

## Lamentations 3:1-39- *Life is hard, but God is good*

### Introduction:

I am not sure about you, but I want a life full of peace and joy. I don't like it when things don't go my way. I don't like it when I drop a cup on the floor and it shatters. I don't like it when I go and do the rubbish but then the rubbish bag breaks and everything goes on my clothes and my hands stink. I don't like it when I lose my keys or phone or when the doctor gives me bad news. I don't like it when bad things happen to me or to my family. The reality is I don't have control of my life. I can't control everything. And when things don't go the way I want, it is very hard to have peace and joy. The reality is, all of us will and do face the uncertainties of the future. We all face the reality of not being in complete control. This week I heard news of families who have suffered miscarriages and stillborn. And it is hard. I don't know what you may be going through and I certainly don't know what you may go through. But, in our text today, I think we learn a very important truth which will help us have peace and joy even in the midst of the most difficult situations. There is only one way. Life is hard, but God is good. And so, what I want to do tonight is to look at three things,

1. The **Situation** in verse 1-18
2. The **Truth** in verse 19-24
3. The **Response** in verse 25-39

### Immediate context Lamentations 3:1-18:

When we enter chapter 3 of Lamentations, 2 things stand out. Firstly, there is 66 verses instead of 22 because instead of the acrostic poem taking 1 verse for each letter, each letter has 3 verses, with each verse beginning with the same letter of the alphabet.

Meaning, verses 1, 2 and 3 begin with "א Aleph" which is our alphabet equivalent of A, verse 4, 5, 6 each begin with "ב Bet" equivalent of B and so on. If you remember from 2 weeks ago, I said that I think the point of the acrostic is to show the completeness of God's judgement. Here I think we are to feel the intensity of what is happening. And I think when we do that, when we get to the glorious climax, it will bring great joy and relief.

Secondly, chapter 3 is dominated by first-person references. The language of "I" and "We" come out throughout this chapter. Unlike chapter 1 and 2 where Misery was observed and experienced and the Lord's righteous anger is described, chapter 3 becomes very personal for Jeremiah. He looks inwardly and speaks of his personal suffering. And we can see that in verse 1 to 18 of chapter 3. Let us look at his afflictions together. **The Situation.**

#### *Affliction like Darkness- (v1-6)*

In verse 1, Jeremiah expresses himself saying,  
*"I am the man who has seen affliction  
 under the rod of his wrath;"*

This is about the affliction that God has placed upon him under the discipline of his rod of wrath. It ties neatly to the themes of judgement in the previous chapters. He has now personalised suffering and sympathises with Jerusalem's suffering. The way he describes his affliction firstly is like being in darkness. Verse 2 onwards

*<sup>2</sup> he has driven and brought me  
into darkness without any light;  
<sup>3</sup> surely against me he turns his hand  
again and again the whole day long.  
<sup>4</sup> He has made my flesh and my skin waste away;  
he has broken my bones;  
<sup>5</sup> he has besieged and enveloped me  
with bitterness and tribulation;  
<sup>6</sup> he has made me dwell in darkness  
like the dead of long ago."*

Notice in verse 3, that Jeremiah says that God has turned his hand against him not just once, not just twice, but again and again, the whole day long. The idea is that God returns, striking him over and over again. His hand moves back and forth. There is no relief to the afflictions that he has faced. It is all day long. Can you imagine being slapped on the face. On the left cheek. Then the right cheek. Then the left cheek. And then right cheek. Non-stop. That is the idea. Except it isn't just a slap on the face. But it is God's judgement. Infinitely worse than a slap on the face. In fact verse 4 and 5, it describes God making his flesh and skin waste away literally. His bones broken. And just like how God sent the Babylonians to lay siege to the city, harming her people and pillaging their city and temple, Jeremiah describes God besieging and enveloping him. He is full of bitterness and tribulation. His fate is the same as the city. The darkness that is mentioned in verse 2, is describe as the darkness of the grave in verse 6. The picture is that there seems to be no hope. His experience of the affliction which God has put upon him has led him to feel like there is no way out. This little section has many similarities with many of the Psalms. An example would be psalm 88,

*<sup>3</sup> For my soul is full of troubles,  
and my life draws near to Sheol.  
<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am a man who has no strength,  
<sup>5</sup> like one set loose among the dead,  
like the slain that lie in the grave,  
like those whom you remember no more,  
for they are cut off from your hand.  
<sup>6</sup> You have put me in the depths of the pit,  
in the regions dark and deep.*

<sup>7</sup> *Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.”*

Just like the psalmist who feels no hope, they both recognise the sovereignty of God. It is God who is doing all these things to them. There seems to be no hope.

### Affliction in walking- (vv7-9)

This hopelessness and despair is further characterized in the way God constricts his movement.

