken account of these in your omniscience and in your wisdom and provided for us a word now written for our benefit which is applicable to all of these changes and all of these circumstances.

And so in the circumstances we are in as a people today in our land, we give thanks that we can turn to your word, that we find your word a comfort to us even if it doesn't provide all the answers that we seek.

[ 4 : 03 ] We thank you, Lord, that it is nevertheless sufficient to instruct us to be wise and to be still and to know that you are God. We ask today your blessing for us as a people as we are unable as a congregation, like many others, to gather as we used to in our place of worship.

Lord our God, we thank you for this facility by which we can come together in this way. And even though not physically together, we give thanks that your people are bound by higher ties than mere physical nearness, that they are bound by the wondrous power of your spirit and the bonds that are theirs in Christ as your own spiritual family.

We give thanks, Lord, that in all of these things in this world by which we are able to address you and hear your voice, you are preparing us for that gathering place which no virus or sin or anything to spoil can enter.

That dwelling place of God in heaven where he will be with his people throughout eternity. We thank you, Lord, for that prospect. And as we think today, Lord, later in our service of our Christian hope, we pray that you would strengthen that hope during these days so that we may take the things that cause us anxiety and concern and lay them before you.

And seek that we may gain your strength so that it be made perfect in our weakness. That we may be made strong in the Lord and the power of his might.

[ 5 : 40 ] And so bless us, we pray, as a congregation today and all who are associated with us wherever they be today in the world. Lord, we ask your blessing, your guidance, your strengthening of us.

We pray today that you bless all the gatherings of your people through different media like these. We pray, gracious one, that you would be with your people during this time of crisis throughout the world.

We pray that you would grant us further petitions and thanksgivings as we recollect your mercies in time gone by, as we can build on what we know of your steadfast love already as we face an uncertain future.

O Lord, bless us, we pray, with your own sanctifying spirit that we may be better people day by day, even through the experiences we have in your providence.

Grant your blessing to our families and to our children. Remember them at this time, O Lord, when many of them may now be wondering what indeed is happening in the world, when they are unable to go to school as usual, when they cannot do the things that they would like to do outside.

[ 6 : 54 ] Lord, our God, bless them, we pray. Grant your people that they may constantly bear them before you. We think of those today who are vulnerable in their family settings.

We think of those families today who face poverty, who don't have the resources that many of us enjoy. Lord God, remember them in your pity and provide for them, we pray.

Grant to us as your people that we may, at whatever means possible to us, be able to show them kindness and help and grant to them, Lord, a willingness to receive it.

We pray that you grant your blessing today to all others who are in vulnerable positions. We pray for those who are in prison. We pray that you bless them and bless the ministries that reach them, O Lord, where they are, through chaplaincies and through other agencies.

We pray that you bless them, O Lord, at this time and those who are charged with looking after them and providing for them. We pray, too, for our governments and for our leaders in government.

[ 8 : 01 ] Lord, bless them again today and grant us we give thanks for a lessening of the restrictions. We ask, O Lord, that you would bless our leaders with further wisdom and guidance.

Grant that whether they accept you or acknowledge you or not, that they may nevertheless be directed by you in their thoughts. Our prayer is that they would indeed come to know you and come to worship you and fear you and live by your precepts.

We pray that you'd graciously bless all who represent us in parliaments throughout the country. Grant to them, O Lord, that they, too, may be given your insight and your wisdom.

Remember local government, too. Particularly remember, Lord, here, our own councillors and the decisions that they have to take. Remember those, O Lord, who are officials in the council, the chief executive, the directors of education especially and others with them, O Lord, in the work of the council from day to day.

Remember, too, we pray, those who look after our health needs. We pray for those, Lord, in hospitals, in care homes, in surgeries. We ask that you bless them there and in our communities, too.

[ 9 : 16 ] And remember them, Lord, as they carry out their duties so well and so wonderfully to the benefit of all who receive of their help.

