



TIME OF GRACE®

Keep the Faith: GOD's Enough

Study Notes

Summary

There are few guarantees in life. That bitter but honest truth is what drives many people to despair, but it doesn't have to. What each of us needs is something satisfying enough to fill up our souls, even if everything else is stripped away. Thankfully there is One who can do just that.

- **Lamentations 3:18-24:** ¹⁸ So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. ²⁰ I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. ²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

- Big Idea: But GOD's _____.

- Next Step: Call this to mind . . .

GOD _____.

GOD _____.

GOD _____.

GOD's _____.

GOD _____.

GOD's _____.

GOD _____.

Points to Ponder

1. What are two or three of your biggest regrets in life? What normally happens to your heart when you recall those moments?

2. Read Psalm 73, especially verses 21-26. What connections do you see between Asaph's words and Lamentations 3:18-24?

3. **Challenge:** Memorize the seven character qualities of GOD that we discussed in today's message. Repeat them each day for the next week so you can "call them to mind" when needed most.

Homework for Next Week

Read Psalm 46.

Time of Grace Ministry
Keep the Faith: GOD's Enough
Lamentations 3:18-24
August 30, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Today's message is for messed up people.

A lot of us need a message that's for messed up people and maybe you do, too. Maybe you're listening to this message at home, feeling lonely, because you messed up your relationship. Maybe you know the feel of a prison mattress because you're listening to this from behind bars. Maybe you know the name of your parole officer or the people at your support group because you've given into an addiction how many times. Maybe you know how messed up it is to have anger as part of your character or insecurity or worry but you, too, have let these sins become part of you and now you just - you don't know how to escape it; it's just what you do and it just feels like who you are. In so many ways, because of our sin and weakness, things get messed up. And so here's my question for you today: What do you do - you, personally - what do you do when it's messed up? Where do you go when it feels hopeless and your heart is hungry for hope?

Well today, I want to suggest an answer that when things are messed up, you should listen to Lamentations. There's this little book in the Bible tucked away in the big, prophetic books of the Old Testament that maybe you've never read or maybe you haven't read in a very long time. The book of Lamentations is this moving, emotional poetry by the prophet Jeremiah and in that book he tells us exactly what to do when our hope is gone; when things are messed up. In fact, in the section of Scripture I'm about to read to you, we find the truth about our faith and I love - I love more than anything in the world - the truth I think about a thousand days in a row and it gives me hope when I feel like hope is gone.

So today, we're going to listen to Lamentations and we're going to hear a message for messy people and messed up lives. So if you have your Bible at home or just want to follow along with me, let's start in Lamentations 3 with verse 18. Jeremiah says this: "So I say, 'My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.' I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me."

Now Jeremiah wasn't just being dramatic because he had just lived through this. This next picture is a depiction of what happened in the city of Jerusalem. I believe this specific picture depicts when the Romans conquered the city but in Jeremiah's day the same thing happened with King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. What happened in 586 B.C. when Jerusalem fell, what Jeremiah himself witnessed, was lamentable. Prophets and priests, the leaders of the church, they staggered around the streets of Jerusalem covered in their and other people's blood. After a long siege, famine had ravaged the city starving even little children down to skin and bones and they quietly died in their parent's arms. Even the king in Jerusalem, King Zedekiah, couldn't escape and he couldn't help. He tried to flee from the city, maybe to get backup, but he was captured by Nebuchadnezzar and forced to watch the brutal massacre of his own children.

Then Nebuchadnezzar gouged out both of Zedekiah's eyes, bound him like a slave, and dragged him off to a foreign land. And there was nothing to do but remember; remember what used to be, remember the temple that used to stand, remember the king that used to protect, remember the life that we used to have. When Jeremiah looked around he wept as he lamented all that he had lost.

Have you ever felt like that? Obviously, you and I haven't been through the exact same situation but have you ever just sat down and wept at what's no longer here? Have you ever looked back on your story and realized that if things had been different, if you had chosen differently, maybe today would be radically different? Maybe some of you feel that way when it comes to your health. You know, your cabinet is just a cluttered mess of pills that you pop every day. You deal with the dosage and its side effects, you schedule surgeries and doctor visits, your body aches and it hurts and you realize it's kind of your fault. It wasn't just getting older, this doesn't happen to everyone; what happened is that you thought your body was a joke. You passed the salt, you downed the sugar, you had the biggest piece of pie and you laughed like there was no consequence. You sat on the couch, you skipped your workouts, you abused this temple that God had given to you and now it caught up to you. And your heart's not healthy and your muscles aren't strong and there's no way to fix it. There's no doctor that can snap her fingers; there's no pill that you can pop and feel better. This is your life and this might be your fault.

