

## Lamentations 3:22-33

Today is a **special** day. Yes, it's the Fourth of July, the day on which we celebrate our independence from Great Britain, but it's also special for **another** reason. Today we're able to experience something very **unique**, because we have the opportunity to make use of a text from the Book of **Lamentations**. In the three-year cycle of readings which our congregation uses - out of the more than 180 different readings we have - there is only **one** which is used from the Book of Lamentations. And **today** is the **day**. What do we **know** about the **Book** of Lamentations? What exactly **is** a lamentation, anyway? The dictionary describes a lamentation as: a cry of **sadness** or **grief** - and that's what we **find** in this book of the Bible. It's a book **filled** with sadness and grief. However, the verses which we have before us **today** are **not** verses of sorrow. They are words of **hope** - and that's exactly the **point** which we want to take **home** from this text. Even in the middle of **tears** and **sorrow**, even when that sorrow is the result of our own **sinful** mistakes, we can still have **hope**. Our God is a God who provides **Hope In The Middle Of Ruins**.

The **author** of this book of the Bible is the prophet **Jeremiah**, and Jeremiah certainly had many **reasons** to be **sad** and **lament**. Jeremiah wrote those words as he stood among the **ruins** of the once great city of **Jerusalem**. What **happened**? How could things have gotten **so bad** in God's chosen city? In order to understand the **depths** of Jeremiah's **grief**, we need to remember the entire history of God's people which **led up** to this point. It all **started** with **Abraham**. God chose Abraham to be the father of His **special** nation. God led Abraham to the land of **Canaan**, and told him that this land would one day belong to his **descendants**. It didn't happen **right away**. In fact, it took over **500 years** - **most** of which God's people spent as **slaves** in **Egypt**. But after Moses led them **out** of their slavery in Egypt, they were finally able to **take possession** of the land of Canaan for themselves.

Now, we would **think** that after experiencing **400** years of **slavery**, and another **40** years of wandering in the **wilderness**, that God's people would have been more than willing to do **anything** which God asked them to do. But, it didn't take very long before they started to **rebel**. So, throughout the period of the **judges**, God would use the neighboring **nations** to cause His people **sadness** and **grief**. As a **result**, the people would **repent**, and ask God to **help** them. In His **mercy**, God would send a **judge** (kind of like a **hero**) to **deliver** them.

But, the people got tired of **that** arrangement too. They wanted to be like all the **other** nations which surrounded them, so they pleaded for God to give them a **king**. And once again, be careful what you **wish** for, because you might just **get** it. They **got** their **wish**. First, God gave them King **Saul** - a man who really **looked** the part of a king, but who let his heart drift **away** from the LORD. So God **replaced** him with King **David**, ushering in the **glory days** for God's people - days which would **continue** under the rule of David's **son**, King **Solomon**. It was **Solomon** who oversaw the building of a magnificent **temple** in Jerusalem - a building which was counted as one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

But once again, many of God's people **rebelled** and quickly **fell away** from the LORD, and before long, God divided them into **two** kingdoms - **Israel** in the north, and **Judah** in the south. Israel was ruled by **wicked** kings for 200 years, and was then finally taken away into **captivity** by the **Assyrian** empire. Again, we would **think** that the people of **Judah** would have learned a lesson from what happened to their brothers in the north. We would **think** that they would have **listened** to the **warnings** from the prophets which the LORD sent to them, in order to get them to **turn away** from their rebellion. But it didn't **work** that way, and in the end, so many hearts had become hardened **against** the LORD, that He brought punishment against **Judah** as well. The mighty **Babylonians** came in, and in the year 586 BC, the people who were living in the city of **Jerusalem** saw their city **destroyed**, and God's people were carried away from the land which they had been promised, to live in **captivity** for 70 years.

This was the **horrible** situation which the prophet Jeremiah was **lamenting**. He lamented the people's **wickedness** and **stubbornness**. He lamented the sad fate of their **nation**, and the destruction of **Jerusalem**. He lamented the **shame** and **disgrace** which God's people had become in the eyes of the world. And what made these things all the more **painful** was the inescapable fact that **God's people** had caused **all** of it. They had **ruined** everything, and they **deserved** their fate.

