

## Mercies New Every Morning

Lamentations 3:19-26

David Sunday

November 24, 2013

---

Father, we're so thankful for Your people and Your Word. We are strengthened by grace as we worship and meditate on Your words. Lord, as we open up this passage, we pray, "What we know not, please teach us. What we have not, please give us. And what we are not, please make us." For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please open your Bible to our passage in Lamentations 3. We are going to hear one more sermon from the Gospel of Luke in our Thanksgiving service, and then we'll be taking a break from that series until after Christmas. Next week, we begin Advent together.

I want to draw your attention to a passage that I think will help set the tone for us this Thanksgiving week. I am going to focus on Lamentations 3:19-26.

*Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!  
My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I  
call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord  
never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every  
morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul,  
"therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him,  
to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the  
salvation of the Lord.*

This is God's Holy Word. Thanks be to God!

I am reminded of the words by the English poet, George Herbert. He said to the Lord,

Thou that hast giv'n so much to me,  
Give one thing more, a grateful heart....

Not thankful, when it pleaseth me;  
As if thy blessings had spare days:  
But such a heart, whose pulse may be  
Thy praise.

(The Temple by George Herbert, 1633)

I love that! I think Herbert recognized that giving thanks is not supposed to be easy. It's not supposed to be just an occasional thing. It's not supposed to be something that is sentimental, as if God's blessings had spare days and we should only praise Him when it pleases us.

Thanksgiving shouldn't be optional or just an annual tradition. The Bible calls thanksgiving a "*sacrifice of praise*," the "*fruit of lips*" that give thanks to God's name (Hebrews 13:15). The Bible says that in everything we are to give thanks, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Bible also says that, in light of God's mercies to us in the gospel, we should be a people who are overflowing with thankfulness (2 Corinthians 4:15).

This week, as our nation celebrates Thanksgiving, many people do not know to Whom they are thankful. Even among those of us who do know to Whom we should give thanks, we must admit that we don't always feel thankful. There may be tears clouding your eyes this Thanksgiving week. Or there may be "sorrows, like sea billows" that are crashing over your head. Depression may have set in and you wonder, "Can I give thanks to the Lord?"

The questions that I want to ask as we consider Lamentations 3 are:

- Do you know enough about God—about His character and His ways—that you are able to give thanks to Him no matter what your circumstances are?
- Is the truth you know about Him enough to sustain your trust and fuel your gratitude to Him, even when you are going through trials that you do not understand?
- When you don't know why you're going through difficult circumstances, do you trust enough in Who is bringing you through that trial?
- Are you able to overflow with thankfulness to Him?
- Can you praise Him in the storms of life?

This is God's call to us and that's what we see in Lamentations 3.

Tradition holds that Jeremiah wrote these laments at the lowest point and the darkest hour of the whole story of God's people in the Old Testament. It is sometime after 587 B.C. The Babylonians laid Jerusalem under siege and now the walls have been broken down, the temple destroyed, and all the kings' sons have been killed. The city where God's name had been praised is wiped out and God's people have gone through immense suffering. Those who have survived have been carried off into exile in Babylon and the people of God were numb with grief.

We cannot be sure if Jeremiah wrote these words because there is no author identified in the book. However, we do know that these words were written by someone who went through the same circumstances Jeremiah went through at that time. I am inclined to trust the tradition that has been handed down that these are the words of Jeremiah.

Either way, what is clear is that the destruction predicted through Jeremiah has been fulfilled. God's righteous judgment has fallen with severe blows upon His people, just as Jeremiah had predicted. But the prophet is not gloating here; there is no satisfaction in his heart or any sense of vindication of his calling. There is only agony and grief over his people and the destruction of Jerusalem. Though it was righteous destruction and well-deserved punishment, this was no less devastating to the prophet.

In Hebrew, the title of the book is one short word: *eicha* which means “how.” It is not the question, “Why?” There’s no doubt why the people are suffering. They are suffering because of their stubborn unwillingness to recognize and repent of their sins. This was predicted all the way from the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:49-50, which says, “*The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.*”

That is what has happened. There is no use arguing why these hardships have come upon God’s people. In fact, the prophet confesses on behalf of the people in Lamentations 1:18 that God’s judgments are just. The text says, “*The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word...*”

It’s not a question of **why** we are suffering right now but **how** could it have come to this. How will we continue after this? How long, oh Lord, must we suffer like this?