We pray that you bless, Lord, at this time, too, those who have mental health issues and for whom this time of lockdown will have exacerbated these problems. Lord, help them, we pray, to turn to you and find your strength and grant that you would give to them the knowledge of your own presence so that they may, as they trust in you, that they may know that God above is in charge of all things that take place in our minds, our hearts, and our providence outwardly.

And help them, we pray, at this time, as these anxieties exist. We ask your blessing, too, for those who are ill. We pray that you bless them with healing, if it please you, those we know ourselves and our family circles, in our congregation, in our communities.

Remember those recovering from illness and from surgery. We commit them to you, Lord, young and old alike. And ask again that you would be pleased to draw them to yourself that they may learn from these events like all of us so that we may learn more and more to trust in you.

We ask that you would bless us now through this day which you have appointed as a day of rest for us. Help us to dedicate it to you. Help us to sanctify it in the way in which we would seek you and seek your blessing and turn to you in prayer and in your word.

[ 10 : 56 ] Grant your blessing to us now. Hear us in our prayer and pardon all our sins. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to have a word now to the children.

Last week we looked at the sparrow just beginning a wee series on birds of the Bible. And today we're turning from the tiny wee sparrow to one of the largest birds, the eagle.

The eagle is mentioned a number of times in the Bible and the text that I've given out for the children just to focus on is in Deuteronomy chapter 32. One of those texts that mentions the eagle and it says there in verse 19 where you find, where you find, sorry, verse 11.

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bear them on its pinions. The Lord guided him.

No foreign God was with him. Now this is God speaking to Israel through Moses just before they were going to enter the promised land of Canaan. And he was using that as an illustration of how God had cared for them.

[ 12 : 03 ] He had rescued them from the slavery of Egypt and he had taken them and carried them himself, spiritually, physically too, in some ways, giving them strength through the desert and now they're ready to go into the promised land.

And the eagle is a large bird. It's a very powerful bird. It's a symbol of power. You'll actually find that, as you probably know, it appears on many of the flags of different countries throughout the world because it's associated with power and prestige.

It's really the king of the skies. It's the king of the aerial predators. There are two things about eagles that I'd like you just to think about and remember. First of all is its strength.

The eagle is incredibly strong and it's so strong, in fact, that it can lift up a weight much bigger than its own body weight. You'll find cases of eagles having killed something of its prey and then lifting it away and you can see it's much, much bigger and heavier than itself.

And that shows you the strength of the eagle. And the strength of the eagle is in the Bible mentioned as something that represents not just human strength but divine strength as well, God's strength.

[ 13 : 21 ] The eagle is said to soar above. An eagle can actually reach to around the height of aircraft, go up to about 35,000, 36,000 feet. Well, an eagle can go that high and it can soar aloft on these huge strong wings that it has and soar for ages at a very high altitude.

So its strength is celebrated in many places. And it's also celebrated in the Bible because in the likes of Isaiah, chapter 40 and verse 31, it speaks about those who wait upon the Lord, they shall renew their strength, they shall soar on wings like eagles.

And that's important for ourselves. Paul, when he was writing the second letter to the Corinthians said that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

It's ideally suited to our weakness. So whatever problem you have today, and I know that children have problems just as many as adults.

And whatever problems we have, whether adults or children, the thing to do with them is put them over onto the Lord. Tell Jesus about them. Ask Jesus to give you strength, to help you through them, to make you a better person after knowing these problems.

[ 14 : 44 ] And as you do so, God's promise will remain true. He will carry you and the problem because of his great strength.

The second thing about the eagle that's quite amazing is its sight. Its sight is far better than human sight. It's about six or seven times better, at least, than human sight.

If an eagle were to sit on top of the church at Kenneth Street, this is something that those who are in locality here will know in terms of distance, if an eagle was sitting on top of the church at Kenneth Street, it could actually see a rabbit moving at Laxdale School.

Two or three miles away it's nothing to an eagle to actually see what to us would be impossible to see. Its sight is absolutely amazing. And when it's soaring away up in the sky and then it sees something that it wants to have as its prey, it sets its eye on it and then down it comes.

The sight of the eagle is quite amazing. And that reminds us of God's sight. God sees everything about us, everything we do, everything we think.

