

A SONG OF HOPE Lamentations 3:21-24

In 1488, a Portuguese explorer named BARTOLOMEU DIAS became the first European to navigate through a dangerous cape at the southern tip of Africa, near where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. Because of the tumultuous journey, Dias called it the “Cape of Storms.” But it was later renamed the “Cape of Good Hope” by JOHN II OF PORTUGAL, because of the optimism engendered by the opening of a sea route to India. It is still called the Cape of Good Hope. One cape. Two names. One name focused on the difficulty of the journey. The other focused on the hope of the destination. This is how life is. Your perspective determines what you see. But **Lamentations 3:21-24** teaches that your perspective can change when you focus on God and not your circumstances.

To lament is to cry aloud. This is the book of Lamentations. The five chapters of the book record five divinely inspired yet sorrow-filled lamentations over the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. Because of unrepentant sin, Israel was taken into the BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY. And the writer laments as he sits in the ashes of the ruined city and sees the pitiful condition of God’s people. The author does not identify himself. But it is generally agreed that the prophet Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, which is why the Jeremiah and Lamentations are located next to one another in scripture. Here the weeping prophet sings the blues over the people of Israel and city of Jerusalem. In chapters 1-2, he writes from the perspective of the people. But **Lamentations 3:1** says: “I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath.” Jeremiah knows that God is behind it all and it causes him to lose hope. **Lamentations 3:16-18** says: He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, “My endurance has perished;’ so has my hope from the Lord.”

Jeremiah only saw a cape of storms. Then his perspective abruptly changed. **Lamentations 3:21** says: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.” Jeremiah’s attitude suddenly shifts from despair to hope. The circumstances had not changed. He had. In the midst of his lamentations, Jeremiah’s hope was renewed when he stopped focusing on his circumstances and started focusing on God. This text is the theological highpoint of Lamentations. Its simple message is life changing: Because God is God, there is hope – even in a hopeless situation. Warren Wiersbe wrote: “Unbelief causes us to look at God through our circumstances, and this creates hopelessness; but faith enables us to look at our circumstances through the reality of God, and this gives us hope.” In **Lamentations 3:22-24**, Jeremiah remembers three truths about the Lord that gives hope even in a seemingly hopeless situation.

I. THE LORD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME.

I have bad news and good news. The bad news is that life is hard. The good news is that life is not God. God is God. And God is good. The goodness of God never

changes even when life is hard. **James 1:17** says: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” TRANSLATION: God is good all the time. In verses 22-23a, Jeremiah celebrates three aspects of God’s unchanging goodness.

A. GOD’S STEADFAST LOVE

Verse 22a says, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” Steadfast love translates the enigmatic word *hesed*. It is a comprehensive word for the incomparable love of God. Various translations render it differently, all struggling to put their arms around this big word. The word basically means “loyal love.” It is love that is an act of the will, not a response of the emotions. It is covenant-keeping love. This is how God loves us. It is not sexy. But it is steadfast. God loves us because he has promised to love us and God always keeps his promises.

Verse 22 says the loyal, steadfast, covenant-keeping love of God never ceases. There is a textual variation here. The text may be interpreted to mean the loyal love of God never changes, which is how the ESV translates it. This is comforting. Family and friends love you today but change their minds about you tomorrow. But the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. There has never been a time when God did not love you. And there will never be a time when God does not love you. But there is another way to read the text. It can also mean that because of the steadfast love of God, we have not ceased to be. The NKJV translates it: “Through the Lord’s mercies, we are not consumed.” This, too, is a comforting truth. But it is often overlooked. We falsely conclude God does not care because of the difficult circumstances we face. Yet the fact that you are still alive to face them is evidence of God’s providential care. You could have been cut off. You would have been cut off. You should have been cut off. But God’s love did not allow sin, sorrow, and suffering to utterly consume you. **Malachi 3:6** says, “For I the Lord do not change, therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

B. GOD’S COMPASSIONATE MERCIES

Verse 22 says: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.” Steadfast love refers to the volitional love of God. But mercies refer to the affectionate love of God. It is from a word related to the womb that describes the tender compassion of a mother. An angry mother threatens a rebellious child with bodily harm. But the threat is not carried out. In his or her folly, the rebellious child concludes the promised discipline does not happen because the mother is all bark and no bite. In reality, the punishment does not happen because of compassionate love. The mother wants to bless the child for doing right, not punish the child for doing wrong. But she must use the threat of punishment to teach the child to do right. Yet she takes no delight in the punishment. To the contrary, she is all along looking for a reason to withhold the threatened punishment the rebellious child rightly deserves.

