



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 5, 2007
Released on Wednesday, August 1, 2007**

“Jeremiah Urged Hope in God”

Printed Text: Lamentations 3:25-33, 55-58

Background Scripture: 2 Kings 25:1-7, 2, 5-7; Lamentations 3:25-58

Devotional Reading: Psalm 23

Lamentations 3:25-33

25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

29 He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.

30 He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

Lamentations 3:55-58

55 I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon.

56 Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry.

57 Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.

58 O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.

INTRODUCTION

“Two men looked out from prison bars. One saw mud, one saw stars.” There is always need for hope—people cannot go on with life if there is no hope.

Writing in *Preaching Today* under the title “Keep Hope Alive,” Lewis Smedes said, “A couple of weeks ago, as I was driving away from the Los Angeles airport, a huge, brilliantly illuminated billboard arrested my attention. It carried one simple message in three simple words: ‘Keep Hope Alive.’ I must tell you it was the most compelling billboard I’ve ever seen, because keeping hope alive is the number-one priority of the city of Los Angeles today. We’re in trouble. We’re broken. We’re hurting.”

“If hope dies, the city will die with it. But we all need to keep hope alive. Hope is to our spirits what oxygen is to our lungs. Your spirit dies when hope dies. They may not bury you for a while, but without hope you’re dead.” It has often been shown that a person can somehow endure the greatest of disasters and disappointments as long as there is hope for something in the future. But when hope evaporates, something in the spirit of a person dies.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jeremiah is traditionally believed to be the author of the book of Lamentations. The theme of the book is the desolation that accompanies the destruction of Jerusalem.

It has now been some 40 years since Jeremiah was called to prophesy. In one sense some may consider Jeremiah a failure. His nation is gone, and the majority in Judah did not heed his message. In God's sight, however, Jeremiah is a faithful prophet who preaches even when he does not wish to do so (Jeremiah 20:9). Future generations regard him highly. His is one of the names given to Jesus when He asked His disciples how others identified Him (Matthew 16:13, 14).

The most difficult time to praise God and live in obedience to His Word comes when life has dealt a severe blow. Great disappointment, shattered dreams, and confusion about the future have a way of spawning bitterness and turning discouragement into depression.

It is with time, experience, and maturity that one learns to use the above-mentioned times to one's advantage. To do that also takes a quiet reflection on what really matters in life. One can then build on that great truth. Such was the task of Jeremiah in this week's text as he urged God's beaten-down people, as well as himself, not to lose hope in the Almighty.

The first four chapters of Lamentations are alphabetic acrostics: the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used consecutively to begin the verses. Here in chapter three there are three verses for each letter. In two places the letters are transposed, and no one knows why. Some think that this method of writing may increase the ability to remember, demonstrate the carefulness of the writer, or perhaps show that the subject is covered completely.

TODAY'S AIM

FACTS: to help students examine the passage to see how to find hope from God in the midst of adversity.

PRINCIPLE: to understand that God provides hope to all who turn to Him in adversity.

APPLICATION: to accept that when we keep our hope in God during our times of trouble, He will show us a way out.

HOPING IN GOD- Lamentations 3:25-33

1. How was Jeremiah able to see the awful devastation around him and still manage to see God's faithfulness? (Lamentations 3:25)

"Jeremiah knew from personal experience about God's faithfulness. God had promised that punishment would follow disobedience, and it did. But God also had promised future restoration and blessing, and Jeremiah knew that God would keep that promise also. Trusting in God's faithfulness day by day makes us confident in his great promises for the future" (*Life Application Bible Notes, Tyndale*).

Jeremiah had just penned, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). One thing we naturally do is look at circumstances instead of keeping our thoughts on the character of the God who controls them.

2. What did Jeremiah say about the Lord's relationship to those who wait upon Him in difficult times? (vs. 3:26)

Is there anything harder than waiting for God to act when we think the need is desperate and something should be done quickly? Jeremiah was looking at the ruins of Jerusalem and wondering what God was going to do next. On the surface, everything appeared to be hopeless. The walls of the city had been broken down, the temple had been burned to the ground, and the people who remained were few in number compared to the many who had been killed or taken into captivity in Babylon. Now what? Where to turn? What a desperate and hopeless sight!