[ 16 : 05 ] Psalm 139 is a psalm that celebrates the sight of God, the knowledge of God. And you know, that can be sometimes very uncomfortable when we know that God is looking in on our hearts and reads our thoughts.

But it can also be hugely comfortable too and helpful because it means that even the tiniest needs of our lives as well as the great needs, God sees them from heaven.

He sees them exactly just like an eagle sees that rabbit miles away. God sees all the needs of our lives. from the distance of heaven.

And that means that no one is able to help us the way God is able to help because he sees exactly what our needs are. So you trust in God.

And as you trust in God, the strength of God becomes your strength. He helps you in your life. And as you think of the sight of the eagle, as you trust in God, you rely on his sight.

[ 17 : 12 ] his knowledge of your life so that he also will help you through the issues of your childhood as well as our adulthood. truth.

So, let's now say the Lord's prayer together. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Let's now read once again.

We're reading in the chapter we're going to be, I'm going to be preaching from. That's Lamentations and chapter 3. The book of Lamentations just following the prophecy of Jeremiah in the Old Testament.

[ 18 : 12 ] I'm going to read from chapter 3 verses 19 to 33. Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.

My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. 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. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I will hope in him.

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust. There may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes. Let him be filled with himself.

[ 19 : 14 ] 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.

For he does not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men. We pray again that God will bless that reading of his word to us.

Now I'd like to look at some of the verses from that passage, especially verses 19 to 24 and looking more fully at verses 22 to 24.

But verses 19 to 24 particularly. The background to the book of Lamentations is far worse than anything we might experience in a lockdown, however bad things might get and are for some people.

Because the background to the book of Lamentations is the siege and fall of Jerusalem in 587 to 586 BC. And during that siege particularly, the people in Jerusalem experienced many, many horrors.

[ 20 : 24 ] If you read Jeremiah 19 you can see some of them described there by this man Jeremiah who we believe wrote the book of Lamentations following the fall of Samaria.

But terrible things happened during that siege. And the book of Lamentations reflects upon that. And in fact, just in passing we could say that Lamentations provides us with many insights into the grieving process that we experience in human life.

For example, it's obvious from Lamentations that the grieving process involves our whole person. Jeremiah speaks about physical pain, speaks about mental pain, psychological pain, spiritual trauma.

It's all there built into this wonderful book of Lamentations. Not only that, but it's clear that although he had preached for so many years and prophesied of this disaster that would come upon Jerusalem, the people didn't listen.

Many of the people ignored it and followed the false prophets instead. And despite being taught for 40 years and even Jeremiah himself preparing himself for these years, yet still when the tragedy came, he was never fully ready and we never are, are we?

[ 21 : 48 ] When it comes to tragedies like death, even if we're preparing for it, and know that it's coming and that it's inevitable, when it comes, it's sometimes as if we hadn't prepared at all.

We're never fully ready, although God, of course, always is. And despite what he says here in verse 8 of this chapter, where we find that he says about God, though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.

It's one of the traumas of his experience in the aftermath of this terrible time in Jerusalem, that it feels as if God isn't hearing his prayers and sometimes it's like that for those going through trauma, darkness, times of darkness.

It's as if God isn't really listening at all. But despite that, he says here in verse 19, remember, he's turning now to prayer, where he says to God, remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.

My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. And that's really where he expresses his heartache in these verses. And as that is expressed, so you find verses 21 to 24 then bring us really to the peak of the book of Lamentations because following this expression of his heartache in these few verses combined with any other expression of it in this book, as you read verses 22 to 24, you really are at the very peak of the book.

[ 23 : 23 ] And the peak stands out all the more clearly because it's jutting up, if you like, above the darkness and above the trauma that he's been dealing with in describing his heartache.

So let's see this heartache of Jeremiah in these verses, just verses 19 to 20, where he speaks first of all about how he is bowed down in his soul.

He's weighed down by the weight of his reflections over what happened. And if we can summarize what happened in Jeremiah's own words, if you go back to chapter 1 at the very beginning, he speaks there, how lonely sits the city that was full of people, how like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations, she who was a princess among the provinces, has become a slave.

