

# Learning God's Faithfulness

## Lamentation 3

One of the greatest blessings of life is to know God.

Knowing God means that He also knows us.

God knowing us means He knows life hurts at times. When ever I go through hard times, sad times, dark times, discouraging times – I can testify with many of you that the greatest cure comes from looking at Jesus.

Remember how Isaiah 53.3 calls Jesus "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...". Sounds to me like just the One to get to know when troubles, pains, and afflictions come rolling through like an unexpected summer storm on the picnic of our life.

### Jesus Knows our PAIN

So where do I look when life hurts? I start in

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest ***who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses***, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.  
16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Did you catch that? Jesus can 'feel the pain with us of our weaknesses'. Now what would you call depression, discouragement, frustration, sadness, and so on – weaknesses. And what does Jesus do? He feels the pain with us. The word is ***sum-pascho*** 'with' 'pain'. In fact the pain of the cross is called the paschal time or pain time. And that is what Jesus feels for us.

Great so how does that help us? Well to bridge the chasm between the High and Mighty Sinless Jesus Christ the Lord of Glory – and you and me, God gave us the cast of this Book. This morning look with me at an Old Testament figure whose life reflects the feelings of Jesus for our weaknesses we painfully live with. His name – Jeremiah. His testimony is the 25<sup>th</sup> book of God's Word, and it is called Lamentations. Does that title suggest anything to you? It is the cry of a troubles soul. It is the testimony of a man who knew pain, weakness, and much sorrow.

As you turn to that 25<sup>th</sup> Book of God's Word, Lamentations 3 -- let me briefly sketch the life of this incredible servant of God. Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> must have had an incredible childhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources used are: The Word of God; Baxter, Explore the Book; Scroggie, The Unfolding Drama; Christ in all the Scriptures; The Criswell Study Bible; Walk through the Bible; The Compact Guide to The Bible, Lehman Strauss, CHM, MacArthur, Ashamed of the Gospel, p. 76-77, Sanders, Spiritual Discipleship, P. 129-136.

The Scriptures tell us God had chosen him before his birth to be a prophet. His family was notable in their service for the LORD. Life was exciting for the son of a high priest.

Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, (NASB)

One of the great blessings of Jeremiah's life was that his dad was the one who found the lost book of the Law. How Jeremiah's love for the Word showed through in his life as God's prophet. He was the "son of Hilkiah" (Jer. 1:1) and as 2 Kings 22:8 records:

"And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it."

Note also Jeremiah's uncle was Shallum husband of Huldah the prophetess as Jeremiah 32:7 tells us:

Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. (KJV)

## When Troubles Come in Overwhelming Waves

Jeremiah's woes were unimaginable to our relatively peaceful lives. He lived through the death throes of the nation of Judah.

- From an earthly perspective ***Jeremiah's life was a failure***. During his lifetime he watched the decay of God's chosen people, the horrible destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the nation to Babylon.
- He preached for 40 years and ***saw no visible result among those he served***. Instead those countrymen he warned for God sought to kill him if he wouldn't stop preaching doom (Jer. 11:19-23). He had virtually no converts to show for a lifetime of ministry.
- He had no one to find joy and comfort with as his own family and friends were involved in plots against him (12:60).
- He ***never had the joy of a godly home*** because God never allowed him to marry, and thus ***he suffered incredibly agonizing loneliness*** (16:20).
- He ***lived under a constant threat of death***, as there were plots to kill him in secret so no one would find him (18:20-23).
- He ***lived with physical pain*** while he was beaten severely and then bound in wooden stocks (20:1-2).
- He ***lived with emotional pain*** as his friends spied on him deceitfully and for revenge (20:10).
- He ***was consumed with sorrow and shame*** and even cursed the day he was born (20:14-18).
- ***His life ended with no relief*** as he was falsely accused of being a traitor to his own country (37:13-14). Jeremiah was arrested, beaten, thrown into a dungeon, and starved many days (37:15-21). If an Ethiopian Gentile had not interceded on his behalf he would have died there.

- *In the end, tradition tells us he was exiled to Egypt, where he was stoned to death by his own people.*

Perhaps the most striking feature of this book is the fact that despite the terrible woes of the life Jeremiah was called to (1:5), he saw that it was all at the Master Potter's Hand (18:1-6). At the point of near despair over his failed ministry, God asked Jeremiah to go to the Potter's house and there he would get a message from the Lord (18:2). Although Israel had failed so grievously, the heavenly Potter was able to bless them again if they would but repent and yield to his Perfect Touch.

