



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

19 Jan 2025

“Seasons of Life: Hope in the Darkness”

Readings: Lamentations 3:22-26, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, John 14:1-39

Introduction:

When Hope Seems Lost: Those Long Winter Nights

There’s a phrase we often hear during difficult times: “There’s light at the end of the tunnel.”

It’s a way of reminding ourselves that even in dark seasons, there is hope. But what happens when you’re so deep in the tunnel that you can’t see the light? When suffering feels endless, when prayers seem unanswered, and when God feels distant, what do we do?

It can feel like a winter night. It is not a warm and snuggly winter night. It is cold and drawn out.

I recall a fond strong memory of the truly snowy cold winter nights in the Himalayan areas when travelling overnight on buses or trains, feeling so cold in the mountains. Then a midnight stop and we would be surrounded by the smiling tea makers, who would usher us in around the bunkered wood fires handing you a moment of reprieve. A hot cup of tea. Five cents worth to warm the heart and help see some light at the end of the tunnel!

The Bible is brutally honest about the reality of suffering during the long, winter nights.

It never softens our pain, but it also never leaves us without hope.

Today, we are turning to **Lamentations (chapter 3)**, a passage that wrestles with despair yet points us to the unwavering hope we have in God.

Here, in the midst of lament, we find one of the most profound declarations of faith in the entire Bible found in (**Lamentations 3:22.**)

In our Bible reading we heard these words from the NIV,

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fails.”

But the timeless version from the King James Bible holds together for me throughout all the seasons of our lives.

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end”

Reflect: What of this truth holds fast for you? Throughout this chapter, we’ll learn three truths about how to navigate suffering:

Our first truth

... is **The Reality of Pain (Lamentations 3:1–20)**: the chapter begins with the voice of a man deeply acquainted with suffering:

From (**Lamentations 3:1-2**)

*“I am the man who has seen affliction
by the rod of the Lord’s wrath.*

He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light;”

The speaker expresses raw, unfiltered anguish.

He feels overwhelmed by God’s judgment, abandoned, and crushed under the weight of suffering. Are you hearing this constant theme throughout Lamentations?

Is it flattening your spirit? Is it too cold for your heart?

He speaks of bitterness and gall (**v.19**), describing his soul as “*downcast*.”

This is the honest reality of pain.

Suffering can make us feel as if God is far away.

The poet’s words echo those of (**Job 6:4**).

*“The arrows of the Almighty are in me,
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God’s terrors are marshalled against me.”*

Like Job, the speaker in Lamentations confronts the **disorienting** experience of suffering under God’s sovereign hand. This is important because many of us struggle with how to process pain. When life becomes unbearable, we’re tempted to think that our suffering means God has abandoned us. Like the seemingly lonely, never ending dark, winter night.

But Scripture teaches us that lament is not a sign of weak faith—it is an **act of faith**.

To cry out to God, even in confusion and sorrow, is to acknowledge that He is still there, still listening.

The psalmist captures this reality in (**Psalm 13**).

This very Psalm, a testimony shared at 10am that Rachel found strength in as she shared last week, do we also cry from verses 1 and 2:

*“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?”*

It reminds me of the many wars around our world, but when I think of winter, I think of the biting cold in the Ukraine and Russia at this time. Imagine the reality of what many experience, day to day in war in that place ...

Come with me.

The wind screamed across the icy fields, its voice a mournful dirge through the crumbled remains of the village. Frosted ground cracked under hesitant steps, while shadows loomed under a dim, cloud-veiled moon.

Each breath was a dagger of cold, the air sharp enough to sting the lungs. Darkened houses groaned against the bitter chill, their barricades silent witnesses to fear.

In a ramshackle shelter, families huddled. Mothers cling to children wrapped in layers of frayed blankets; old men whisper prayers, their breath faint halos in the darkness. Every distant sound sends shivers of dread through the group.

Above, muted stars offer no solace. The night felt endless, pressing its icy weight on fragile bodies. Yet, in a corner, a single candle flickered, its wavering glow a fragile protest, against the cold and despair.

Though winter seemed to suffocate hope, their quiet endurance carried a defiant promise: morning would come, and with it, new mercies.

This is a fictional description but must speak some truth of the reality.

Like the Psalmist, can you declare,

From (**Psalm 13:5**).

“But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.”

Honest lament is a **bridge** between our pain and God's promises.

This is **true faith**.

As (**Psalm 34:18**) reminds us:

*"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

If you are in a season of suffering, know this: God sees you. He hears your cries, even when you feel like He is silent. God is still reaching out to you even when you do not feel it, sense it or believe it. God's touch is often beyond understanding. So often it is when we look back that we can see God's hand. He does and will provide like the first chilling sunrise thawing out the winter evening giving you his light and warmth preparing us for each new day.

