

Great Is Your Faithfulness

Lamentations 3:1-39

Introduction

Grab a Snickers: Do you remember those **Snickers** commercials? “You’re not you when you’re hungry.” Usually, some celebrity (e.g., Joe Pesci, Betty White, Danny Trejo, Robin Williams, etc.) acts cranky or short-tempered (i.e., hangry). Then they’re given a Snickers, and they morph into a normal, well-adjusted, calm person.

- There are definitely times when you just need a nap and some carbs. But what about the situations that can’t be fixed by a snack? E.g., death, depression, cancer, wayward children, broken marriage, unmet expectations.

Wallow to Wellness: We’ve been journeying through this poetic processing of suffering in Lamentations. Each chapter is a different poem in the journey of grief. Chapter 3 marks a turning point in the journey. Even **structurally**, we see the difference: chapter 1 and 2 each have 22 verses (one verse for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet).¹ Chapter 3 multiplies the pattern with *three* verses per letter (i.e., 66 verses).

- Chapter 3 takes the overflowing emotion of chapters 1 and 2 and filters it through truth. It doesn’t *replace* lament, it *deepens* it with truth.
- I think chapter 3 gives us a **path to process** our grief that **cultivates hope**.
- Notice the trajectory: he ends the first section of chapter 3 by saying he has lost all hope (v. 18),² but only a little while later in the poem he is able to say: “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him” (v. 24). It’s the same chapter, under the same circumstances, but a radically different outlook. What changed? How did we get from hopeless to hopeful? That is the question and answer of today’s message.
- Hope grows from truth rehearsed.
 - When suffering overwhelms you, hope grows as you remember what is true about God.³
 - (1) Suffering Speaks Lies to Your Heart (vv. 1-20)
 - (2) Preach Truth to Your Heart (vv. 21-24)
 - (3) Let Hope Shape You (vv. 25-39)

1. Suffering Speaks Lies to Your Heart (vv. 1-20)

¹ I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; ² he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; ³ surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long. ⁴ He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; ⁵ he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; ⁶ he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. ⁷ He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; ⁸ though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; ⁹ he has

¹ A standard acrostic.

² “My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD” (3:18).

³ Hope is restored by rehearsing the truth of God.

blocked my ways with blocks of stones; he has made my paths crooked. ¹⁰ He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; ¹¹ he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; ¹² he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. ¹³ He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver; ¹⁴ I have become the laughingstock of all my people, the object of their taunts all day long. ¹⁵ He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood. ¹⁶ He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; ¹⁷ my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; ¹⁸ so I say, “My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.” ¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! ²⁰ My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.

The Method of Satan: Satan disguises his attacks with half-truths. A lot of the lies he wants us to believe are wrapped in a *veneer* of plausibility.

- If you tell someone, they'll reject you.
- You'll never change.
- There's no point in praying.
- The pain and suffering are real, and it might be true that he has “forgotten what happiness is” (v. 17). But God is not his enemy. God is an enemy to the sin of his people, not his people.
- Every one of Satan's temptations is a lie that will lead to your destruction, not your flourishing.⁴
- The bottom of the pit of lies is the loss of hope: ¹⁸ so I say, “My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.”

Down, Down: The journey of suffering takes him “into darkness without any light,” he is wrapped up with “bitterness and tribulation,” and he drives his face into the dirt.

- It reminds me of Jonah (cf. Jonah 2). He went “down” to Joppa, “down” to the ship, “down” into the depths of the ship, “down” into the ocean, and, eventually, the belly of the fish falling “down” into the deep, belly of Sheol (i.e., the grave).
- God will continue to take you to the bottom until you turn and trust him (e.g., construction project through a swamp, putting pilings in, but having to keep going to find the bottom).
- Jonah ends up at “rock bottom.” But “it's not simply *being* at the bottom that begins to change Jonah, but *prayer* at the bottom” (Keller). Rock bottom is only useful when you acknowledge it and respond accordingly.
- Jonah prays to God from a place of weakness, not strength (out of my distress). That's the kind of prayer God answers. It's a moment of clarity. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.
- He experiences a shift in perspective in the presence of God. He's alone with God and remembers God's true nature and character.
- In the pit of despair, the solution to Jonah's problems is not “find himself” but to “find God.” He didn't “discover his inner strength” but remembered the character of God. His focus is on God, not his problems.

⁴ Satan uses the disguise of light rather than his real identity as an adversary: αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός (2 Cor 11:14).