Jeremiah knew that hope had to be in the Lord, for "the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him." Therefore, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. 3:26). There was nowhere else to turn; so instead of sitting around moaning over the circumstances, this was a time to look to God. God never loses control of any situation. Even when it appears that life has dealt us a final blow, He remains constant and faithful to respond to our needs.

3. Why is it sometimes best that parents stand back and not solve hard situations for their children? (vs. 3:27)

Children are going to face all manners of obstacles on this life journey. As parents, it is only fitting that we have our child's best interest at heart because of our love for them. We school, instruct, and counsel our children on the good and bad things the world offers hoping they would be of a sound mind to make good choices throughout their life to avoid some of the struggles they may draw to themselves.

However, not all struggles are a result of the inflicted individual but could be due to the operating standards of society and its people. Whatever the situation may be, we as parents do not want to see our children suffer, mistreated or misled in ways that bring about pain to them. Our parental instinct is to jump right in the midst of the situation and make it all better. We even wish we could change places with our children because as a parent, we have an instinct to be a protector. We want to bear the burdens; we want to provide the right antidote to make the pain go away.

Once again, however, wise parents realize that valuable learning experiences come through difficult times. This is basically what Jeremiah was reflecting on in these verses. He had been through much hardship while young and recognized the value of what he had gained from it. To "bear the yoke" (Lam. 3:27) means to suffer.

Jeremiah looked around at total devastation and had to remind himself that this was not the first time he had encountered a situation that required him to wait upon God.

Jeremiah had endured terrible suffering for his prophecies about the doom of Judah. He had been put in a "dungeon," or cistern, and left to die, although he was later rescued. Jeremiah attributed that rescue to God, just as he believed God would always deliver him in the future.

Does God always rescue us from trouble? No, but He is always there, no matter what. Paul talked about the difficulties he had faced (2 Cor. 11:23-27), but he knew that God would always give him His grace (12:9). That is what we can count on. That is what gives us hope.

4. What did Jeremiah say about how to wait during suffering? (vs. 28-30)

Jeremiah's words in the next three verses seem to combine the thought of the previous verse (bearing a yoke) and the suffering that accompanied Jerusalem's siege and destruction. There is no question this time about the source of the sorrows. The Lord is the one who has placed the burden on His people (v. 28).

For Jeremiah, seeing the destruction of Jerusalem was cause for great grief and consternation. He knew God had been warning the people of Judah that judgment was coming, but when he saw the extent of it, it was no doubt far beyond anything he could have imagined. All he could do was humbly submit himself and God's people to Him.

During suffering, Jeremiah said man should sit by himself and not say a word. He used the expression in vs. 29, Let him put "his mouth in the dust..." In order for anyone to put his/her mouth in the dust, he or she must bow down to the ground. This expression is derived from the Oriental custom of throwing oneself in the most reverential manner on the ground, and involves the idea of humble silence, because the mouth, placed in the dust, cannot speak" (Keil, Commentary on the Old Testament, Hendrickson).

In the meantime, Jeremiah would be subjected to taunts and reproaches from those unable to understand how God works.

5. What does God's compassion make Him willing to do for His people? (vs. 31-33)

God is good all the time, and all the time God is good! Despite the trying circumstances that we face throughout this life, we know that God is a God of love. He is not mean-spirited. Jeremiah knew this as well. Jeremiah reminded himself of three specific facts concerning God: (1) God will never cast aside His children without a time of restoration. Many of God's children have known the chastening of God because of sin but have been restored.

When a Christian confesses his sin and repents of it, there is always restoration to fellowship with God; (2) Though God may be causing the grief His children experience, He is still compassionate toward His people, again because of His great mercy. Jeremiah referred to this as "the multitude of his mercies" (v. 32); and (3) Jeremiah knew that God does not willingly afflict or grieve His people. This is a most important truth for us, because we live in a world fraught with pain, disappointment, and discouragement.