<sup>7</sup> *He has walled me about so that I cannot escape;  
he has made my chains heavy;*  
<sup>8</sup> *though I call and cry for help,  
he shuts out my prayer;*  
<sup>9</sup> *he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones;  
he has made my paths crooked.*

Jeremiah is walled in, so he can't escape, his chains are heavy, stones close in on him and he is unable to walk straight. God turn's his darkness into a sealed prison from which there is no escape. It is so bad that he calls out and cries for help, and even then, there is no aid. Yesterday I visited a family who has a 1-year old son. They recently bought a playpen. They put the walls around their mat to contain their child. When their son was placed within the playpen, he hated it. He cried and cried and cried. For him... the walls were closing in. His movements were restricted. And even when he cried as much as he could, there was no aid. I am sure their son experienced what he thought was a sealed prison with no escape. No hope.

At this point in time you might be able to sympathise with Jeremiah. Maybe sometimes in your life it might seem like how he feels. The language in verse 1-9 could be used for those who suffer depression. It is the language of those who suffer, who have all sorts of misery. Life seems to be going breezy and when you least expect it, it crashes down. When you lose a child, husband or wife, father or mother. When the doctor brings bad news and tells you that you have cancer or a few weeks to live, when the child you have waited for passes away, you might feel like God's judgement is upon you. You might feel like instead of walking in the light, where you can see all the beauty there is in creation, all you can see is darkness. Pitch black. No hope. No purpose. No aid. You might question why, why why? And that was the question we asked in chapter 1. Well if you think it could not get any worse, look at verse 10-18.

### Affliction by God- (v10-18)

His affliction is further explored. He employs a range of different images for us. He has already used imagery of darkness and being imprisoned. In verse 10-11 God is like a bear or a lion, a powerful beast and predator, who tears him to pieces and makes him desolate.

<sup>10</sup> *He is a bear lying in wait for me,  
a lion in hiding;*

<sup>11</sup> *he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces;  
he has made me desolate;*

V12-13 He is like a deadly archer, who is aiming at him. Shooting his arrows continuously.

<sup>12</sup> *he bent his bow and set me  
as a target for his arrow.*

<sup>13</sup> *He drove into my kidneys  
the arrows of his quiver;*

Further in verse 15-16 God is depicted as someone who feeds him and treats him harshly.

<sup>15</sup> *He has filled me with bitterness (Bitter herbs, bitter things);*

*he has sated me with wormwood. (wormwood is a plant which has a bitter taste and is made into a drink).*

Continuing the feeding metaphor, in verse 16

<sup>16</sup> *He has made my teeth grind on gravel, (or a literal translation "he has broken my teeth in the gravel)*

*and made me cower in ashes;*

Can you imagine chewing through gravel? I went pepe catching last year and I didn't know you had to leave them in salt water so that the sand and all the junk comes out. I couldn't eat any of it because there was just too much sand. How much worse is the picture of just putting gravel in your mouth until it breaks your teeth. God has made him feel lowly.

Humiliated and all these things lead him to feel hopeless and weak.

Verse 14 he describes himself as being laughed at all peoples. He is the object of taunts.

This man who speaks and acts on behalf of God. This person who God is supposed to be on his side, is now his enemy, foreigners devastating his homeland, and people mock him for his faith and situation.

<sup>14</sup> *I have become the laughingstock of all peoples,  
the object of their taunts all day long.*

And it is not just his enemies but it's also his own people. And I don't know about you but sticks and stones may break my bones, and I know for sure words will definitely hurt me, especially if it is from people that I love or associate with. Especially when they come from the church.

If you have felt the same way as Jeremiah, you would probably echo how he feels in verse 17- 18.

<sup>17</sup> *my soul is bereft of peace;*

*I have forgotten what happiness is;*

<sup>18</sup> so I say, *“My endurance has perished;  
so has my hope from the LORD.”*

In light of his outward circumstances and the mental, emotional and spiritual despair. How could he feel peace and joy, especially when the God he serves and knows is acting like an enemy towards him and Jerusalem. I mean who would??? He has forgotten what happiness is. His endurance has perished and even his hope in the Lord seems to have disappeared. Life is just so hard. There is no hope.

One thing I think worth mentioning at this point in time in regard to the authorship and style of this book is that, although in my previous sermon and in this sermon I have implied that Jeremiah is the author and speaks from his perspective. However, as you can tell, the book is anonymous about who he is exactly. So, when we read in verse 1, “the man” and all of his sufferings and hardships, stylistically I think the author wants us to not get caught up in his exact situation and who he is but rather learn from his message. Here we have a man who has observed horrible things. He has conveyed and understood how the people feel in this misery. He has seen and recognised the fierce anger of the Lord and his righteous judgement. He has experienced it for himself! He has suffered God’s affliction, through darkness, and being imprisoned, God has afflicted in ways which makes him seem like a deadly predator, deadly archer. God seems to affect the way he walks and eats. He has affected his environment and how people perceive him. Although his experience may differ from us slightly, he wants us to learn from what he has gone through. He wants us to come to the same conclusion that he comes to. Life is hard, suffering and hardship is real. Many things will happen that you will not understand.