This is the mercy of God. Like a compassionate mother, the Lord withholds so much of the punishment we deserve. Think about that the next time you are tempted to complain about how bad things are. Can you imagine where you would be if the Lord gave you what you deserve? No matter how bad things are, God is still good all the time. His mercies never come to an end. He continues to hold back what you deserve and give you another chance. **Micah 7:18-19** says, “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgressions for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

C. GOD’S RENEWED FAVOR

The opening line of verse 23 makes a statement about God’s steadfast love and mercy declared in verse 22: “they are new every morning.” Verse 22 looks back and remembers the past experience of God’s goodness. But verse 23 looks forward with confidence in the continual experience of God’s goodness today and tomorrow: “they are new every morning.”

THE NOVELTY OF GOD’S FAVOR. Verse 23 says God’s steadfast love and mercies are “new every morning.” Mercy is like manna. As the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness for forty years, God provided manna for them to eat every day. They were not allowed to store up manna for the future. If they tried, it spoiled. They were to trust God for daily bread. And every day, God faithfully provided what they needed for the day. This is how God works in our lives. We never have to live on yesterday’s blessings. Each new day presents another opportunity to experience God’s extravagant benevolence. It is new every morning. Mercy is an attribute of God, which means that mercy is as old as God is. How can something that is as old as eternity past be new? Picture this. A husband rolls over, sees his sleeping wife, and falls in love with her all over again. He wakes her up with a gentle kiss on the cheek. And the first words she hears that day are from her husband’s voice: “I love you today.” But did he just start loving her? Of course not. He’s been in love with that woman for decades. That morning encounter is just a new expression of an established fact. So it is with the love and mercy of God. Every day, the Lord finds a new way to demonstrate his steadfast love and tender mercy.

THE CONSISTENCY OF GOD’S FAVOR. Verse 23 says God’s love and mercy are “new every morning.” Do you see the paradox here? On one hand, it’s new. On the other hand, it’s every morning. The novel experience of God’s favor is a constant experience. What else can you count on in the morning? Nothing. There are no guarantees in life. Your health, strength, family, job, money, and possessions can be gone by the time the sun comes up in the morning. But if you wake up in the morning, you can count on new mercy to face your new mess. This is why anxiety is so evil. Worry borrows sorrow from tomorrow. It ignores what God has already done and questions the faithfulness of God on the basis of that which was not happened yet. In **Matthew 6:33-34**, Jesus says, “**But seek first the kingdom of God**

and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Instead of worrying about tomorrow, trust God for fresh grace and new mercy in the morning. JOHN PIPER said it well: “You live on God day by day, or you don’t live on God.”

II. THE LORD IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST.

Jeremiah begins this song of hope by celebrating the goodness of God: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” Then he shifts from talking about God to talking to God: “great is your faithfulness.” Here is a clear sign your theology is right. It will not end there. Theology is never an end in itself. It is always a means to an end. When it is done right, theology becomes doxology. Truth becomes worship. Sound doctrine becomes high praise. Jeremiah was not content to preach about the goodness of God to others. He had to shout about it for himself: “great is your faithfulness.” This exclamation of praise is rooted in two facts about the trustworthiness of God.

A. GOD IS ALWAYS FAITHFUL.

Verse 23b declares: “great is your faithfulness.” Faithfulness is fidelity, certainty, or trustworthiness. To say that God is faithful is to say you can always count on God. God will keep his word. God is worthy of your trust in every situation. God is faithful in affliction. **Psalm 119:75** says, “I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.” God is faithful in temptation. **1 Corinthians 10:13** says: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” God is faithful to in sanctification. **1 Thessalonians 5:24** says: “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” God is faithfulness in forgiveness. **1 John 1:9** says: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God is faithfulness in the midst of unfaithfulness **2 Timothy 2:13** says: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.”