If you are dealing with any of these right now, remember that God is not being mean or vicious toward you. He has some loving purpose behind what He is allowing in your life. Your faith is being severely tested, but remember that you can focus on the God who loves you instead of on the circumstances that surround you. Remember, God is bigger than any circumstance you will ever encounter.

CALLING ON GOD- Lamentations 3:55-58

At what point did Jeremiah call on God? (Lamentations 3:55-56)

The verses immediately before this section show that Jeremiah is vividly recalling the time when he personally was the object of violence (Lamentations 3:52-54). Also see Jeremiah 38:6-13.

Jeremiah called on God for help at his lowest point. He felt as if he were down in a "low dungeon" which refers to a pit or a hole (again). We all go through tough times-times when it seems we are about as low as we can get. God's people are not exempt. Remember Daniel: he was in pretty low state when he was in the lion's den. Joseph was not much better off when he was cast into a pit by his brothers then sold into slavery.

But no matter how low we may go, the good news is we can never go so low that God cannot hear us or see us. We know we have victory through Jesus in the low times. Jesus knows what it means to be in low dungeon, and He knows how to lift us out of that state.

6. What did Jeremiah know after praying? (vs. 56-57)

After praying, Jeremiah knew he had been heard. He cried out to God with all that was within him, grieving for the city, the people, etc... He cried out with sincerity expecting a word from the Lord. He called on the Lord to hear him and not close His ears off from his cry for help. Jeremiah described his cry for help as "breathing" (vs. 56) which means he was in a very desperate state.

Because he knew his cry was heard, though, hope remained-slim though it may have been. We should never give up on our faithful God!

In verse 57, Jeremiah sensed that as he cried out desperately to God, God drew near to listen and help. He said that the Lord told him the simple, reassuring words "Fear not."

Have we not found ourselves in situations in which we desperately needed to hear these same words from God? We live in a loud, noisy world in which it is not always easy to hear the still, small voice of God. If your life has been shaken up, get away by yourself and let Him assure you with these words.

7. How did Jeremiah feel about his life, knowing God was there? (vs. 58)

Triumphantly Jeremiah could say from his heart, "O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life" (Lam. 3:58). The word translated "redeemed" refers to the buying back of a person's property or freedom by someone who is the next of kin. By himself the person is unable to buy back what was taken from him; but when someone else steps up and takes care of the matter for him, he is redeemed. This is, of course, what Jesus Christ has done for every one of us. We cannot gain salvation alone, but He paid for it for us.

Because God had drawn near and taken up his cause, Jeremiah knew he would be given the necessary strength to go on. His life was not over in spite of the destruction all around him. Hope returned as Jeremiah prayed. Where are you today? If you are surrounded by devastation, turn to God in earnest prayer. He is there and will draw near to give you hope. If you are surrounded by devastation, turn to God in earnest prayer. He is there and will draw near to give you hope.

CONCLUSION

If we never experienced difficulties and trials, we would think we were self-sufficient and not in need of God. We would lose sight of all we have to be thankful for. In the case of Judah, their time of suffering in exile would make their appreciation of God's mercy much keener when He delivered them.

No matter what our circumstance, even during the most difficult times of suffering, the believer can say that God is good. His goodness is not something He keeps to Himself. He is generous with His goodness. He *wants* to bless His children. The problem is that we are often impatient in waiting for His goodness. Sometimes it is unbelievably hard to wait for His blessings. But take heart. They will come.

Jeremiah made it clear that God is good to those who wait on Him. Isaiah said "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

This is what God's Word says.

PRAYER

Almighty God in Heaven, thank You for the blessings of redemption, daily bread, and friends in Christ. None of us seek trials and pain, but we can thank You for the steadfastness, character, and hope through the suffering that those trials and pain produce. In the name of Jesus who suffered so much, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Study Ezekiel 18:4, 20–23, 30–32 "Ezekiel Preached About Individual Responsibility."

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