

# "Faithful Love"

Lamentations 3:22-24

Baxter Exum (#971)  
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## Introduction:

This morning, I would like for us to conclude our series of six lessons from the life of the prophet Jeremiah.

- Some of you might remember that back on April 20, we started by looking together at Jeremiah's call as he was called by God to be a prophet, somewhere around the age of 14 or 15. We found that God had plans for Jeremiah even before he was born.
- The following week, we went on to look at the danger of accepting phony substitutes for God in one of Jeremiah's first sermons, found in **Jeremiah 2**. The prophet accused the people of rejecting the fresh mountain stream in favor of a broken cistern. But in spite of their rejection, God responded with faithful love, and we considered the picture Jeremiah painted for us—a picture of God taking His people to court. Even after all that they had done, God said, **"Therefore I will yet contend with you."** In other words, God was not through with them yet.
- A week later, we continued by looking at Jeremiah's invitation to go back and join God on the ancient paths. Unfortunately, though, the people had rejected the word of God, they had turned aside to materialism, they had deluded themselves, they were no longer ashamed of sin, and they were in the process of rejecting the only possible cure—very similar to the culture we see around us today. And yet the solution continues to be going back to the ancient paths.
- Two weeks ago, we considered a very interesting picture, as God tells Jeremiah to go to a pottery shop. The message is twofold. First of all, God is the potter. And secondly, we are the clay. As lumps of clay, we may mess up from time to time, but God is patient, and as long as our hearts are soft—as long as we are willing to repent, God remains willing to put us back on the potter's wheel as He tries to shape us once again.
- And then last Sunday morning, we looked together at a prophecy much closer to the end of Jeremiah's ministry. We looked together at the importance of the word of God. Jeremiah was banned from the temple at this point, and so he sent his scribe with a written message. Some of the religious leaders were apparently touched by the message, but as they brought it to the king, King

Jehoiakim took out a knife, he cut up the word of God, and he threw it in the fire. We learned that God's word can make some people very, very angry, and yet even if we cut it and burn it in a fire, the word of God cannot be destroyed.

This past week, I read about a police officer who pulled someone over and wrote a ticket. But as the officer walked away, he heard something rather unusual, so he turned around and he saw the driver chewing up the ticket. The driver actually swallowed the ticket! I think we would have to agree, however, that destroying the ticket did not get the driver out of trouble! The driver still had to appear in court and still had to pay the fine. In a similar way, God's word cannot be destroyed. We can ignore various parts of it, we can turn away from it, we can burn it up, we can chew it, but the word of God will still judge the world on the last day. This was a lesson that the southern kingdom of Israel was about to learn in a very personal way.

Unfortunately, their rebellion continued, and by the time we get to the end of the book of **Jeremiah**, the prophecies hold true, and the city of Jerusalem is completely destroyed. The king tries to run, but he is captured and is brought back. His two sons are killed right before his eyes, and then the Babylonians gouge out the king's eyes so that the image of his sons being murdered is the last thing that he will ever see. He is then carried off in chains to the city of Babylon. Thousands of other residents are killed. During the siege, it gets so bad that mothers resort to eating their own children. Nearly all of those who survive are then carried off into Babylonian captivity. All of this is recorded for us in **2 Kings 25** as well as in the final chapter of the book of **Jeremiah**, in **Jeremiah 52**.

As we conclude this series, I would like for us to actually end by looking at the next book in the Bible, a book that is commonly referred to as the book of **Lamentations**. In our pew Bibles, the book of **Lamentations** begins on page 1286. The book of **Lamentations** is only five chapters long, it is often overlooked, and yet it was most likely also written by the prophet Jeremiah. Over the past few weeks, we have occasionally referred to Jeremiah as the "**Weeping Prophet**," and in the book of Lamentations, we see that his nickname is well-deserved. To "**lament**" is to cry, and so the book of **Lamentations** is a book of crying. It is basically a funeral song.