- And God answered Jonah; he heard his voice. A beauty of the gospel is that God answers us from the bottom! Whether you are suffering from your sin or the sin of others, God hears you and answers you! This is one of the most reassuring truths in all of Scripture. No matter where you are. No matter how bad it is. God hears you: all you have to do is call.
- God meets you at the bottom, in your pain, in your suffering. **Calling out to Jesus isn't a magical prayer to remove all difficulty but an honest acknowledgment that you need his help.** God is not waiting for you to get your act together or clean yourself up, but to admit your weakness and depend wholly on him. It's a prayer of desperation, not holiness.
 - By the time you find yourself at the bottom, you don't have articulate prayers left (no Thees or Thous, no expiations or eschatologies). All that's left is desperate, heartfelt, needy prayer: "Lord, save me" (Matt 14:30).

Hope Displayed: Here's what I can report: Jesus meets us at the bottom. Jesus, who is subject to no one and nothing, subjected Himself to suffering to save us.⁵

- **The cross proves that Jesus doesn't distance himself from our pain, but puts it on his shoulders.**⁶ He doesn't abandon us; he carries us.
- In the Anglican liturgical tradition, the words of Lamentations are put on the lips of Jesus on the cross.
 - We see affliction under the rod of his wrath (v. 1) and the taunts of the crowd (v. 14).
 - We know the prophet Isaiah predicted Jesus would be smitten by God, and afflicted (Is 53:4). We know that Jesus, on the cross was mocked by the crowds (cf. Matt 27:39-43).
- The truth of our situation is that we can have hope in the midst of suffering because Jesus **suffered in our place.**
- Don't believe the lie that there is no hope.
- "Resisting the devil is not spells and incantations but rejecting his lies" (Lawrence). "The devil's power is your belief in his lies" (Lawrence).

Hope Cultivated: Reminds me of Dumb and Dumber: "What are the chances a guy like you and a girl like me end up together?" "Not good." "Not good like *one in a hundred*?" "I'd say more like *one in a million*." "So you're telling me there's a chance."⁷

⁵ Heb 2:10; in the belly of the fish, in the depths of Sheol.

⁶ Is 54:4

⁷ Even if just a glimmer, things weren't hopeless. That reminded me of the prophecy in Ezekiel 37. There is absolutely no HOPE. The situation is beyond HOPE. It is truly HOPELESS. It's a vision of the armies of Israel as nothing but dry bones, having been defeated and decaying in the sun for a long time. They were "very dry." Not just sort of dead. Not recently dead, not mistaken for dead (i.e., corpse at a funeral at least still resembles the body that was there). Hope had dried up. The promises of God must surely be gone and dead. Death in all its horror, intensity, and finality was the ruling image. "For Ezekiel, there can be no self-improvement on Israel's part, no last effort at resuscitation." No one more chance to get it right. "Israel is totally dead. The picture is the grave, and the dry bones of death—not sudden or perhaps, mistaken death, capable of reversal through a fresh shot of obedience or a change of heart, but of death in massive proportion and in advanced and final stages" (Seitz).

Feeling the truth of our suffering is a necessary step, but it can't be the final step. We can't let grief have the final word.

2. Preach Truth to Your Heart (vv. 21-24)

²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Victims of the Algorithm: Have you noticed how social media algorithms feed your anxieties? The more you watch a certain type of video, the more of those videos that show up. For me, it's courtrooms, copcams, and comedians. The more and longer you watch a certain *type* of video, the more of those videos show up in your feed (lately I've been trying to get more feel-good stories... e.g., "On the Road with Steve Hartman"). Your algorithm works just like old school TV; they give you what you want because it's a business that has to sell ads.

- You are similar; the more you focus on the negative, the more cynical you become. The more you turn your attention to God's promises, the more hope grows.

Curate Hope: If we are going to cultivate hope in our hearts, then we have to meditate on the truth of God. We have some choice in the matter: "take every thought captive" (2 Cor 10:5). Paul tells us to focus our minds on the praiseworthy things of God (Phil 4:8).

- What we think about steers where we go (e.g., driving, mowing, etc.).
- If we keep turning the **steering wheel** of our mind toward fear and despair, we sink deeper into darkness. But if we steer it toward the truth of God, it gives us hope. Hope grows when you preach truth to your own heart.
 - "Hope itself is like a star, not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, but to be discovered in the night of adversity" (Spurgeon).
 - "Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear" (President Snow, *The Hunger Games*).⁸
 - "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope" (MLK).