I think the verse that summarizes the intensity and the horrific nature of the suffering of God’s people at that time is in Lamentations 4:10. It’s so gruesome I shrink to even express read it but I think it’s important for us to see that God’s people had fallen so far in this suffering that starvation was intense. Lamentations 4:10 reads, “*The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people.*”

So Jeremiah laments. He cries out to God. This isn’t the kind of gut-wrenching, frantic outburst of a person who’s beside himself with grief, just spilling it out however it comes. There is an amazing discipline to this composition. It’s a specimen of the highest type of poetry in the Hebrew language. If you scan through the book, you’ll see there are five laments. Four of them have 22 verses each, the number of consonants in the Hebrew alphabet. The one in the middle, from which we have just read, has 66 verses, or three times 22. There is a definite structure that is being followed.

In chapters one, two and four, each verse begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It’s an acrostic type of poem. So in his grief and sorrow, the prophet has sat down and asked himself, “How can I describe the sufferings of God’s people from A to Z?” He’s disciplined himself to write these laments and pour out his soul to God. That’s what makes our passage in chapter three so remarkable. In Hebrew poetry, the most important point often comes in the middle and here we are in the middle of this highly structured book of laments. In the middle of the longest chapter of these laments, we find the heartbeat of the book. This is what is pulsing at the middle of the book and fueling the prophet’s heart and his expression of sorrow to God. What do we find here? Thanksgiving! Hope! Praise to God!

These verses in the middle of the most sorrowful point in the history of Israel inspired these great lyrics,

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;

Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

(Great is Thy Faithfulness by Thomas O. Chisholm, 1923)

We see from this that the prophet is not only thankful when it pleases him, as if God's blessings had spare days. He has the kind of heart whose very pulse is praise. We take his pulse at the middle of Lamentations and see that it is strong, even as he laments before God with intense grief. There is life here! There is praise here! There is thanksgiving that rises above the clouds, towering at the pinnacle of these laments. It is a shining peak when it seemed like we were going down, down, down, almost into the darkness of despair itself. There it is, the Himalayas or the Mount Kilimanjaro of Israel's deepest sorrow. It is the same God Who is worthy of my thanks and praise. God remains a steadfast rock, Who is worthy of being thanked in all circumstances.

Jeremiah knows enough about God to praise Him and thank Him, even when he doesn't know how long. "How long, oh Lord?" He still knows Who is worthy of his praise.

There are two lessons in this great passage that can fuel our great thankfulness to God in all the circumstances of our lives, not just when it pleases us or when we feel like giving thanks. The first lesson is one of conviction. The second is one of instruction, or application. Let's look at them together.

**There is a vast difference between sorrow and self-pity—thanksgiving makes the difference.**

Thanksgiving makes the difference between sorrow (which can be godly) and self-pity (which is always sinful). Let's unpack that a little bit.

Thankfulness doesn't require us to bury our emotions or deny our sorrows. As we read the Bible, we discover it is an act of faith to pour out our sorrows to the Lord and tell Him the complaints of our souls. To not do so is to treat God as if He does not know, does not care, or is far removed from our circumstances. God expects us to experience pain frequently in this fallen world and He expects us to frequently express our pain and sorrow to Him.

He gives us a wonderful gift in His Word: hymns and psalms of lament, of which this book is a great example, to teach us how to come to Him in this broken world and admit our sense that things are right in this world. Even in my own heart, things are not the way they're supposed to be. These laments in Scripture teach us how to express our sorrow, anger, fear, longing, confusion, desolation, disappointment, repentance and our depression to the Lord. They are gifts and treasures from God for the saints to teach us that there is a God Who, despite our feelings, is near to us, understands our griefs and sorrows. He invites us, not to act as if He doesn't care but to come to Him, like a child to his Father, and

pour our hearts out to the Lord. Laments are expressions of God's care and compassion for us. They give voice to our troubled souls.

Jon Bloom writes, "If we never lament, we ought to wonder how robust our faith or how real our faith is because laments poke us in the chest and force us to wonder whether we are making light of our sin or making light of the suffering in our own congregation and community."

Jeremiah does not take the sins or the sufferings of God's people lightly. He takes it personally. In chapter three, at the middle of this book, he becomes intensely personal and internalizes the grief of the nation, making it his own. If we had read verses 1-20, we would see that the prophet is personally responding to the sorrows of his people. This "weeping prophet" is foreshadowing for us another greater prophet Who Himself was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with sufferings because He Himself bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was stricken and smitten and afflicted for our sins (Isaiah 53:3-5).