But in verse 19-24 we have the climax of this chapter and situation. We have the climax of the book.

We have a glorious **truth**, which you can apply in every aspect of your life.

We have a **“Call to remember the Heseḏ of the Lord”**. I just used a Hebrew word, but I think it is so rich in meaning that we can’t limit it to just one word. And so, I want to explain it a little later on.

Look at Lamentations 3:19-21, Jeremiah moves on and he transitions from stating his extreme situation to God’s Heseḏ. He has used 18 sentences to describe his affliction. And now having come to understand himself and his situation he has come to a conclusion. The conclusion to cry out to God. It is the same thing that the city is counselled to do in chapters 2:11-19, Lamentations 2:19, *““Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street.””*

And so, Jeremiah cries out to God addressing the Lord. O Lord, Remember! Verse 19

<sup>19</sup> *Remember my affliction and my wanderings,  
the wormwood and the gall!*

And he goes on to reiterate his situation in verse 20,

<sup>20</sup> *My soul continually remembers it  
and is bowed down within me.*

Although he remembers all the sufferings and hardships he sees hope, he cries out to God to remember because verse 21,

<sup>21</sup> *But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:*

Why does he have hope? What does he call to mind? Why does he cry out to God to remember and to act? Why even in the midst of the worst possible situation can he have hope? What is this truth? Verse 22-24

<sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;*

<sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

<sup>24</sup> *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,  
"therefore I will hope in him."*

How beautiful and amazing are those words? How beautiful and glorious is this truth. Although we sin, although we are unfaithful, although God judges and we sometimes face the consequences of our sins. Although life seems to be crashing down. When everything just seems to go wrong. When we feel like we are in darkness, or imprisoned. When we feel like God is constantly against us. When we are in situations where people mock and scorn us. When physically you are decaying. When you are emotionally, mentally and spiritually unstable. You can know for sure,

<sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;*

<sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

And the key word here is *Hesed*. It is translated in the ESV as the "steadfast love". And many of the psalms use this word. "The steadfast love endures forever".

Others translate it to covenant faithfulness and love, loyal love, loving kindness, covenant mercy, goodness, loyalty. *Hesed* is a key word for the old testament. It is essential to who God is. It describes God's disposition towards his people and to humanity in general. It is a description of what God does. God has entered a covenant relationship with his people,

and he is committed to himself, he is committed to his unchanging nature and infinitely glorious beauty, to be *Hesed*. To perform it. He is bounded to himself to be *Hesed* to his covenant people. If you look at Psalm 136 you will see *Hesed* conclude each verse. 26 times. Even when people are unfaithful, he is *Hesed*. His steadfast love, his covenant faithfulness, his loyal love towards his people never ceases. A key text would be in Exodus 34:6-7. If you remember the story of the Golden calf, Israel broke their covenant with God by worshipping an idol which they made. They blew it. But God renews his covenant with them. But before he does it God commands Moses to come to Mount Sinai with 2 tablets. The LORD descends on a cloud, stood with him there and proclaimed his name. And in Exodus 34:6-7 God does something amazing. He gives us a description of himself and it is because of that description the covenant is renewed. *“6 The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”* At the core of who God is and what he does, he is abounding in “steadfast love, *Hesed*”.

And that is who he is. That is his disposition towards us. He is the God who will forgive and have mercy. He is the God who is abounding in love. His covenant faithfulness endures forever.

Remember Lamentations 3 is an acrostic. V19-21 begin with the letter zayin (ז). Verse 21 is the last verse for zayin ז. And it says, “but this I call to mind”. And in verse 22 guess what word it begins with. *Hesed*. God's overwhelming disposition. His steadfast love. His loyal love. His covenant faithfulness. And so what Jeremiah remembers, is who God is. And he knows because of who he is, it will never cease. God is unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Because of who he is, his mercies will never come to an end. Because of who he is, he can know for sure that God's mercies are new every day. Every morning they are refreshed. Because he is faithful. Great is thy faithfulness. He says in verse 23 that because of who God is, because *Hesed*, all that he needs is God. He is his portion and therefore he has hope.