Now that's wonderfully graphic imagery. She who was a princess has become the slave. She's become the slave of the Babylonians who came and who ruined Jerusalem and took the people captive.

This people, this princess of God, this people that God had rescued from Egypt to make her his princess. princess. Jeremiah is saying she's become a slave.

[ 24 : 40 ] She's become a slave in such a sad circumstance that despite all the teaching that Jeremiah and Isaiah before him had given and others, she refused to listen.

The people were just committed to idolatry and backsliding and rejecting God. And you can see in chapter 1 again, verse 19, how Jeremiah speaks about her idols that she had gone after had failed her.

I called, she says, to my lovers, but they deceived me. My priests and my elders perished in the city while they sought food to revive their strength.

Now that's really a summary of how Israel, Judah, had gone after these idols, the idols of the Canaanites, the practices of the Canaanites, the abhorrent things that God detested and God had said, unless you repent, I'm going to remove you from this place.

I'll bring my anger upon you, which is what happened and what I, what Jeremiah is lamenting in his book of the Lamentations. Her idols failed, her friends.

[ 25 : 49 ] All alternatives to God will ultimately fail. That's been proved all the way through history. that's what Jeremiah himself is finding so, so difficult to reckon with.

That he's actually seeing this people, this people that God brought out of Egypt to make beautiful for himself. She prostituted herself and now she's paying the price.

However attractive alternatives to God are in our world today, however many people will say this is far better than those ancient things of the Gospel and of the Christian Bible.

The question is this, when you come to face trauma, when you come to face issues bigger than yourself, when you come to face especially God and God's judgment, then you need something much greater than human wisdom, much greater than human inventions, much greater than idols that we can create for ourselves and are creating in our world today because they failed Israel as God himself had foretold.

And our enemies are rejoicing. As the princess became the slave, you don't want to spend too much time on his heartache because, but it's important as a background to his hope that we'll see next.

[ 27 : 08 ] But you can see that her enemies are rejoicing. Chapter 2 again and verses 15 to 16 where you'll find they are 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 duty, the joy of all the earth? All 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, now we see it. It's incredibly sad, tragic, when the world celebrates the demise of the church.

When we give people who are enemies of the Lord cause to celebrate an outfall in our wrongdoings, in our omissions and commissions of wrong, we must always seek that we will never give as far as we can in dependence on God cause for the enemies of the Lord to rejoice because all they do is take it out upon God ultimately.

So there's his heartache, the princess has become the slave, but the sourest point of all in his heartache is that the Lord is issuing his just affliction. Chapter 1 again and verse 5, this is the sourest point of all in Shoenai for Jeremiah.

[ 28 : 36 ] Her foes have become the head, her enemies, because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone away captives before the foe.

The Lord has applied his just affliction to her. He forewarned her by the prophets like Jeremiah. I mentioned chapter 19, you can go to that and read it afterwards for yourselves.

It contains some shocking details, but it proves the point that God in his kindness, in his forbearance, in his patience, was actually giving them time to repent and he does the same for ourselves.

He doesn't come with his judgment instantly the moment we deserve it. We always deserve it anyway, but God in his patience is drawn out. He gives us a period of grace, period of opportunity.

Jesus himself many times spoke of that, about how the time was not yet for judgment and how God in his patience gives us time to repent, but nevertheless God did what he said he would.

[ 29 : 43 ] Chapter 2 and verse 17, let's leave it at that final point. The Lord has done what he purposed. He has carried out his word which he commanded long ago.

And so it will always be. What God promises will be done, will be done. What God says he will do, he will do. Every word of God is to be trusted as true.

And if you go to the lyrics of 2 Peter and chapter 3 where Peter is facing those who are scoffing at the idea of Christ's return, promised by God, promised by Jesus himself.

Where is the promise of his coming? The world continues as it's been for generations. That's what they were saying. That's what people are saying nowadays. The prospect of Christ's return is ridiculed by so many people just as a figment of Christians' imagination or something long ago that we still think is relevant.