In this sense, Jeremiah the prophet becomes a wonderful foreshadowing of Jesus. Jesus, Who will come and weep over Jerusalem, because she did not recognize the day of visitation. Jesus, Who will go to a cross, bearing our griefs and sorrows, standing in our place as our Substitute and making all our griefs and sorrows His own. Jeremiah identifies with his people like Christ. He suffers along with God's people; he feels the weight of their sins; he experiences the justice of God's wrath.

Look at Lamentations 3:10-12. Jeremiah confesses that he feels God's wrath is directed against him. He says, "*He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow.*"

Sorrow can very much be godly. In fact, there are times when lack of sorrow would be ungodly. It would be a refusal to weep with those who weep. To lack sorrow is, at times, ungodly. You cannot live a life of wholehearted devotion to God and service to His people without having your heart broken at times. As Colin Smith says, "God's ministry and work always advances through many tears."

If we never experience sorrow and grief in our service to God and love for His people, it may be that we are not giving ourselves fully to His work or entering in to the sufferings of God's people.

Sorrow can be godly but there's a vast difference between godly sorrow and self-pity.

Now, I want to do a full-frontal assault against self-pity this Thanksgiving morning. I want us to look at self-pity and say, "Oh, you're ugly! Poison! Poison! I don't want to go near that." Poison will kill your thanksgiving to God and I'm not talking about enjoying your dinner around the table. I'm saying self-pity will keep you from offering to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

#### What's the difference between sorrow and self-pity?

1. Self-pity feeds on disappointment and grief. It's kind of like a parasitic relationship. It loves to suck on grief and sorrow. It says, "Give me more! Give me more! Give me more! I want to keep feeling sorry for myself." But godly sorrow pours out the grief to

- God. As much as the grief rises in the heart, there is an expression of faith and trust in pouring that grief and casting that burden on the Lord.
2. Self-pity refuses to be consoled but godly sorrow refuses to give up hope. It continues to hope in the Lord.
  3. Self-pity cannot be thankful. Godly sorrow lifts up a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.
  4. “Self-pity is a vacuum into which gratitude cannot enter. In fact, self-pity and thanksgiving cannot co-exist. They’re mutually self-exclusive. Although thanksgiving is the antidote to this poison of self-pity, few bound by self-pity will take the foray into expressing thanks for all the blessings they do have.” (William Farley, The Poison of Self-Pity)
  5. Self-pity is a weed that grows in the garden of great expectations in which we says “I deserve an easy life. I really don’t want to suffer much. And if I do have to suffer, it better only be a little bit. I prefer no suffering at all. I’ll thank God when life is easy but when things aren’t going my way, self-pity rises up.” In this garden of great expectations, weeds begin to crop up and they sound like this: “I deserve better than this. If God is loving and good, why is He treating me like this? And why now?”
  6. Self-pity just keeps focusing on what it doesn’t have, forgetting all of God’s benefits to us. It is more conscious of what seems to be lacking than it is of all we have been loaded with in terms of benefits and mercy from God.

The truth is that thanksgiving is not our default mode or what comes naturally to us. If we only thank God when it pleases us, we will act as if there are many spare days when God does not bless or as if there are many times when God is not near and good and kind.

A discipline is required. It’s what we see in verses 19-21. The prophet is disciplining his mind and he doesn’t deny his sorrows. He thinks about it continually in verse 19, saying, “*Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!*” He can taste the sorrows. He feels the weight of the grief.

He says in verse 20, “*My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.*” But he says in verse 21, “I’m not going to stay there! *This I call to mind.* I’m going to do an act of remembrance here and bring my thoughts in order. *Therefore, I have hope* in the Lord.”

What do you call to mind when you’re full of sorrow and fighting against self-pity? What must you train your mind to remember? You don’t need to understand your trials and sufferings in order to have hope in the midst of them. God doesn’t owe you an explanation but you do need to know Who He is. You don’t need to know why.

That’s what sorrow can do for us. It trains us to see God in a new way. It helps us when God disillusion us of lesser hopes, making our hope in Him clearer and brighter.

Many saints who have gone through great sorrows and sufferings would agree with the poem that says,

I walked a mile with Pleasure;  
She chattered all the way,  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow;  
And ne'er a word said she;  
But, oh! the things I learned from her  
When sorrow walked with me.

(Robert Browning Hamilton)

Here Jeremiah walked many miles with sorrow. He's not giving in to self-pity, which shows us the second lesson this morning.