Over the past few weeks, maybe you have noticed some of the weeping that has taken place in China. After the huge earthquake, the news kept showing people sitting in the streets sobbing in front of piles of rubble. I think we have a similar picture in the book of **Lamentations**. For just a picture of what this book is like, I would encourage us (by way of introduction) to look together at the first nine verses—**Lamentations 1:1-9**. As the prophet Jeremiah sits down on the outskirts of Jerusalem—looking back at the destruction—as he sits there and cries...

***<sup>1</sup> How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer! <sup>2</sup> She weeps bitterly in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; she has none to comfort her among all her lovers. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become***

***her enemies. <sup>3</sup> Judah has gone into exile under affliction and under harsh servitude; she dwells among the nations, but she has found no rest; all her pursuers have overtaken her in the midst of distress. <sup>4</sup> The roads of Zion are in mourning because no one comes to the appointed feasts. All her gates are desolate; her priests are groaning, her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is bitter. <sup>5</sup> Her adversaries have become her masters, her enemies prosper; for the LORD has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions; her little ones have gone away as captives before the adversary. <sup>6</sup> All her majesty has departed from the daughter of Zion; her princes have become like deer that have found no pasture; and they have fled without strength before the pursuer. <sup>7</sup> In the days of her affliction and homelessness Jerusalem remembers all her precious things that were from the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the adversary and no one helped her. The adversaries saw her, they mocked at her ruin. <sup>8</sup> Jerusalem sinned greatly, therefore she has become an unclean thing. All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; even she herself groans and turns away. <sup>9</sup> Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she did not consider her future. Therefore she has fallen astonishingly; she has no comforter. "See, O LORD, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself!"***

The prophet continues in **Lamentations 3:48-51**, ***"My eyes run down with streams of water because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes pour down unceasingly, without stopping, until the LORD looks down and sees from heaven. My eyes bring pain to my soul because of all the daughters of my city."***

And so I think we get the picture. Jeremiah is mourning, he is weeping over the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. And yet almost exactly in the middle of this book of mourning, we find one of the most positive statements ever recorded anywhere in the Bible.

In fact, we have a song in our songbooks based on the statement that we are about to consider. I would say that it is one of the most beautiful songs in our entire book, and it is a direct quote (from the Revised Standard Version) of **Lamentations 3:22-24**. **▶PPT▶** The song (#892) was written down by sister Amy Bessire, who, in a rather unusual twist, is visiting with us this morning! As I told you several weeks ago, I have been planning this series for close to two years, and I had no idea that Amy would be here until this past Wednesday evening! This morning, I spoke to Amy, and she said, "It was all God." Certainly we need more of our young people to put God's word to music. As we were singing this morning, I noticed that most of our songs were written in the late 1800's. Wouldn't it be great if we could look at our songbooks 30 years from now and find the names of our young people listed as authors, with copyright dates of 2008 and 2009? Nevertheless, I would like for us to focus our thoughts this morning on **Lamentations 3:22-24**...

***<sup>22</sup> The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. <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 have hope in Him."***

This morning, as we close our thoughts on the prophet Jeremiah, and as we think back on these three verses, I would like for us to ask ourselves the question: **How can one of the most positive and beautiful songs come from the saddest book in the entire Bible?** I would suggest several answers to that question...

**I. First of all, in spite of all of the terrible things that had happened to the Southern Kingdom of Israel, the prophet Jeremiah could say with confidence that THE LORD'S LOVINGKINDNESSES INDEED NEVER CEASE.** **▶▶PPT▶▶**

The English Standard Version says that, ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases."*** The New International Version says, ***"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed."*** The New King James Version says that, ***"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed."*** And so for just a moment, maybe we can try to put ourselves back in Jeremiah's situation. We have preached for decades, warning the people about the coming judgment of God. And yet here we are, sitting on the outskirts of Jerusalem as the smoke is rising. The city has been completely destroyed. Every building has been burned to the ground. The city walls have been pulled down. The priests have been killed in the temple. All of the gold and the bronze in the temple has been cut into pieces and hauled away. The bodies of women and little children line the streets. The remaining residents are being shackled together and are being led away into captivity. God has allowed all of these terrible things to happen. In fact, God has caused all of these things to happen. This is God's punishment. It is the wrath of God. And yet through his tears, Jeremiah is able to say, ***"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease!"***

Sometimes we might see a bumper sticker that says, ***"If you can read this, you are too close."*** Perhaps in the same way, Jeremiah is saying, ***"If you can read these words that I am writing, then God has been merciful to you, because you are still alive!"*** It is because of God's never-ending love that we ourselves have not been consumed! Someone has said that as bad as things may get, that without God it would be so much worse!

