

Lamentations 3:25-39 The Lamenting Zone Falls Ch. AM 11/5/2023

In this third lament, the third chapter of Lamentations, Jeremiah wrote of his own afflictions at the hands of the Lord in ways that remind us of Job, remind us of the Psalmists, remind us of Jeremiah's bigger book, the Book of Jeremiah, and remind us of the suffering of Christ Jesus.

What happens right after verses 22-24, when we were reminded of God's steadfast love, which never ceases, God's mercies, which never come to an end, God's faithfulness, which is new every morning, and God Himself, who is our portion, giving us a sound basis on which to hope? What happens after that?

Waiting! That brings us to our main point: **Between our current suffering and our future relief, we have a limited opportunity to lament, while God uses this time to produce something good.**

**1. While we lament that waiting itself has become our new hardship, we discover afresh the goodness of The Lord. (v.25-27)**

All three verses of this unit, 25, 26, and 27, begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That fits the pattern throughout the chapter, 3 verses per letter, in the intricate structure. In addition, each verse here even begins with the very same Hebrew word, repeated three times. The word is good.

Jeremiah's lament provides a meditation on what is good. Jeremiah stated in verse 1 that he has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath. The natural tendency would be to run away from God, but Jeremiah learned something vital through His lamenting. Jeremiah learned that the better course is to not run from, but rather to wait for God. Why? Because of this golden truth in verse 25, "*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him...*" And the second half of the verse supports and confirms that same truth, "*[The LORD is good to...] the soul who seeks Him.*" What does it mean to wait for The LORD and to seek God? Lamenting! It means to communicating to God. It means praying. It means coming into the presence of God. It means getting God's help.

Verse 26 gives the second out of 3 things that are good. It is good when suffering people wait quietly. In other words, it is good when we do not grumble to God about His delay. It is good when we do not gripe to God that He is in slow motion. It is good is when people going through a hardship show a yielded attitude. Verse 26. "*It is good that one should wait quietly...*" Quietly does not mean ceasing all talking with God. Not that kind of quiet. Rather, it is the kind of quiet that is praying to God devoid of fuming toward God. Jeremiah was not silent. He raised challenges toward God regarding this affliction. But Jeremiah was not questioning the fundamental justice of God in allowing his city to fall.

Jeremiah will go on to say much more later in chapter 3, but all of this Jeremiah will manage to say while maintaining a yieldedness to God, during his waiting!

Verse 27 gives us the third of the set of 3 things that are good. It is good to bear the yoke while young. “*In his youth*” could refer to literal young people, and it also could refer to the early moments of suffering, rather than much later in the time of suffering. Learning to bear the yoke is best done as soon as possible. What is the yoke? The yoke refers to the long duration of time of suffering under God’s discipline. An ancient yoke enabled the farmer to steer the animal in the needed direction. God’s yoke of suffering remaining on us, enables God to steer us in the needed direction. The implication is that if we experience and recognize God’s lessons from suffering that steer us in the right direction, then later we will remember both the pain and the lesson, and after the yoke is removed, we will continue to walk in the correct and godly pathway. The mention of yoke by the prophet Jeremiah reminds us of the Book of Jeremiah, chapters 27 and 28, where the prophet put on an actual animal yoke to make his teaching point, that God’s people must submit to the rule of the invading foreign King of Babylon. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar was God’s instrument of discipline and the people should accept that suffering as from God and be steered in the right direction. It is good that what God’s people learn in exile would be continued after exile is over.

**2. While we lament, The Lord reassures us that our suffering will end.(v.28-33)** The previous it is good to “*wait quietly*” from verse 26 becomes in verse 28, to “*sit alone in silence.*” And what in verse 27 was “*bear the yoke*” now becomes in verse 29, to say that “*there may yet be hope.*”