Peter is saying that's what they were saying in Noah's day. Not going to happen until the flood came. That's what they were saying in Jeremiah's day.

[ 30 : 52 ] It's not going to happen. The false prophets, our prophets are telling us the truth until Jeremiah's word or God's word through him came to be realized and fulfilled.

The Chaldeans, the Babylonians came and wrecked the place and took away so many captives. God's word about the coming of Christ, the end of the world, they are absolutely certain and fixed.

And so we do well to remember that and to prepare for its inevitable arrival. And so there's his heartache. The princess has become the slave and the Lord's just affliction has been applied.

But then he moves into hope where he says, my soul is continued remembering this and is bowed down within me. But verse 23, 21, but this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

Well, what is he calling to mind? Well, the very next verses, that's what he's calling to mind. He's now drawing on his knowledge of God. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

[ 32 : 02 ] You see how brilliant it is when you know something of Bible doctrine. And it's so important that we store a Bible doctrine in our minds and in our hearts because if you're a lover of doctrine, of Bible doctrine, the doctrine of God as it is here, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrines that you find throughout Scripture, you've got a great advantage if you love doctrine because here is the Jeremiah, the prophet in his lamentations, in his heartache, what is he doing?

He's turning to doctrine. He's turning to God. He's turning to what he knows about God. What is it he knows about God that's giving him hope? Well, three things. First of all, sorry, two things.

He recalls God's character. There are three things within that. He recalls God's character and then he comes to in verse 24 to confess his hope. But he recalls God's character, first of all, as something which nourishes his soul and the three things about God's character that he recalls and gets help from, first of all, is God's unfailing love.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. There is the unfailing love of God in verse 22.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases or never comes to an end, never runs out. Now, the word is plural and we could translate it as it's sometimes translated in the older translation, loving kindness.

[ 33 : 40 ] The loving kindnesses of the Lord never come to an end because what Jeremiah has in mind is not so much the love of God itself but the acts of kindness that come from that.

The acts of kindness that God continues to show that come from his nature as love and what he's saying is they never cease. They never come to an end.

This is the word steadfast love or steadfast love or loving kindnesses. It's a great covenant word appears very often in the Old Testament. that really captures God's commitment to his people, to his promises and God's provision and love for them.

Well, he's saying here, this is what I call to mind. Therefore, I have hope that the steadfast love, the loving kindnesses of the Lord, the gifts of his love, they never come to an end.

They never run out. And you notice here he's saying this. It's a constant flow of these mercies, of these acts or gifts of kindness.

[ 34 : 47 ] Now, sometimes it might appear that it is the case that God's acts of kindness run out. And Jeremiah, indeed, might have concluded that that's not the case. You'll find in the Psalms very often, as the Psalms is just searching for meaning in his traumas and in his heartaches, that sometimes it appears that God has ceased to be kind.

Indeed, he mentions that at times. It appears to be the case that God's mercies have come to be closed. But yet, even those circumstances, you see, are within the wonderful, loving kindnesses of God.

They form part of his purpose just as much as the comforting times do, which is why all things work together for good to those who love God, as Paul says in Romans 8, who are the called according to his purpose.

All things are working, not just here and there or in isolation from each other, working together for the good of those who love the Lord. And this is really what Jeremiah is beginning to glimpse here as he moves from the heartache and trauma of his heart to his hope, where he recalls God's character and where he recalls God's unfailing love, God's continuing acts of kindness towards him.

Isn't that how it is for ourselves? Can we really believe that God in his commitment to his people will ever cease to be kind to them?

[ 36 : 19 ] Will withdraw all gifts of his kindness? Can we believe that the times when we do face difficulty and affliction and trials and temptations, that these are equivalent to God having ceased to love us?

No, many times they're God's way of disciplining us, as Hebrews 12 so graphically puts it. But one thing is true for Jeremiah. This is an never-failing flow of loving kindnesses from God.

And he comes in verse 31 to add to that, 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.

Well, he doesn't afflict, willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. Today, you may be questioning the love of God yourself. You may be questioning his commitment to you.