We think about the word that is used here in the New American Standard Bible, ***"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease."*** The word refers to God's covenant love for the people of Israel. It carries the idea of ***"loyal love."*** It is love based on a decision. It does not depend on an emotion, but the kind of love that we are talking about here is ongoing. It is constant, regardless of the circumstances. The spell-checker in my computer had a really hard time with this. It kept telling me that there is no such word! And certainly, ***"lovingkindnesses"*** is a very difficult word to understand. There is no English word that fully translates the idea that we

are talking about. But we start to get an idea when we talk about the steadfast love, the great love, the mercies, the lovingkindnesses of God indeed never coming to an end. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases!

**II. There is a second reason why one of the most positive verses is found in one of the saddest books of the Bible, and that is, THE LORD'S COMPASSIONS NEVER FAIL. »PPT»**

In other words, even though His people are sinful and rebellious, God still shows His compassion, "***His compassions never fail.***" It is interesting to me that the word "***compassions***" is plural. As the Revised Standard Version puts it, "***His mercies never come to an end.***" As I understand it, the word that Jeremiah uses here can ultimately be traced back to an ancient word for "womb," and so the term starts to communicate the deep and gentle feeling of concern that God has for us as His children. His mercy is intense and without limits. It comes in waves like a river that never stops flowing.

Certainly as human beings, our compassions do fail from time to time. Perhaps we are compassionate here and there. Perhaps we are compassionate more often than not. Perhaps we merely see ourselves as being compassionate. But when it comes right down to it, our compassions fail. Unlike God, we blow it from time to time. But the compassions of God "***never fail.***"

And once again, it is significant that Jeremiah is writing these words during some of the darkest times in the history of God's people. The city of Jerusalem had been crushed by the Babylonian armies. The temple had been defiled by Gentile soldiers who had come in and had killed the priests and the others who were hiding inside. And yet as his tears were falling on the page, Jeremiah was able to write that the compassions of God "***never fail.***" Even though His people had forgotten Him, God had not forgotten them. Even though His people had chosen other gods, God had not chosen another people. God brought punishment. God let them feel the heat of His anger. God allowed them to suffer. But through it all, God remembered His promise to Abraham that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God remembered, even though his people had done nothing to deserve being remembered. His compassions never fail.

**III. There is another reason why such a beautiful passage is found in such a sad book, and that is, THE LORD'S COMPASSIONS ARE NEW EVERY MORNING. »PPT»**

I don't know about all of you, but I am so thankful that we are serving a God who checks in on us and considers our needs every single day of the year! His compassions are "***new every morning.***" God takes care of us on a daily basis. Most of us do not know what it is like to live from day to day, not knowing where the next meal will come from. After all, most of us have regular paychecks, we can probably see several weeks of food in the pantry and in the refrigerator and in the

freezer, and so it is very easy to forget where that food really comes from. And isn't it interesting that one of the main reasons why we tend to forget the gifts that God gives us is because of their regularity! He constantly takes care of us, and yet we forget. We forget because the care is so constant! We forget, because those blessings are **"new every morning."** What if our blessings were not **"new every morning"**? What if we had food only every other day? What if we had sunshine only every other day? What if we had air only every other day? But thankfully, God's compassions are **"new every morning"**!