Our second truth

on how to navigate suffering as we move through the reality of pain

...is to seek **God's faithfulness**.

In these key verses from (**Lamentations 3:21–33**) the poet doesn't deny his suffering, but he chooses to **anchor his hope** in the character and promises of God.

The poet is not speaking from a place of resolved suffering—Jerusalem is still in ruins, and the pain hasn't gone away. Yet, he proclaims God's mercies are "new every morning."

God's mercy is like the sunrise—constant, dependable, and renewing.

I enjoy discussing and praying with and through life complexities with people in my ministry.

I get to witness how God moves them through these tough, suffering times.

Last week we shared about Max Boy's heart bearing witness as the last autumn leaves fell in his life.

This week Max breathed his last earthly breath. In the days prior, he was enjoying the glorious view of God's creation rejoicing in his winter season. He is now in God's glory forever more.

Max has proclaimed God's Kingdom come. His Lamentation is over forevermore!

Sleep on it through the cold winter night when the Spirit works. Stop, and when you awake, trust God is processing a new day forward. This matters because hope is not found in the absence of pain but in the presence of God's faithfulness. God's character doesn't change, even when our circumstances do. God's promises never fail. He is faithful, even when we are faithless.

(**2 Timothy 2:13**) states:

"if we are faithless, he remains faithful"

When you're overwhelmed by suffering, remember to "**call to mind**" God's faithfulness. **Make it a practice** to reflect on His past mercies. Listen to (**Isaiah 46:4**) as it reminds us:

*"Even to your old age and grey hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you."*

This is not about **denying** your pain; it's about **anchoring your soul** in the truth of who God is.

The third truth

about how to navigate suffering, having acknowledged the reality of pain, sought trust in God's faithfulness,

... we are pointed to a **Response of Hope-Filled Waiting**.

Having declared God's faithfulness, the poet turns to what our response should be (**Lamentations 3:24–42**).

Verses 24 and 25:

*"I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;"*

Here, we find a biblical view of waiting. Waiting is not passive; it is **active trust** in God's timing and purpose. It is **choosing** to rely on Him as your "portion"—your ultimate source of satisfaction and security.

(**Isaiah 40:31**) echoes this truth:

*"but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint."*

Waiting on God is not marking time; it is **renewing your strength** in His promises.

The Call to Repentance:

In (**Verses 39-42**), the poet also calls for self-examination and committing to God's promises:

*"Why should the living complain
when punished for their sins?

Let us examine our ways and test them,
and let us return to the Lord.
Let us lift up our hearts and our hands
to God in heaven and say:
"We have sinned and rebelled
and you have not forgiven."*

This reminds us that suffering often reveals our need for a **change of attitude**.

Suffering invites us to examine our hearts and draw closer to God. What does hope-filled waiting look like in your life? Perhaps it means trusting God's timing in a season of uncertainty. Perhaps it means seeking His will in prayer, instead of rushing to fix things on your own terms. And perhaps it means confessing and asking for His forgiveness, knowing that His mercies are new every morning.

And so today, I conclude- Jesus, Our Ultimate Hope: Lamentations 3 reveals a God whose steadfast love never ends, whose mercies are new every morning, and whose faithfulness is unmatched. It also points to the ultimate fulfillment of God's faithfulness: Jesus Christ. Lamentations anticipates Jesus' work on the cross, bearing grief and suffering for humanity. The man in chapter 3 embodies Judah's pain, mirroring the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who bears Israel's sorrow. These texts foreshadow Jesus, who took humanity's disobedience and sorrow upon Himself to reconcile us to God.

Like Lady Zion, Jesus wept for Jerusalem, he suffered abandonment, ridicule, and apathy, and he was publicly shamed, and became defiled— not of his own doing but for ours. Like the man, he endured blows, mockery, and bitterness but entrusted Himself to God's ultimate faithfulness, knowing he would not be forsaken forever. Through Jesus, we are assured that God's mercies

never fail. He has promised to wipe away every tear, to make all things new, and to bring us into His eternal presence.

(Revelation 21:4–5) assure us,

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain,
for the old order of things has passed away.
He who was seated on the throne said,
‘I am making everything new!’*

*Then he said,
‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”*

So today, whether you are in a winter season of despair, or a season of joy, let **Lamentations 3** remind you to **choose to anchor your hope in the character and promises of God.**

Bunker down when you need to in those winter nights in life but always remember: God’s love never ceases, His mercies never fail, and His faithfulness endures forever.

Let these promises renew your strength as we head to the rebirth of Spring.

Amen.