The lesson is clear: the lamenting zone is limited in time, and so the time must be used correctly. Christians who are going through hardships are to do more than hunker down in stoic waiting. We are to do more than ‘remain tough’ or ‘hang in there’ and we need more than minimum goals to ‘outlast the problem’ or reach the point when ‘this too shall pass.’ That is not a Christian approach. That is not lamenting. Suffering Christians who are yielded to God are actively waiting. Actively waiting for The LORD is actively resting. Actively resting in The LORD is infused with hope. Hope is the sure knowledge and expectation that someday our hardship will end. Hopeful waiting is knowing that God is worth waiting for. Hopeful waiting is remaining convinced that God knows what is best. A healthy hoping is accepting this current pathway as best. This suffering, this hardship, this waiting, this timetable, this pathway, has all been perfectly arranged by our loving God, our hoping hearts keep repeating to ourselves. Wait and see, hope says. Through this good lamenting, our good Lord encourages us. This form of

acceptance is today's mercy – we remember how His mercies are new every day! In addition, tomorrow we can count on this mercy being part God's mercy to us, too. This acceptance perspective is available today. This yielded perspective will be available tomorrow from our God of consistency and faithfulness. This surrendering to God without squawking, is always part of the new mercies delivery basket that arrives daily from heaven. Daily, our merciful God enables us to comply with His sovereign will by trusting Him. Romans 12:2, "...by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Why should the sufferer accept the pain and quietly wait for future deliverance by God? Because God promised an end, and God sets that time of the end of our suffering zone. That promise is provided in yet another set of 3 lamenting verses, verse 31-33, "*For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though He cause grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not afflict from His heart or grieve the children of men.*" God has no desire to afflict His children out of a heart that would want to see us suffer. No. Rather, God only sends as much affliction as is absolutely necessary to bring about our restoration. As Psalm 23 reminds, The LORD is our shepherd, He it is who restores our souls, the same Shepherd who remains with us while He takes us on a walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Why don't we fear? Because of His presence, because of His goodness and mercy following us each day of our lives. Psalm 23 shares the viewpoint of Lamentations 3 – our suffering is God's chastisement with a view toward restoration, like surgery with a view toward healing.

### **3. While we lament under God's design, we gain true contentment. (v.34-39)**

Verses 34-36, "*to crush underfoot...prisoners, to deny a man justice...to subvert a man in his lawsuit, the Lord does not approve.*" God's character is now described here in reference to releasing the captives, which was the central work of the Messiah, as Jesus pointed out in His first sermon in Luke 4:18, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me...and He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives...*" which was Jesus quoting Isaiah 61:1-2. 1 Corinthians 15:57, "*...thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" God has given people certain basic rights, including each person having equal opportunities before the law. To take someone captive unfairly, or to cheat him out of his rights is to deface the image of God in him, since God is the Just One. Eventually, God will respond and make it right.

We see this expounded in our last triplet. In verse 37, God alone is the controller of all things that come to pass, and in verse 38, from God's mouth comes all good outcomes for us and all bad outcomes for us, and in verse 39, therefore who should complain? Every person should endure every bad outcome with

patience and without protest to God, trusting in the mercies of God to bring us good out of this evil. Job came to the same conclusion in Job 2:10, “*Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?*” God’s Word tells us how both good outcomes and bad outcomes can be squared with the fact that God is good and that God loves us. Consider Romans 8:28, “*we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*” Patience and endurance should especially be the case when it is an innocent person who is the one who is suffering unjustly, and this truth we know from 1 Peter 2:24-25, “*[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*” On the other hand, when a person has done wrong and suffers for it, that person has no cause to grumble, per 1 Peter 2:20, “*For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?*” In other words, since innocent Job was not supposed to grumble, how much less should the exiles grumble, whose exile was caused by their own sins!

How far does this acceptance go? This attitude of being submissive to God’s will in the face of sufferings is seen at the highest level by Jesus, just before His crucifixion. Matthew 26:67, “*Then they spit in [Jesus’s] face and struck Him. And some slapped Him...*” Luke 22:64, “*They also blindfolded [Jesus] and kept asking Him, ‘Prophesy! Who is it that struck You?’*”

The lamenting zone takes us to the cross. What do we see? While waiting for God, an innocent victim suffered for the sins of others, in obedience to God’s will. Matthew 26:39, “*...[Jesus] fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’*”