We think about the Israelites in the wilderness. They knew what it was like to have their compassions renewed every morning. We remember God's gift of manna. And to reinforce the fact that it was a daily blessing, do you remember the rule that God made? God said that they could collect only what they could eat in a day. God was reinforcing the fact that His compassions were going to be **"new every morning."**

Not only does God take care of us in a physical sense, but we also learn from the Scriptures that we can be forgiven on a daily basis (and really, this is the most beautiful part of God's compassions being new every morning). I might have really made a mess out of my life yesterday, but that was yesterday! I might have been harsh with someone at school or at work. I might have been really grumpy at home. I might have said something inappropriate to a brother in Christ. But that was yesterday! We thank God that today is a new day! His compassions are **"new every morning"**! When we pray to God and ask Him to forgive us, those sins are forgiven, those mistakes are completely erased, those sins are forgotten in the mind of God, they are erased from God's hard drive. In **1 John 1:9**, the Bible says, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** God may say, **"Baxter, you really blew it yesterday, but My compassions are new every morning, and so you are forgiven—you can start today with a clean slate."** What a blessing it is to serve a God whose compassions are **"new every morning"**!

Jeremiah's message to the people of Jerusalem, therefore, was that God was still compassionate. Even though the city was still burning, even though the temple was in ruins, and even though the best and the brightest had been killed or taken away into captivity, God could still forgive if the people were willing to repent.

And when we look at history, we find that the people did, in fact, turn away from their sins. There was a new morning in the history of God's people. And we find that seventy years later the people were slowly allowed to return to the city of Jerusalem. And you know, it is interesting: After the Jews came back from Babylon in 539 BC, they never again bowed down to idols. They may have sinned in other ways, but never again did they have a problem with the sin of idolatry. In the books written after the captivity (the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), the Jews never again fell into the sin of idolatry. They learned the lesson well! They finally understood that the compassions of God are **"new every morning."**

**IV. As we come to verse 24, we find another reason why Jeremiah could be so positive in such terrible circumstances, as he says, "THE LORD IS MY PORTION," SAYS MY SOUL, "THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE IN HIM."**  
**»PPT»**

It is no coincidence that Jeremiah's father was a priest. That means he would have been from the tribe of Levi. You might remember that as the land of Canaan was divided up, the Levites were not given a portion of the land, but as the priests they were to divide up between the tribes. In a very real sense, God was their **"portion."** God was their inheritance. And so, as the city of Jerusalem is burning, as the prophet Jeremiah is weeping, he can see through the destruction, and he can see that this is not his land—his land is God. God is Jeremiah's portion. God is Jeremiah's inheritance.

In the New Testament, we think about the apostle Paul, and we see some definite parallels. The apostle Paul had lost basically everything to become a Christian. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe where Jeremiah lived as a priest. The apostle Paul gave up his position as a Pharisee only to be beaten, and ridiculed, and abused for preaching the gospel message. And yet as Paul said in **Philippians 1:21**, **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."** Paul could also say that God was his **"portion."** God was his inheritance.

It was because of this confidence that the prophet Jeremiah could say, **"Therefore I have hope in Him."** Even as the city of Jerusalem continued to burn, Jeremiah could put his hope in God.

**Conclusion & Invitation:**

This morning, we have looked at an incredibly positive statement that is found in the middle of one of the saddest books in the entire Bible. After decades of preaching and warning the people to return to God, the punishment begins, and Jeremiah was there to watch it all happen. Certainly we have learned this morning (and over the past few weeks) that sin has consequences. Sin brings out the wrath of God. As we read in **Hebrews 10:31**, **"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** But thankfully, God's love warns us about the danger of sin. And even in the middle of suffering the consequences, Jeremiah was able to say, **"The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I have hope in Him.'"** We have now completed our study of the great prophet Jeremiah. I hope that we have been encouraged by the weeping prophet of the Old Testament.

God's message today continues to be that sin has consequences. But in response to our sin, God sent His only Son as a sacrifice. The wrath of God has been satisfied in the cross. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved, and in response to that sacrifice, the good news is that we can respond to the message in loving obedience. The Bible tells us to turn away from sin and to allow ourselves to be immersed in

water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we would love to study with you right away. But if you need to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)