## When Life Hurts

So as we turn to Lamentations 3, what are the Biblical afflictions God uses, manages, allows and most of all – hurts that HE can handle:

1. **THE HURTS OF BROKEN PHYSICAL HEALTH:** Lamentations 3:4 He has aged my flesh and my skin, And broken my bones.
2. **THE HURTS OF DEEP EMOTIONAL STRAIN:** Lamentations 3:5 He has besieged me And surrounded me with bitterness and woe.
3. **THE HURTS OF PERIODS OF DARK DEPRESSION:** Lamentations 3:6 He has set me in dark places Like the dead of long ago.
4. **THE HURTS OF DESPERATION AND BURDEN OF BEING TRAPPED:** Lamentations 3:7 He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy.
5. **THE HURTS OF FEELING OUT OF TOUCH, DISTANT FROM GOD AND LEFT BEHIND IN LIFE:** Lamentations 3:8 Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.
6. **THE HURTS OF FRUSTRATION AND CONFUSION:** Lamentations 3:9 He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.
7. **THE HURTS OF ANXIETY AND SADNESS:** Lamentations 3:17 You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity.
8. **THE HURTS OF PHYSICAL WEAKNESS AND HOPELESSNESS:** Lamentations 3:18 And I said, "My strength and my hope Have perished from the Lord."
9. **THE HURTS OF BITTER AFFLICTION AND AIMLESSNESS:** Lamentations 3:19 Remember my affliction and roaming, The wormwood and the gall.

## A Prescription from the Great Physician

So what possible blessing could ever come from such a desperate condition of affliction and hurt? Look back at this passage because it contains the greatest message of Hope in all of God's Word. This is what our Faithful God offers:

1. **IN OUR FAILURES God always offers HIS UNFAILING LOVE:** Lamentations 3:22 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. Jeremiah didn't say he was perfect- he said I know that I am weak and what the Lord revealed to him is even if we fail, God's love never fails. The Lord's mercies, his compassions, they fail not. He loves us with an unfailing love.

2. **INTO OUR MONOTONOUS LIVES – look what the Lord promises- HIS DAILY FRESHNESS:** Lamentations 3:23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. Have you ever thought about how monotonous life could be without God's faithfulness, His newness and His freshness? Basically, I do the same thing, I have done the same thing in my life for 25 years everyday. I have to spend a portion of everyday wrestling with this Book. It is the same Book, by the way. I have been reading the same Book for a lot more than 25 years, but vocationally for 25 years, full time, this is what I have done. I know a lot of men in ministry—they say it's so monotonous—we have to find something new—and they are always trying to find something different. Look at this 23<sup>rd</sup> verse- what he says: They are new every morning—into our monotonous lives, God if we will allow Him to, inserts daily freshness. There is such a newness in our walk with Christ everyday because He is faithful and when we are afflicted, we realize how faithful He is. In fact, a couple of years ago when we studied the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, remember the gardener--- and I remember I did the same thing, I reached over this plant here and I said if I am going to trim my favorite plants, I get really close so I don't cut anything off that I don't want cut off. When God comes into afflict us, He is very close. That is what it means, He is faithful, he gets really close to us during these times. Look at verse 24-
3. **IN OUR WEAKNESSES – He gives us a PERSONAL DOSE OF STRENGTH:** Lamentations 3:24 "The Lord is my portion," I have with Bonnie fed 8 children from their first meal onward- when they stopped the milk regimen and went into the real food as we call it, I remember how you sit there on your plate and you chop, chop, chop this way, then you chop, chop, chop that way. Some times you mash, mash, mash some of those peas and squash in there when they are not looking- into the potatoes so they will get a good balanced meal. I remember that I would have this little tiny spoon that was only about this big. I didn't use the serving spoon, I didn't use the ladel to put in to that little mouth, I know what portion they would be able to handle so they wouldn't choke on is. Look what he in verse 24- "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, He knows the personal dose of strength I need in my weakness "Therefore I hope in Him!" – He said my soul is weak, the Lord knows the dose or portion I need. Therefore I hope in Him.
4. **IN OUR OFTEN FRANTIC LIFESTYLES – HIS PROMISE OF BLESSINGS:** Lamentations 3:25 The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, You want a great study? That word "wait" is one English word and you will find that word all the way through the Old Testament. There are 8 different Hebrew words translated into English—wait. You know waiting is really important to God. Waiting is very foreign to us. This morning I pulled off 169. A fancy big black, jacked up SUV blew by me on 169. I pulled up beside him toodling along at the light at 61<sup>st</sup> Street. He had passed me five minutes ago but that light is so long—I edged up like this so he would notice me—and before the light turned, he ran the red light and squealed around like that. I thought—Americans, we don't like to wait. He couldn't wait for the speed limit, he couldn't wait for the light, he couldn't wait for anything. You know what God says? Look at this- The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, Waiting is so important there is 8 different Hebrew words that we translate wait. The translators were in such a hurry they didn't have time to translate them 8 different ways, they just put one word—not really, I am just teasing. But To the soul who seeks Him—Our lives are often frantic but God promises a blessing to

those who wait for Him, who don't try and run away from the affliction, who don't try and run away from the hard time, who don't try and escape it but say Lord, now I know that Your judgments, You don't change and they are right. I know that in faithfulness you are allowing this in my life so I just lift up my antenna and I say what is the message, Lord? Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth. The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, To the soul *who* seeks Him.