Or maybe you think of the relationships in your life; how different they could be. If you had just been able to let that thing go instead of letting bitterness grow. If you hadn't been pursuing your goals and dreams and it selflessly served people and kept in touch, you know, your family could have been like that family but it's not. You're distant, you've drifted, words have been said that you can't back, the trust is gone, and there's no like family gathering that can just make it come back. This is your family and this is your life and there's no rewind button.

When you're like Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem and you just look around and you remember the affliction, the wandering, the bitterness. When you can't forget and your soul is downcast, what do you do? Well today, I want to encourage you to do what Jeremiah did. I want you to listen to these epic verses from the book of Lamentations. Here's what he says next, verse 21: "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Whoa! How did Jeremiah manage his mess? "Yet this I call to mind," he said. When his soul felt like it was squeezed out of every drop of joy and hope, he called this to mind. He forced his depressed heart to think about this.

So what's the "this?" This is God. Jeremiah lists these qualities or attributes of what God is like and it gives him hope. As he sits there in the mess that he made, he forces himself to think the kind of God that he believes in, the kind of faith that he's holding onto, and he says this, verse 22: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed." Like just when you think God is going to consume you and condemn you to hell, what do you see? God's great love. Not just his love, not even his good love. No, Jeremiah says, his great love, his mercy, his grace for us. The kind of love when you look up expecting to see God's angry face and instead it's smiling upon you, it's shining upon you, giving you his blessing. When you've messed everything up and you look up expecting condemnation and there's only the cross that offers salvation, you have hope.

Or Jeremiah continues: "For God's compassions never fail." That just when you think God is going to be fed up and frustrated and done with you, you find out that he is the kind of father whose compassion never fails. When you've been the rebellious kid and you run into your room and you bury your face in your pillow and you can't even look him in the eye, God is like the compassionate dad who sits on the edge of the bed and just puts his hand in your hair and he's just there. He doesn't stop caring, he refuses to quit loving, his compassion never fails even when we do. In fact, Jeremiah says, "God's compassions are new every morning and great is your faithfulness." On those mornings when you wake up and you just know - you can remember the things you said and did and you haven't been faithful - God still is. As the sun comes up, so does his compassion, his faithfulness, and his love. And when we call that to mind, stop just looking at ourselves and our sin but we fix our eyes on the object of our faith, on God, the God who died on the cross, we have hope.

I wonder if you've ever felt the incredible mercy and compassion of God? Like for some of you listening right now, maybe you never have. Maybe you've always thought of God as the Lord of the contract. You know, you live a nice Christian life and then he's going to like you. And you've never really realized the good news of the Christian faith. That God's love reaches down to the bottom. It reaches into the jail cell, into the prison. It goes into the bedrooms of people who are lonely because they've messed up relationships. It reaches out to addicts and recovery groups and those who are so scared they haven't even gone yet. Maybe this could be the day when for the first time in your life the sun of God's great love rises and you feel the warmth of his compassion. Seriously, this could be the day! Angels are literally leaning forward right now thinking about you; if you would repent and believe. If you'd open up your hands and confess the mess, Jesus' broom would clean it all up and bring you to God and you would see how great his love and his faithfulness really are.

But maybe some of you already knew that and maybe you are a Christian and you know that you're saved but have you personally ever felt how fresh and how new the compassion of God can be? There's a story that I told a few years ago, a true story, of an elderly Christian woman who was battling Alzheimer's and she would forget about Jesus. She could still remember that there was a God and she could definitely remember some of the things that she had done in her life and she could never forget some of those hellfire sermons of her childhood. And so every morning when she would wake up, she would panic. She would assume that her life was too messy; that she was too messed up for God to love or to save. She thought she'd never make it to heaven but be condemned to hell. But there in her care facility was a Christian nurse who knew her; a faithful woman who had been there the day that this woman moved in and put that cross of Jesus up above her bed. And so every morning, part of the nurse's routine was to remind this woman of mercy; to point to that cross that she herself had put up; that she had believed in but forgotten. That there was a father of compassion and a God of incredible love and when the old woman heard that news she would smile and the gospel that she had known for so long felt new and it felt fresh.

And some of you know exactly what that's like. You know, it's not the fact that Jesus died on the cross that's new to you but some mornings, doesn't it feel that way? When you wake up and you immediately remember that you've messed up - how much you drank last night, the thing you

said to your kids in the moment of frustration and anger, the stupid argument you got into with your spouse - it makes no sense the morning after and you feel the bitterness of your own sin. But then you wake up to mercy. Maybe it's the song that you play on your phone or that happens to come on Christian radio that reminds you of the love of God. Maybe it's that morning devotion or the podcast from the pastor who somehow knew exactly what you were feeling. It reminds you that there is a Jesus so that even though our sin is great, his mercy is so much more. Have you ever felt that? How many mornings have I just felt like a spiritual loser and then the gospel comes back into my mind and I think about Jesus and the depth of his love and hope comes back. And the sun rises in our hearts and we remember that God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning and great is his faithfulness.