Have you ever felt that kind of **sadness**? Have you ever found yourself in a really **bad** situation, and then realized that you caused it **yourself**? Sin always has **consequences**. Those consequences might come in the form of physical or emotional **pain**. They might show themselves in a damaged or destroyed **relationship**. But **whatever** the case, those consequences will bring a mixture of **guilt** and **regret**. And unfortunately, just like the people in

**Jeremiah's** day, we have the tendency to dig ourselves **deeper** and **deeper** into those **sinful**, **self-destructive** situations. That is, until we finally hit **rock bottom**, and **wake up**. Maybe you've never **been** there, and maybe you never **will** be. But whenever people **are** suffering so severely, and seem to be unable to see any **light** at the end of the tunnel, we have an **opportunity** - an opportunity to show them just how **merciful** and **compassionate** our **God** is. God is the **only** one who can bring **Hope In The Middle Of Ruins**.

It was that **hope** which Jeremiah still **clung** to in the middle of the ruins of **Jerusalem**. He **knew** the one true God, and he knew God's **love** and **compassion**. That's why Jeremiah could write with confidence, "*By the mercies of the Lord we are **not** consumed, for his **compassions** do not **fail**. They are **new** every morning.*" Jeremiah knew that when things are **so bad** that there's nowhere else to **turn**, then it's time to turn to the **LORD** - the God who brings **Hope In The Middle Of Ruins**. Jeremiah served as a **wonderful** example for God's people. At a time when everything seemed to be **slipping away**, he understood that he still had an **inheritance** from the LORD. Just listen to his **attitude**. "*The Lord is my **portion**. Therefore, I will **hope** in him. The Lord is **good** to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.*" Jeremiah was willing to **wait** for the Lord's deliverance, because he knew the LORD is always **faithful** to His promises. The LORD had **committed** Himself to **loving** this group of people and **saving** them, and nothing would be able to **stop** the LORD from following **through** on His commitment.

**Waiting** for the LORD's deliverance would take great **patience**. Waiting is never **easy** - we **hate** to wait. But Jeremiah realized that even this difficult time of **waiting** was **good**. He wrote, "*It is **good** to hope quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is **good** for a man that he bears a **yoke** early in his life. Let him sit **alone** and be **silent**, because the **Lord** has laid this upon him. Let him stick his face in the **dust**. Perhaps there still is **hope**. Let him turn his cheek **toward** the one who strikes him. Let him be filled with **disgrace**. For the Lord will **not** push us away **forever**. Even though he brings **grief**, he will show **compassion** on the basis of his great **mercy**.*" Jeremiah knew that although the LORD had brought this horrible **grief** and **ruin** to His people as a **punishment** for their **rebellion**, he knew that **ultimately** God would show them **compassion** - and He **did**. After 70 years of **captivity**, the people of God would be allowed to **return** to their homeland by **Cyrus**, the king of Persia.

But as great as that deliverance **was**, it would be **overshadowed** by the deliverance which the LORD would bring for His people some 500 years **later**,

when He would send **Jesus** - His only-begotten **Son** - to offer His perfect **life** on the **cross** - as **payment** for their sins. You and I are **included** in that deliverance. Do we ever take the time to sit back and **marvel** at what that really **means** for us? Our **sins** have all been **forgiven**, so now there's nothing **blocking the way** for us to be in the presence of **God Himself - forever**. Even though we may have to face **consequences** for our sins in **this** life, we won't have to suffer for those sins **eternally**, because all of our sins have been **removed** from us. We have been **washed clean** by the blood of **Jesus**.

When we face **guilt** and **regret** for things we've said and done, we can **calm** our troubled hearts with the assurance that there is **no sin** we can commit which hasn't already been **covered** by the blood of Jesus. He is our **Savior**, and when He **returns** again on the Last Day, He will take us to be **with** Him in **heaven**, where we will finally experience the **complete results** of the salvation which Jesus **won** for us. May the LORD help us to wait **patiently** for that salvation, and as the world continues to **fall apart** all around us, may He continue to provide us with **Hope In The Middle Of Ruins**. Amen.