**There is enough truth about God to fill your heart with thankfulness that will overflow your deepest sorrow.**

Friends, there is enough truth about God in the deepest sorrows when we do not know what we will face in days to come. We should expect that there will be difficulties but there is enough truth about God to overflow our hearts with thankfulness in the deepest sorrows.

Do you believe that? Do you trust in His character and His ways? Do you call to mind the things that are true about God to sustain you with hope that yields thankfulness in your sorrows?

Let's look at some of the things Jeremiah tells us about God that can help us be thankful today and should cause us to always be thankful no matter the circumstances. Notice in the ESV, there are different manuscripts with different translations at the beginning of verse 22. The NIV version of Lamentations 3:22 says, "*Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed...*" Let's take this truth in the NIV because it is true theology.

*"Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed..."* Think about that. What is he saying? He's saying, "Lord, you have not treated us as our sins deserve." That's the first truth about God that we need to call to mind: He has not treated us as our sins deserve.

It may become cliché now but it is so true when you ask someone, "How are you doing?" and they say, "Better than I deserve." That is the truth. We are doing much better than we deserve. Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed. We are not in hell. That's what our sins deserve.

There was a man in England named William Gooze who suffered greatly. He used his sufferings as an opportunity to reflect on God's grace. His biographer said,

When his pain was great, he would say to his soul, "Soul, be silent. Soul, be patient. It is your God and Father who thus orders your condition. You have deserved much more. It is enough that you are

kept out of hell. Though your pain be grievous, yet it is tolerable. And your God affords some intermissions. He will turn it to your good and, at length, put an end to it all, none of which things can be expected in hell.”

That’s where thanksgiving starts. “Lord, You’ve already treated me so much better than my sins deserve.” Who wants to thank Him for that today? Who wants to thank Him for all that He’s already spared you from? For all the sins He’s kept you from committing? For the forgiveness He’s shown? That’s mercy.

The second truth about God that ought to fill our hearts with thankfulness, even in our deepest sorrows, is His covenant love and mercy are inexhaustible. The NIV says, “...*His compassions never fail.*” The ESV says, “*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end.*” That’s the English translator’s way of trying to describe this almost untranslatable Hebrew word. It is one of the greatest Hebrew words regarding one aspects of God’s character. It is *chesed*, God’s covenant love and faithfulness to His promises. It is His steadfast love toward His people.

When my wife was sick this was her favorite word about God. She made note of all the references to God’s steadfast, faithful, unfailing, inexhaustible love toward His people that she could find in her Bible readings. Michael Card says the best translation of *chesed* is this: “When the person for whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything.” That’s God! He is faithful to us and unfailing in His kindness and love and mercy. His mercies never come to an end! *Chesed* is in the plural here, as if God is saying, “My love and faithfulness is so enduring, you can never exhaust it.”

The thing that breaks God’s heart most is when His people do not trust in His love for them. It is when we think that somehow His mercies to us will come to an end.

Puritan John Owen called this a “soul deceit from Satan.” He said,

Men are afraid to have good thoughts of God. They think it is a boldness to eye God as good, gracious, tender, kind, loving. I speak of saints. They can judge him hard, austere, severe, almost implacable, and fierce (the very worst affections of the very worst of men, and most hated by God). Is not this soul-deceit from Satan? Was it not his design from the beginning to inject such thoughts of God? Assure yourself, then, there is nothing more acceptable to the Father than for us to keep up our hearts unto him as the eternal fountain of all that rich grace which flows out to sinners in the blood of Jesus.

We must never, ever doubt His love for us. How can we doubt His love for us when we trace His love’s design by the cross of Calvary? We can say, “I’m His and He is mine.” His love is inexhaustible.

The third truth about God on which we can focus our minds and in which we have hope and thanksgiving in the midst of our deepest trials is in verse 23: “[The Lord’s mercies] *are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!*” No matter what comes next or what happens tomorrow, I don’t

have to worry about tomorrow until tomorrow. And then I won't have to worry about it because, as I've been sleeping at night, God's been awake and preparing fresh mercies for every new day.

As I wake in the morning, there will be mercies that are new and freshly prepared to attend to my soul and carry me through the struggles of each new day. I don't have enough strength to face tomorrow's temptations, trials, adversities or challenges today, but I don't have to bear tomorrow's troubles with today's resources. Today's mercies are for today and there will be fresh mercies for tomorrow. As our days, so shall our strength be (Deuteronomy 33:25).