Even though we know that this suffering of Jesus is unique for Him as the only Messiah, there is still an application to us. The attitude of Jesus is to become the attitude for us as followers of Jesus, the path of submitting to God’s will for our sufferings. Philippians 2:5, “*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...*” Yes, Jesus is God, and that is the point – even though He was the Son of God, yet even He emptied Himself to become obedient to the point of death. Doesn’t that clearly steer us to also empty ourselves and be obedient to God in our suffering? Yes, the apostle Peter makes it just that clear in 1 Peter 2:21, “*...to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you and example, so that you might follow in His steps.*” Peter calls us to notice that there was no form of retaliation from Jesus to His persecutors, as verses 22-23 are careful to point out, “*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.*”

**Conclusion:**

1. The lamenting zone is for receiving hope from God.

Jeremiah was leading the people back to God Himself. In the lamenting zone, we do not set our hearts on a certain outcome from our sufferings. Instead, we set our hearts on drawing near to God and placing our hope in Him alone. No suffering can take God from us! This is the very nature of hope itself, to wait patiently for what we do not see. Romans 8:24, “*Who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*”

If we already had a life free from suffering, we would not have a need to exercise hope.

In the lamenting zone, God is teaching us how to wait patiently, which is the same as saying God is teaching us how to hope. Waiting is not easy. But in the waiting, there are lessons to learn that are so valuable, they are like gold.

Lamenting is when the lessons get learned. Lamenting is telling ourselves what we believe. God’s mercy is new today. God’s love never ceases. God is being faithful to me right now. We still have good reason to keep hoping in God.

Hope is watchful waiting – watching for the new mercies in this day. Eager. Eyes peeled. Looking for the good.

Hope is waiting with knowledge – knowing that one day God will bring the suffering to an end.

Hope is yielded waiting – surrendering fully to God’s timing, and not needing to keep asking “Are we there yet?” with the immaturity of small children.

Hope is waiting without grumbling. Rather than going on and on about how this is not right suffering, this is not deserved suffering, Jeremiah got into a new habit of waiting with hope. Jeremiah got that hope from God.

2. The lamenting zone is for lamenting. Once God provides relief, we will be too busy rejoicing to do any more lamenting. Now is the time to lament.

When we are suffering, we are in a rare period of time. We are in a short-lived moment. Only during this time can we lament. We are in the lamenting zone designed by God for us as a learning laboratory. Even during this time, God is doing something good. Let us keep lamenting, until relief comes. Let us keep lamenting with hope. Let us keep receiving the reassurances of God, and expecting good to come to us from our good God.

Lamenting is contented waiting. It is okay that we don’t know what will happen. Wondering about it, occupies too much space in our thinking. Lamenting helps us avoid getting fearful about what might happen, what could happen. In lamenting, we constantly keep turning to God.

Lamenting is asking - why is this happening, and accepting God’s answer? Because God gives us mercy, because God loves us, because God knows us, because God says this is best, because God corrects us, because God rules over us and protects us, because God sees the whole picture.

Lamenting is telling ourselves that we are not God. We wait because we are not God. We wait not knowing because we are not God. Waiting feels like we are not doing anything. That is the whole point. We cannot do anything. We cannot fix this world. But God is doing something. God is doing something because God can. God can fix this world. God can provide for us. All we have to do is find a way to express that we know God is in control. We feel out of control. But actually, it is enough for us that God is in control. Only in the lament zone can you learn this truth. Jeremiah says learn it as young as we can. It will serve us well our whole lives.

Lamenting is relinquished waiting. Spiritual lessons come slowly. Because we don't relinquish very quickly, do we? We have to stop trying on our own. We have to reach a point of brokenness. We have to be ready for God to lead us out of this. Our job is not to fix. Our job is to lament. That is why God brought us into The Lamenting Zone. While we are in the Lamenting zone, we remember the goodness of the Lord, and that even in the zone, His mercies meet us there. His intentions for us are kind intentions. God is not enjoying our struggles any more than we are. But He has so much good to give us that can be given no other way, during no other time, in no other zone. The lamenting zone is for lamenting.

Psalm 42:6, *“Why are you downcast, 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.”*