**“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.”**

Can you sing that? Not now. It doesn’t count when you sing it in church. It doesn’t count when you sing it at a wedding or graduation or anniversary. It doesn’t count when it you sing it during a time of celebration. The proof that you trust God is when you can sing, Great is Your Faithfulness, in the midst of a hopeless situation.

B. GOD IS MORE THAN FAITHFUL.

Faithfulness is not relative, subjective, or contingent. You cannot be kind-of faithful. It's like being a little pregnant. Either you are or you are not. And either you are faithful or you are not. There is a word for a husband that is faithful to his wife ninety percent of the time: "unfaithful." Faithfulness is an absolute reality that is not subject to qualification or quantification. Yet Jeremiah declares, "Great is your faithfulness!" Because God is always faithful he is more than faithful. Great is our fickleness. But great is his faithfulness.

In Reaching For the Invisible God, PHIL YANCEY writes of visiting Yellowstone National Park with his wife. After seeing the famous geyser, Old Faithful, erupt they passed the next eruption in the dining room of Old Faithful Inn, which overlooks the geyser. When a digital clock reached one minute before the next eruption, they joined the other diners and left their seats and rushed to the windows to observe the big, wet event. Immediately, as if on signal, a crew of busboys and waiters descended on the tables to refill water glasses and clear away dirty dishes. When the geyser shot up, we tourists oohed and aahed and clicked our cameras; a few spontaneously applauded. But glancing back over my shoulder I saw that not a single waiter or busboy – not even even those who had finished their chores – looked out the huge windows. Old Faithful, grown entirely too familiar, had lost its power to impress them.

III. THE LORD IS ALL YOU NEED.

As Jeremiah reflects upon the hope-giving and hope sustaining attributes of God, he first speaks about God to others: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning." Then he speaks personally and directly to God: "great is your faithfulness." Finally, in verse 24, Jeremiah speaks to himself about God: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Scripture records times when a person speaks to his soul. In **Psalm 42:11**, the psalmist rebuked his depressed soul: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." In **Psalm 103:1**, David calls his soul to praise: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" In **Luke 12:19**, the Rich Fool seduces his soul into damnation: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But here Jeremiah's soul speaks to him. It's as if Jeremiah's soul cannot trust him to view circumstances from the right perspective. So his soul talks to him and tells him how to view the matter. Verse 24 says: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

The word "portion" refers to a personal inheritance, an acquired possession, or a great endowment. It is real estate terminology, which the Lord himself used to

explain why the priestly tribe of Levi would not receive any property or possessions when the children of Israel entered into the promised land of Canaan. When the land of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi would not receive an inheritance in the land. **Numbers 18:20** records: "And the Lord said to Aaron, 'You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.'" The Lord did not give the tribe of Levi anything because he himself was going to be their everything. **Joshua 13:33** affirms, "But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance, the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them."

This is what the Lord is to all who trust in him. The Lord is our portion. And if this is true for Jeremiah in his lamentations, how much more is this true for those of us who have the rest of the story! This is the testimony of all who have run to the cross and put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation: The Lord is my portion! Jesus Christ himself is the portion of his people. And God has not given each of us a piece of his Son. He has given his Son to each of us. All of Christ is our portion. He is our sure and satisfying and all sufficient portion. Our hope is in the Lord not in the material possessions of this world. **Psalms 73:25-26** says, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." When Martha confronted Jesus because her sister Mary would not help her in the kitchen, **Luke 10:42** reports that Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Choose the good portion and hope in him!

**MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS
THAN JESUS' BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
I DARE NOT TRUST THE SWEETEST FAME,
BUT WHOLLY LEAN ON JESUS' NAME.**

**WHEN DARKNESS SEEMS TO HIDE HIS FACE
I REST ON HIS UNCHANGING GRACE
IN EVERY HIGH AND STORMY GALE
MY ANCHOR HOLDS WITHIN THE VEIL**

**WHEN HE SHALL COME WITH TRUMPET SOUND
O MAY I THEN IN HIM BE FOUND
DRESSED IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ALONE
FAULTLESS TO STAND BEFORE THE THRONE**