You put your trust in him, but it seems that he has turned his face away from you. Well, of course, when that happens, we've all got to examine our hearts. As this chapter goes on to say, verse 40, let us test and examine our ways and return if we need to return to the Lord.

[ 37 : 31 ] Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven and even when it appears to be the case that he has forgotten us or turned away from us, perhaps then more than ever we need to turn to him and need to recapture this great truth of Jeremiah that the steadfast love, the loving kindnesses of the Lord never cease.

He is committed to his people absolutely. He is so committed to his people that he is committed against their enemies for them absolutely a hundred percent.

It never ceases. It never runs out. Don't ever question the love of God. Don't ever question his commitment, his wisdom, his love for you.

But secondly, you have, along with his unfailing love, you have his daily mercies. There you have his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning.

And that's parallel obviously to the first part in verse 22 there. It's very similar really what he's saying there. But mercies is a word which has a very close connection with the word in Hebrew for the womb, for a mother's womb where she carries the child before birth.

[ 38 : 51 ] a very, very close connection between the word mercies and the word for womb. And it's understandable therefore that you find again very close to that the whole idea of compassion.

As Isaiah says, can a woman lose compassion for the child of her womb? Yes, he says, they might but I will never forget you.

And that's what Jeremiah is doing here. He's combining together the wonderful steadfast love, the loving kindnesses of the Lord with the mercies of the Lord.

The mercies that really come from within God's own being. The mercies that belong properly to his compassion that have a result of his compassion like a mother's compassion for the child that she has carried and brought into the world.

Where is there a human compassion like that? Well, God is saying, this compassion of mine is where my mercies come from. And Jesus, of course, as he revealed God in his ministry so often and we saw recently the compassion of Jesus from which the feeding of the 5,000 proceeded.

[ 40 : 13 ] It was from deep within his heart and the compassions, the compassion, the tenderness of his heart. And this is what Jeremiah is saying, the tender mercies of God, the heart mercies of God, the compassion mercies of God, along with the gifts of his kindness, they are new to us every morning.

They never come to an end. And it means also the word actually includes the idea of going beyond what a person merits. And you find this word often used with forgiveness, the mercies of the Lord from which we receive forgiveness, or the mercies of the Lord of which forgiveness might be said to be won.

So you find the daily mercies, they are new every morning. Do you not love this man? Do you not love the way that he comes here in his trauma, still in the midst of this trauma, this heartache that he is expressing throughout this book, but do you not love him?

What he is saying here when he is saying, I have this breakfast daily, the mercies of the Lord. They are my daily breakfast, that is how I begin my day, because they reach me in my situation.

He recalls God's character has unfailing love. He recalls God's character in his daily mercies. And thirdly, he recalls God's character in his faithfulness, in God's faithfulness.

[ 41 : 44 ] Great is your faithfulness. You know what it is when you go to somewhere and you need an official document to be stamped, to prove that you've paid something, or something that you've done that requires authentication, passport, whatever, and it comes to be stamped.

The person that's stamping it says, I'm confirming the truth of this and confirming that this is so. Here is Jeremiah saying, here is how God stamps his promises.

He stamps them with his faithfulness. He stamps down on every single promise, and if you look at every single promise of God, it bears this mark of his faithfulness.

He is saying, this is what I'm committed to. You see, the Christian really has the best of all worlds, he has that strength of God, that power of God through the Holy Spirit working in him or her, and he has the faithfulness of God accompanying that.

You can't fail, can you, to reach your final place in heaven? You can't fail to have God's purpose fulfilled in your life when you know that your life is actually taken up with God's purpose, with God's power, with God's faithfulness.

[ 42 : 59 ] promise. How do you know that God has the capacity to fulfil his promises? Because he's all-powerful. Is that all? No. Because he's 100% faithful as well.

And when you put both together, what a great God we have, what a great privilege we have to be his believing people, his children. This is what he's saying, this is what Jeremiah's coming to, he's beginning now to rise out, at least momentarily, out of his trauma, out of the darkness that he's describing, because he recalls God's character, his unfailing love, his daily mercies, his faithfulness.