Hinge to Hope: This is the **hinge** that turns **hopelessness to hope** (e.g., big butts of the Bible).

- ²¹ But this I **call to mind**, and therefore I have hope. The life of God's people is sustained by the memory of his promises and faithfulness.⁹
 - To "call to mind"¹⁰ means to **intentionally** bring something back to the center of your thinking (i.e., being, "heart"). If I look at the Spotify Wrapped of your inner life, what are the most-played tracks? Do you need to change the playlist of your heart?
 - This isn't "positive thinking," it's intentional remembering. He stops replaying only his pain and starts reminding himself of what is true.

⁸ "Remember, Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies" (Andy Dufresne, *The Shawshank Redemption*).

⁹ "Israel lived by memory and hope" (Wright).

¹⁰ תָּאֵת אֲשֶׁר יָבִי אֶל-לִבִּי; תָּאֵת אֲשֶׁר יָבִי אֶל-לִבִּי; תָּאֵת אֲשֶׁר יָבִי אֶל-לִבִּי

- The flood of painful emotions are unavoidable (cf. vv. 1-20), but here (vv. 21-24) the “deliberate, determined, teeth-gritting decision to call something to mind. It is an action of the will, not a reaction of the emotions. It is a conscious and difficult choice: ‘I will think about this’” (Wright).
- “We may hear our hearts say, ‘It’s hopeless!’ but we should argue back. We should say, ‘Well, that depends what you were hoping in. Was that the right thing to put so much hope in?’ Notice how the Psalmist [in Psalm 42]... admonishes himself. ‘Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him.’ The psalmist is talking to his heart, telling it to go to God” (Keller).
- We should “listen to our heart,” but we should also “reason and talk to our heart” (Vroegop).
 - Don’t just listen to yourself, but talk to yourself.¹¹
 - “No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do” (Tripp).
 - What are you preaching to yourself?
- “Forget not all [God’s] benefits... [He] forgives your iniquity... redeems your life... crowns you with steadfast love and mercy... satisfies you with good” (Ps 103:2-5).
 - “This is not forcing yourself to feel a certain way, but, rather, directing your thoughts” and heart to the truths of Christian hope. “Hope springs from truth rehearsed” (Vroegop).
 - This is how you can not only survive, but stay anchored and hopeful through suffering.
 - The ‘secret’ to hope is not a different set of circumstances but remembering what is true about God.¹²

Hope: He stops, and directs his attention to this truth: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

- The love of God hasn’t run out. He hasn’t exhausted his reservoir of grace. You haven’t done too much. Things are not too far gone. His mercy still outruns your misery. God is not finished being faithful to his people.
 - Jackson got to choose where we went out to eat for his 14th birthday, Friday a week ago. And he picked the peak of teenage cuisine: *Olive Garden*. I realized, as we were there, that the more children we’ve had, the less we go out to eat because it gets more expensive (not to mention inflation... Five Guys 🙄). When the waiter brought out the breadsticks, they were quickly consumed by the table. My daughter was sitting beside me, and she saw only one left (after already having a couple), and asked if she could have “the last one.” I looked at her and said, “The last one? No, baby. They’re *unlimited*.” You should have seen her face!
 - We think, at *some point*, God will get tired of me. But he doesn’t. There is no end to his mercy and love.

¹¹ HT D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

¹² “The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances.”

- ²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” The Lord is my inheritance,¹³ my retirement (e.g., 401k, pension, etc.). He will never run dry. He is not only the *greatest* treasure, but he is an *inexhaustible* treasure.

Hope only survives if what we remember is *actually* true. We can have *real* hope because God is really good, really merciful, really sovereign, and really faithful and that truth *shapes* how we endure suffering.

3. Let Hope Shape You (vv. 25-39)

Let me point out a few ways that the truth of God shapes our hearts:

- **(1) Waiting is not wasted (vv. 25-30)**^{14 25} The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; ²⁹ let him put his mouth in the dust— there may yet be hope; ³⁰ let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.
 - Waiting is good. It’s not perfectly obvious in the English, but each line in vv. 25-27 starts with the Hebrew word for “good” (טוֹב).
 - Think Genesis 1: God saw all that he made and it was good. This isn’t just “How was your day? Good.” This is the wholeness of God’s ordered design. *Everything as it should be.*
 - Somehow, Jeremiah can say that suffering provides fertile ground to wait for hope.
 - It appears that certain things are only truly learned, deep in our souls, by waiting.
 - Seasons of waiting expose our fears and idols.
 - How can I wait with hope? Only if I truly believe that all of God’s decisions are good. Everything he does flows from his eternal love and kindness.
 - Jeremiah says we need to stop talking so much, get low, and listen.
 - Shia LaBeouf (of *Even Stevens* and *Holes* fame), who seems to be struggling with a lot of challenges, was asked in a strange interview in early 2026: “What would you say to Jesus if you met him?” His answer: “I wouldn’t say [anything]... I’d kiss his feet.”¹⁵
 - Can you wait with worshipful expectation more than anxious frustration?
- **(2) Suffering is not forever (vv. 31-33)**^{16 31} For the Lord will not cast off forever, ³² for, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; ³³ for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.
 - Your suffering is not a forever thing. In fact, in the light of eternity, it won’t be hardly anything: “You don’t even bother to wipe the dust off of the scale when

¹³ my portion = my inheritance

¹⁴ ט (Tet/Teth), י (Yod)

¹⁵ Sh*t

¹⁶ כ (Kaph)

weighing your produce at the grocery store, it's so light. Someday, your suffering will be like that dust when weighing the joy that is yours" (Pierre).¹⁷

- The final word has not been spoken because the final word is redemption. "He will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes, and death shall be no more" (Rev 21:3). He will make all things new (Rev 21:5).
 - Perspective
 - "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is not simply a reminder of what God *has* done, but an anchor reminding us of what God *will* do.
- (3) God's character can be trusted (vv. 34-39)^{18 34} To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth, ³⁵ to deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High, ³⁶ to subvert a man in his lawsuit, the Lord does not approve. ³⁷ Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? ³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? ³⁹ Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?
 - Even in our darkest hour, God's character can be trusted. He does not punish sin from a gleeful heart.
 - Even when God allows wickedness to continue for a moment, it is still wicked. His allowance of wickedness is not his approval of it.
 - Remember, God has to judge sin.
 - "If there is a judgment day, what hope is there for us? If there is not a judgment day, what hope is there for us?" (Keller).
 - Suffering will tempt you to doubt what you know is true of God. He is kind and good and just.
 - "Never doubt in the dark what God showed you in the light."
 - Here we see a reminder of his **sovereign** power: ³⁷ Who has spoken, and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? ³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?
 - The reason his compassion is comforting is *because* of his power, not in spite of it.
 - If he is not powerful enough to judge, he is not powerful enough to save.
 - If he is not righteous enough to judge, he is not merciful enough to pardon.
 - Judgment and mercy are two sides of the same coin (e.g., "merciful and mighty"¹⁹).
 - Some people here about God's **sovereignty** and see it as an imposition on their free will.²⁰ It is not. The doctrine of sovereignty is a supreme comfort, that no evil or wickedness is greater than God.
 - "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps 115:3).²¹

¹⁷ Cf. Rom 8:18

¹⁸ ל (Lamed), מ (Mem)

¹⁹ Holy, Holy, Holy

²⁰ Not resigned fatalism: Christianity does not teach that humans are robots trapped in inevitability, but that a sovereign God works meaningfully through real human choices.

²¹ Amos 3:6, Is 45:7, Job 2:10, Prov 16:33

- “The universe is not ultimately governed by chaos, chance, or blind necessity, but by a rational Creator whose power upholds it moment by moment” (Lennox).
- “If God were small enough for us to fully understand, He would not be big enough to worship” (Lennox).
- “If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways” (Keller).²²
 - But God's power is not merely raw force, but wise and purposeful.
- Who are you? (e.g., v. 39). Are you going to trust what you see and know or trust what God sees and knows, the God who loves you enough to suffer in your place to give you new life that starts now and lasts forever?

Conclusion

How do we cultivate hope in the midst of suffering? Preach the truth to our hearts.

- “Use lament to express the sorrow that we feel, but also to rehearse the truths that we believe” (Vroegop).
- **(1) Rehearse**
 - Take a piece of paper, the note app on your phone, a journal, or the like, and spend some time writing down the truths of God you know *and* how you have seen him show that character to you.
 - God is kind (e.g., wife, kids, church).
 - God provides (e.g., gift to church, adoption subsidy).
- **(2) Repeat**
 - Memorize and recite Lamentations 3:22-23: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

²² “A God great enough to be mad at could not possibly be small enough to be understood” (Keller).