When things look tough. When you are in a situation which you can't understand. Look to God's *Hesed*. Call to mind his *Hesed*. Remember who he is and his disposition towards you. And you can know as new covenant people that he definitely will. You can look to Jesus. Because it is in Jesus where the fullness of the LORD's *Hesed* is seen. It is on the cross where Jesus himself, who was the only person who is righteous, died for your sins. We who are covenant breakers, we who are unfaithful are now able to clothe ourselves with God's *Hesed*. We clothe ourselves with Christ's Righteousness. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21. In 1 John 4 we are given a description that God is love. And you can know God is love because of the cross. Because 1 John 4:11, “he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” He took the just punishment for our sins. He satisfied the wrath of God. That is the ultimate picture of *Hesed*.

And you can imagine what a change that will be if you remember all the time God's *Hesed*. This amazing truth. Before we close with verse 25-39 and look at the response, one thing I want to mention is that in verse 22-23 one of the applications we can take out is to live on God day by day. Everyday you need to draw near to the throne of Grace. Everyday you need to taste and see that the Lord is good. Rely on the mercy he gives you today and know for sure that he will give mercy for the next morning. He will supply everything you need to do his will.

### **Response to God's sovereignty and goodness 3:25-39:**

To close I want to look at verse 25-39 to draw some more application. The tone of this section is very different. There is hope.

If you look at verse 25-30, an overwhelming point that comes out is to 1. **Wait on God.**

<sup>25</sup> *The LORD is good to those who wait for him,  
to the soul who seeks him.*

<sup>26</sup> *It is good that one should wait quietly  
for the salvation of the LORD.*

<sup>27</sup> *It is good for a man that he bear  
the yoke in his youth.*

<sup>28</sup> *Let him sit alone in silence  
when it is laid on him;*

<sup>29</sup> *let him put his mouth in the dust—  
there may yet be hope;*

<sup>30</sup> *let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,  
and let him be filled with insults.*

Because he knows the LORD's *Hesed*, he will wait on him. God is good to those who wait on him, trust in him. When we normally think of waiting, you might think of it as being idle and doing nothing. But the second half of verse 25 completes the verse by saying "to the soul who seeks him". You wait by seeking him. When you don't understand what is going on in your life, you wait upon God. You do it by seeking him. You can seek him in his word and in prayer. You devote yourselves to God's word and pray. And maybe you are asking why or what, and you don't have an answer. It might be because you aren't seeking him. You aren't reading his word and praying to him. As you do that, you persevere, you endure because the affliction will pass, and God is good. He is *Hesed*.

The second response in verse 31-36 2. **Remember his righteousness and Hesed**

<sup>31</sup> *For the Lord will not  
cast off forever,*

<sup>32</sup> *but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion  
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;*

<sup>33</sup> *for he does not afflict from his heart  
or grieve the children of men.*

<sup>34</sup> *To crush underfoot  
all the prisoners of the earth,*  
<sup>35</sup> *to deny a man justice  
in the presence of the Most High,*  
<sup>36</sup> *to subvert a man in his lawsuit,  
the Lord does not approve.*

Although God causes grief he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. And he will judge one day, the living and the dead. And so you can know for sure that all the unjust things in the world, all the sinfulness that you see, is in his hands. He will bring justice one day.

And finally, in verse 37-39 3. **Find peace in the Sovereignty of God**

<sup>37</sup> *Who has spoken and it came to pass,  
unless the Lord has commanded it?*  
<sup>38</sup> *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High  
that good and bad come?*  
<sup>39</sup> *Why should a living man complain,  
a man, about the punishment of his sins?*

There is nothing out of his control. Even when it seems like it is out of control, God is in control. He is the creator. The speaking creator he spoke everything out of nothing. Nothing comes to pass unless God wills it to pass. And therefore, we should take comfort that even when it hurts, God is good, and he is in control. The worst act in history is the crucifixion on the cross. It is when the righteous, perfect son of God died. Yet God was in control even then. And it was for our good. It was a demonstration of his *Hesed*. So, find peace in the Sovereignty of God.

I want to end with a story which I hope would encourage you. I read this story over 4 years ago and it has always stuck with me. Monty Williams was fired as the head coach of the NBA New Orleans Pelicans in 2015. He lost an amazing career and opportunity. 9 months later his wife was killed in a tragic car accident with 3 of his children suffering with serious injuries. The other driver was driving more than 2x the speed limit. In front of thousands, in the midst of professional sports, streamed online, many heard his eulogy. He could have been angry at God. He definitely would've felt many different emotions. But he began his eulogy quoting the psalms saying that "the Lord is good" and that "he is love". He later says that "What we've gone through is pretty tough, and it's hard, and we want an answer, and we don't always get that answer when we want it, but we can't lose sight of the fact that God loves us, He loved me so much that he sent his Son to die for my sins... Let's not lose sight of what's important. God will work this out. My wife is in heaven. God is love. And when we walk away from this place today, let's celebrate, because my wife is where we all need to be, and I'm envious of that..." I think he got the point of Lamentations 3.

Amen