5. **INTO OUR ANXIOUS LIVES – HIS SALVATION GIVES QUIET HOPE:**

Lamentations 3:26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. What he is giving us is---- Jeremiah is telling us what he learned in his affliction. What did he learn when he had broken physical health, deep emotional strain- verse 5, dark depression- verse 6, when he had desperation and felt trapped- verse 7, and when he felt out of touch and distant from God in verse 8 of chapter 3. When he was frustrated and confused in vs. 9, when he was anxious and sad in vs. 17, when he was physically weak and hopeless in verse 18 and when he had bitter affliction in verse 19--- what did he learn? He said this is what I learned in verse 22-- when I fail, God's love never fails. Verse 23- when my life is monotonous and awful, His freshness pervades my life. Every single time I open this Book, it's like a breath of fresh air. You know the last week, it has been so cool we have been able to have our windows open. I look forward to that season. Air conditioning is nice, but I love cold air from outside, it's nicer. I couldn't wait till it cooled down and got into the 50' and 60's and I opened that window and you can just feel it rolling in. Did you know, every time you open this Book, in the hot, triple digit temperatures of life, there is a freshness that comes, if you wait on the Lord. The Lord is the One who gives freshness every morning-- Great is His faithfulness if we will allow Him to. In our weakness- His personal dose of strength, verse 24, he is our portion. In our frantic lives, verse 25, his promise of blessing. In to our anxious lives, verse 26, we hope and wait quietly. Here is the last one- verse 33- this is where we end this morning.

6. **INTO OUR CONFUSING LIVES – He writes HIS PERFECT PLANS:** We kind of end where we started, it says in Lamentations 3:33 For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men. He says this is not just capricious, it is not roulette living, it's not happenstance, God has a plan. When affliction comes, as this 33<sup>rd</sup> verse says, it's not an affliction that is a willing, you know----- just want to rattle your cage a little bit and just cause you some problems--- No--- He has a plan.

That plan is--- we are going to go back and end with our starting verse, Psalm 119:75- I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right (You don't ever change), and *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me. You know what? God wants to teach us something, He wants to teach us that He is faithful. The way He teaches us He is faithful is, He brings affliction into our lives. If we will wait quietly before Him, and say Lord, I want what You are teaching me. He will bring into our lives everything that I just shared with you from verse 22 all the way down to verse 33 of Lamentations.

- Into our failures He will bring His love
- Into our monotonous lives he brings freshness everyday, he will open the windows of blessing
- Into our weakness, He will give us a little spoonful of what we need, our personal dose of strength

- Into our frantic life styles, He promises blessing if we wait for Him
- Into our anxious lives with anxiety, He gives us a quiet hope that is serenity in the midst of the storm
- Into our confusion, He says I have a perfect plan

That's our great God. Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not; as Thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Let's bow before our Lord and ask Him to help us to worship Him as we come before Him at His Table. With heads bowed and eyes closed, think about any difficulties you are going through and give them to the Lord and say Lord, I want to learn through my afflictions.

Father in Heaven we bow quietly before You this morning. There are blessings in affliction that we will miss if we run away, if we don't accept the fact that You are faithful and that You afflict us because You love us, because You want to be close to us, because you want to chisel Your plan into our life. The only way You can do that is to stop us in our tracks and get our complete and undivided attention. At this table we want to commune with you and we want to say, Lord Jesus, You are faithful, we believe that. Whatever You bring into our lives, we know it's good and so we want to hope in You and commit the keeping of our souls to You, Who do all things well. For the dark times, the sad times, the discouraging times, the inexplicable times, make them a blessing as we trust Your faithfulness. Thank you now for Your greatest display of faithfulness, for giving Your Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. Thank You that in His body, he bore our sins on the cross and that He gave Himself for us so that as oft as we eat this bread we would proclaim that death. I pray that we might bless You as we partake of Your body and of Your blood, portrayed through the elements this morning. In the Name of Jesus we thank You, AMEN.