Brothers and sisters, do you see what happens when we call this God to mind? It gives us hope. In fact, if you call God to your mind right now, you just might end up like Jeremiah did. Our last verse for today is verse 24; my favorite words where he says this: "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'" Whoa - come on. Oh, I love that so much! The Lord is my - but what I keep saying to myself, what I refuse to let my emotional heart forget - is that the Lord is my portion. My portion. My lot in life. My slice of the pie. The hand that I'm dealt. What I get because of Jesus is God. Man, I hope that you don't forget that. I did but I refuse to today.

I actually brought something for show and tell today: A binder from my old days in pastor grad school. This right here - is a binder from just one class that I took; my doctrine, or dogmatics class, at seminary. And inside this binder are all these little tabs and all these hundreds and hundreds of pages of teachings and passages that we had to really study before we could become pastors. The class actually started here with the notes in the back and worked this way forward and I wanted to share this because do you know what happened to me when I was a younger Christian? I got so focused on these notes that I forgot about these notes. Here's what I mean - these notes here are about the work of Jesus. These had all the passages about who Jesus was - true God, true man, about his incredible work where he humbled himself on the cross and was raised from the grave, about his role as our prophet, our priest, and our king, you know, how God carried out his plan of salvation. These notes were so, so good and they deserved to be but I kind of missed these notes. Do you know what these first notes were about? God. My little tabs here say things like the "essence of God," the "attributes of God," the "revelation of God." And for some reason, for so much of my Christian life, I forgot about God. I was so grateful that Jesus had forgiven and saved me that when I died, I was going to go to heaven and not to hell. But what I forgot was God. In those days, I might have suddenly disagreed with Jeremiah and though the Lord will be my portion one day when I die but that's not what Jeremiah says. He said the Lord is my portion. Right now, because of the finished work of Jesus, I have God. And even if I've lost the life that I wanted, even if I messed up that relationship, my body, my health, my finances, whatever, because of Jesus things aren't messed up with God. I have him and he's enough.

In fact, that's what I want you to write down; our big idea for today: That we have God and God is enough. He is our portion and he can satisfy our soul. So before I say amen, let me make this really, really practical. How do we do all this? When our soul is downcast and depressed, how do we call God to mind? I want all of you to think about that seriously but, especially, I want to

speak to those of you who are more emotionally wired. Just a show of hands at home, how many of you consider yourselves pretty emotional people? You know, big hearted, empathetic, compassionate; you cry at least once a month. Yeah? Some of you are saying, "Well, once a month? Every day, Pastor." Okay, if you're in a room with more than one person, on the count of three, I want you to point to the most emotional person there. Ready? One, two, three. Okay, if that's you, this is a gift. The prophet Jeremiah and our Savior Jesus were big hearted, compassionate people. I love the fact that God made you that way but I just want to warn you today that that can mess with your faith. Sometimes, your soul is downcast and in those moments you need to engage your mind, you need to preach facts at your feelings, so that you can restore your hope.

And I want to leave you today with the next step on exactly how you can do that. I want you to keep the faith by repeating all these things that we've come to know about God. We're right in the middle of this message series but here's what I hope to teach you before this is all done. I want you to call to mind that God can, God cares, God controls, God knows, God's near, God's enough, and God endures. Okay, you've heard some of those things already: God can, cares, controls, knows, near, he's enough and he endures and I know that's seven things to remember and that's a lot of things to remember so let's practice together. Ready? Say this with me: God can, God cares, God controls, God knows, God's near, God's enough, God endures. One more time: When we lament what we've lost, let's say to ourselves but God can, God cares, God controls, God knows, God's near, God's enough, and God endures. And the more you put that truth in your heart, the more you can stop lamenting and start rejoicing that you still have God.

And if you do, you might end up like her. I want to show you one last picture today from one of my favorite Christian artists. It looks like this. I love how this picture depicts life; it can be dark and difficult. It's not easy terrain but for those who call God to mind, we have this unique light that we see Jesus is with us and because Jesus died for us, we have God and that's enough. And even in the middle of our lamentation, we remember. But because of his great love, we are not consumed. His compassions never fail and great is his faithfulness because the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, believer, you have God and God is enough.

Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, we worship you today. We remember that you are a glorious God. You are not small and insufficient; you are all that we need to be content. So open the eyes of our heart. Help us to remember not just our sin but to remember our glory; to know that you are with us and you promised to never leave or forsake us. You are all that we need. Help us to remember that truth; that we could rejoice today.

We ask this all in the name of your Son, our amazing Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.