Isn't that how it must be for ourselves? But not only does he recall God's character, these three aspects of his character, secondly, he confesses his hope in verse 24, the Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him.

Now, portion is a word that reminds you of the way that the land of Canaan was parceled out or allotted out to the different tribes. And as he says here, the Lord is my portion, Jeremiah is thinking of his spiritual allotment.

And the amazing thing is that the inheritance that God has given to his people, it doesn't consist of a piece of land, it doesn't consist of something even created or physical.

[ 44 : 29 ] Ultimately, the inheritance God has given his people is God himself. The Lord is my portion.

Everything about God is yours as a Christian. His power is yours. His wisdom is yours. His purpose is yours.

Everything about him in his attributes and perfection may belong to you because God belongs to you. And the inheritance is God himself.

What is heaven? It is the full enjoying of God to all eternity as the Catechism puts it. The full enjoying of God to all eternity.

eternity. That's why in some of the Psalms you'll find God described as the psalmist's portion. God is of my cup the portion and my inheritance.

[ 45 : 31 ] Isn't that an amazing thing? It would be enough if God gave us a little parcel of ground to spend eternity in. He's given us himself. He's given us the full enjoyment of himself through Christ in heaven to be our eternal inheritance.

And when God is your inheritance you can face tragedy. You can face trauma. You can face heartache.

When God himself is our portion isn't everything you need in God himself isn't everything we require already built into the inheritance that God himself is for his people.

Is there anything, we could put it this way, is there anything out with of God himself that we require in order to face our traumas and our heartaches and our future?

No. He is himself our portion. Therefore he says, I will hope in him. what is a post COVID-19 world going to look like?

[ 46 : 45 ] What will it be like when the lockdown is finally over? When things are back to the freedom that we once had? What's it going to be like for us as a people?

What's it going to be like for the church? What's it going to be like for the economy?  
What's it going to be like for our communities? What sort of future do we have looking forward to a post virus world?

Who knows? The future is uncertain from that point of view. Nobody can actually define it right now. However politicians might tell you or want to describe it as this or that or this possibility.

Nobody can be certain about how these things will work out. 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.

[ 47 : 57 ] The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I will hope in him. That, friends, is certain.

And let's hope in him, whatever our circumstances may turn out to be. Let's pray. God, let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. God, let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. God, let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. We give thanks today for the capacity you give us to love you, and to love you for all that you are in yourself, for the fact that you are indeed the portion of your people, for the way that they can say, with the psalmist too, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Lord help us we pray in our needs to turn to the plenitude of your own provision for us and help us to find out hope in your own steadfast love, in your continuing mercies, in your faithfulness. Grant that as we wait upon you during these days, we may be reminded day by day when you bring us your daily parcels of mercy, when we unwrap them and find that they are designed for our good. O Lord of God, continue to lead us, we pray, in this particular way. Hear us now, we pray, forgiving all our sin, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now we're going to sing in conclusion, and we're going to sing today from Psalm 36, we read the psalm before our study of Jeremiah's Lamentations, and Psalm 36 from verse 5.

[ 49 : 55 ] We'll sing to the tune Huddersfield, verses 5 to 10. Your steadfast love is great, O Lord, it reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky.

Your steadfast love is great, O Lord, it reaches heaven high.

Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky.

Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep.

Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast you keep.

[ 51 : 11 ] How precious is your steadfast love, what confidence it brings, both high and low, and shelter in the shadow of your wing.

They feast within your house, and drink from streams of your delight.

For with you is the source of light. In your light we see light.

To those who know you as their God, your steadfast love impart.

Maintain your righteousness to those of pure and upright heart.

[ 52 : 47 ] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you, now and evermore. Amen. Thank you very much once again for watching, and I trust that through your worship today, you will have experienced God's blessing, and also that that will follow you into the days to come.

Do join us again if you can this evening, when Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod will be the preacher. That will be at 6.30, and you'll be very welcome to join with us for that if you can as well.

Stay safe. Let's look after one another, and particularly continue to pray as Jeremiah did, that we will know the mercies of the Lord as new for us every morning.

Thank you.