As we prepare to offer thanksgiving and put our trust in God, think about some of the fresh mercies God has already shown you today. Can you think about mercies you've already experienced today? Did you have good rest last night? That's God's mercy. Has someone encouraged you with a kind word today? That's mercy. Has God given you the ability to lift up your voice in song and trust in Him? Has God assured you that your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus's name? Those are fresh mercies.

We often sing these lyrics:

Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

(Great is Thy Faithfulness by Thomas O. Chisholm, 1923)

You're rich in love, and You're slow to anger  
Your name is great, and Your heart is kind  
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing  
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find

Bless the Lord, O my soul  
O my soul  
Worship His holy name  
Sing like never before  
O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name

And on that day when my strength is failing  
The end draws near and my time has come  
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending  
Ten thousand years and then forevermore

(10,000 Reasons by Matt Redman)

The fourth truth this passage reminds us of is that we will never find that God is not enough. Look at verse 24: "*The Lord is my portion, ' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.' "* Therefore, I will say to Him,

- <sup>1</sup> *Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.*  
<sup>2</sup> *I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you."...*
- <sup>5</sup> *The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.*  
<sup>6</sup> *The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.*
- <sup>7</sup> *I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.*  
<sup>8</sup> *I have set the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.*  
<sup>10</sup> *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let your holy one see corruption.*
- <sup>11</sup> *You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

(Psalm 16)

Lord, You are my portion. You are all I need and I'm never going to find that You're not enough. Even if I've lost everything but You, God, I still have all that I need. You are my all in all.

That's what Jeremiah is saying. Trust that you will never find that God is not enough—that He is not sufficient for you.

Finally, if you are in Christ, trust that your future joy will infinitely outweigh your present hardships. Look at verse 25: *"The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him."* It is good for us to be afflicted. It is good for us to go through trials because it strips us of false illusions and leads us to wait on the Lord, looking to Him for mercy and waiting patiently with hope and joyful expectation that sometime these trials will come to an end. We will experience God's salvation.

*"It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord,"* verse 26 says. When we bask in the fullness of that salvation and are saved to sin no more, we will look back and see that, "behind every frowning providence, He hides a smiling face" (from *God Moves in a Mysterious Way* by William Cowper). He is working it all together for our good (Romans 8:28) and for His glory.

When God has fulfilled our expectations with all the treasures of our inheritance in Christ lavished upon us, we will bask in the fullness of that joy and say, "Oh, those trials? Those troubles? They were light and momentary under the weight of the glory that is now being revealed to me. It far surpasses any of the sufferings I had to endure on earth" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Wait for the Lord. The Lord is good. The joy will exceed the hardships. Jesus knew that. How else was it that, on the very night He was betrayed on the eve of the anguish of His soul—when His body and soul would be crushed under the weight of God’s holy wrath against our sins—Jesus could take bread with His disciples and break it, knowing that the breaking symbolized the crushing load that was bound to fall on Him? As He gave it to His disciples, what did He do? He gave thanks to the Lord. When He was facing the most crushing grief, He, our Savior, gave thanks (Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-20)!

That’s why we call communion “the Eucharist”—the giving of thanks to the Lord—because that’s what our Savior did on the night when He was bearing the hardest and deepest load of grief. He gave thanks. Why? For the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2)—the joy of knowing He would be bringing pleasure to the Father through the salvation of a multitude of sinners. Through the open door that Jesus made through His body, sinners would fellowship with Him forever in eternity. Jesus gave thanks in the midst of suffering.

May we follow our Savior’s example.

Let’s pray.

Father, as we come to express our trust in You and think about offering to You this sacrifice of thanksgiving this week—You, Who have given us so much—please add to all these blessings one more thing: a thankful heart. Not thankful just when it pleases us, as if Your blessings have spare days. But give us such hearts that their very pulse may be Your praise.

Lord, we want to have a strong pulse as a church. We want there to be praise and thanks to You pulsating from every fiber of our being. Lord, as John Newton said so well, “Your love in times past forbids me to think You’ll leave me at last and troubles to sink. My prayer, let me wrestle, that You will perform. With Christ in the vessel, I’ll smile at the storm.”

Help us, Lord, by Your grace and strength, to hold our heads high in this world of trouble and be overflowing with thankfulness to You, not just this week but all the days of our lives. We pray this in the name of Your Son, our Savior. Amen.

---

## **New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

Text provided by [sermontranscribers.net](http://sermontranscribers.net) ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)