

July 7, 2024

“Ceaseless Love”

Lamentations 3:16-24

Lesson 1

Intro

Lamentations remembers and processes the trauma of the Babylonians capturing Jerusalem, destroying the temple, and taking the majority of the people into captivity. This book has traditionally been attributed to Jeremiah, though the speaker/writer is never named. Whoever wrote it expressed the grief the people felt with vivid images of language. In Chapter 3 (part of which is our study today), the speaker presents himself as an authoritative figure with an official role as the people’s representative, with a responsibility to lead them in expressing and processing their pain. Part of what gets expressed in chapter 3 is a reminder of God’s character, and His long record of faithfulness and love.

Read Lamentations 3:16-24

1. vs. 16: The speaker here uses two images to show the emotional low the people are experiencing

“He has broken my teeth with gravel”

This is like what an enemy would do—throw you do into the gravel

Such an action could very likely knock that person’s teeth out

God here seems to be acting like one of Judah’s enemies

This is an act of humiliation, caused by the people’s rebellion against God

“he has trampled me in the dust”

Here is a second act of humiliation

To be thrown into the dust shows that one is superior to the other one

Today we might say “He made me eat dirt” as an equivalent idea

The people are feeling that God has done this to them, that He hates them

It is true that God allowed the Babylonians to overcome His people

2. vs. 17: The emotional response of the people is the focus of this verse

They feel that they have no more peace, and won’t have it again

The word translated “peace” here is “shalom”

Shalom can mean peace, but it’s also a common greeting

It conveys the idea of complete well-being, spiritually and materially

They people have lost all sense of peace, as well as losing any prior sense of prosperity

Their entire worlds have been upended, and nothing seems right in their worlds

3. vs. 18: Here we see the hopelessness that the people feel

“My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord”

The words also could indicate just that these are gone for the time being

But the feeling behind them is that all is lost and cannot/will not be recovered again

The past good is gone, and their path forward seems filled with loss

4. vs. 19: Two words in this verse indicate something hard to take, “hard to swallow”

The words are “bitterness” and “gall”

Bitterness is literally “wormwood” in the KJV

Both wormwood and gall were plants used in medicinal drafts and in teas

They both were extremely bitter-tasting
This made them exceptionally hard to swallow without gagging or vomiting
Though used as medicine, they are rarely connected with healing in Scripture
They are usually viewed negatively and as having no redeeming value
They are considered toxic in some verses (Deut. 29:18, Prov. 5:4, Lam. 3:15)
The speaker is connecting his afflicting and wandering to “bitterness and gall”
He sees no value at the moment to the suffering he is undergoing

5. vs. 20: Here, the speaker says he remembers his afflictions and wanderings
The effect of these memories is dark, as he says, “my soul is downcast within me”
Each time he remembers and reflects on them, he gets further depressed
6. vs. 21: This verse begins with a word showing a change, a contrast to the previous feelings/thoughts
“Yet” shows the author seeing another way to consider these experiences
He says he calls “to mind” something that contrasts with his despair
This surely must be prayers and songs of praise to God, the opposite of his bitterness
These things he calls to mind are deep enough and powerful enough to change his thinking
Because of these new thoughts, he now has hope
He is not thinking of personal experiences alone, but from a tradition of faith
7. vs. 22: Here is one important thing that the writer “calls to mind”
The people are not destroyed, even though they sinned, because of God’s great love
God’s great love is the mercy he has shown them
The people have deserved the full measure of God’s punishment for their disobedience
Instead, God withholds the full punishment, even though he is disciplining them lovingly
He doesn’t want to destroy or forsake Judah; he wants them to obey
He finishes the verse by recognizing a key element of God’s character
His “compassions never fail”
God is always filled with compassion for His people
Yes, they may sin, and even be rebellious
God still loves them and desires to have compassion on them
8. vs. 23: The previous verse mentioned God’s “compassions”—plural, not just “compassion”
God shows various and numerous compassions on His people
These compassions are “new every morning”
Each day there will be new compassions from God
This fact would give the people a reason to work through their afflictions
God hasn’t forsaken them; He is providing daily reasons for them to remain faithful
He concludes with the praise to God, “Great is your faithfulness”
This is the only statement in this passage directed toward God
He is praying this to God, not speaking to the people or himself
He may be looking for reassurance that God is faithful
He may be half stating/half questioning: “Great is thy faithfulness; right?”

9. vs. 24: The writer here says that “The Lord is my portion”

The word “portion” refers to the land plots given to the tribes of Israel

But these land plots had come under the control of the foreign powers God used

Those original land grants were now meaningless

But the writer notes that God, not the land, is his “portion”

This is the same situation that the Levite priests were in

They did not receive a portion of land as the other tribes did

They served God, and God tells that He is their portion

By serving God without land, they modeled dependency on God

The verse concludes with the faith statement “therefore I will wait for him”

The writer chooses to remember all the ways that God has been faithful

Even after all the difficulties and fears, hope in God remains the best choice

Application: When we endure great trials or suffering, we cannot isolate ourselves in our despair. That is the most crucial time to be a part of a worshipping community such as we find at church on Sundays and Wednesdays. We have all heard or read stories of people of faith dealing with difficult circumstances that challenged their faith and their view of God. And these stories frequently end with the person expressing greater assurance of God’s love. One important reason they were able to have this resilient faith was that they trained themselves to recall the evidences of God’s enduring love, both to the person themselves and to all believers. This is what we are called to do as well.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for the testimonies in Scripture and other places that reminds us of your enduring love even in the darkest of times. May your Spirit remind us of memories of your faithfulness and love to each of us to help us maintain hope and faith in You always. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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