

A Chronicle of Redemption

Chapter 33: Trusting God, Confessing Sin, and Banking on Mercy

Dr. Bart Box

September 5, 2010



CHAPTER 33: TRUSTING GOD, CONFESSING SIN, AND BANKING ON MERCY Lamentations

Well, good morning. If you would, take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Lamentations. Lamentations is located after the book of Jeremiah, a large book in the Bible, and then before the book of Ezekiel. We're going to begin our reading this morning from Lamentations in Lamentations 1.

What a week of reading, huh? Lamentations and Ezekiel. Ezekiel may be one of the few books that can make us long for Lamentations, when things were so simple. Lamentations 1. Hear the Word of the Lord.

How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.

Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival; all her gates are desolate; her priests groan; her virgins have been afflicted, and she herself suffers bitterly. Her foes have become the head; her enemies prosper, because the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe. From the daughter of Zion all her majesty has departed. Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer.

Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers from days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was none to help her, her foes gloated over her; they mocked at her downfall. Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy; all who honored her despised her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns her face away. Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future; therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter. "O LORD, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!"

The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom you forbade to enter your congregation. All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade

their treasures for food to revive their strength. "Look, O LORD, and see, for I am despised."

Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts and our minds and our heads before you, and, God, as we do, we thank you that you have spoken to us in your Word, even in a difficult word. God, we would acknowledge as we read it, and as we consider it this morning, we would acknowledge that we need your help, that we need your Spirit. So, we would ask that you would send your Spirit among us, to teach us your Word, and to show us more of Christ, to lead every single person in this room...God, we pray that you would lead every heart in this room to a greater trust and a greater comfort in the person, and the work, and the blood, and the cross of Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are beginning a new section this morning. The last section was entitled "Faithful Prophets in a Divided Kingdom." However, you'll notice that this morning we're transitioning into what is called "Faint Hope for a Devastated Kingdom." "Faint Hope for a Devastated Kingdom.", and Lamentations may well be the most faint that hope ever appears in all of the Old Testament.

God had warned the people of God. It's what we've read over the past few months, that God had sent prophet after prophet. He had sent word after word, vision after vision, and He had warned the people of God to turn from their sin, to turn from their idolatry, and turn back to the living God to find mercy and grace. They had steadfastly refused the Word of the Lord. They were, as the Scriptures say, a stiff-necked people. They were rebellious to the Word of the Lord, and even though God had been patient with them, and God had been long-suffering with them, historians and the Bible tells us in 587 BC, under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar, that the patience of God ran out. God raised up that pagan king and that pagan nation to come and to devastate the people of God.

They came, and they laid siege to the city, and they ravaged the city. They destroyed the wall, and they destroyed the temple, and they destroyed the people of God. Lamentations is really the blow-by-blow accounts. It's the most detailed picture that we have in all the Scripture of this huge event in the life of Israel, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and in particular, the destruction of the temple.

As I was talking and preparing this week, talking with others that were reading through the same text, and reading through Lamentations, and asking questions, "What does this mean, and what does this have to do with us?", it just kind of struck me, that the real difference that we see in our setting, even this morning, and what we read in the Scriptures, we have...most of us have...almost all of us have very little idea of the nature and the severity of the sufferings that were going on among the people of God. We sit here this morning in comfort and security, and in a state of the evident blessing of God, and it just begs the question, for people like you and for people like me, "What does a text like this have to do with our lives?" How does this picture of difficult and gruesome suffering of the people of God...how does it intersect with your life and with my life? How does a book like Lamentations speak to us?

Well, to see that, what I want to do is I want to walk you through the crisis that we see in Lamentations. I want us...as best we can, I want us to enter in to their suffering. I want us to hear their cries. I want us to hear their groaning. I want us to see the very suffering that the people of God underwent because of their sin.

However, I don't want to leave it there. I want us to enter into their suffering. I want us to hear it, but then I want, also, to hear the very comforting words of God that we find, that

David quoted in Lamentations 3:22-24. Not only do we suffer for sin, but even in the midst of that, even when we are suffering, we know that *"the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies are without end; they are new every morning..."* and that the faithfulness of the Lord is great.

There are people here this morning, I am convinced, who need to hear from this book that God is not too far off; that you, brother or sister, are not beyond the grace and the mercy of God; that there is a God who has set His affections upon you, and there is a God who, in Christ, has given us all the mercies that we will ever need, and there is a God who is everlastingly and infinitely faithful toward us, no matter what we have done.

The Crisis in Lamentations

Sin brought about suffering that was ...

So, I want to walk you through the crisis that we see in Lamentations, the comfort that we find, the Christ in Lamentations, and last, just a few challenges from this book. First, notice the crisis in Lamentations. That sin brought about suffering, first, that was tragic. We see that, in the book of Lamentations, that sin brought about suffering that was tragic. We notice it in the very first verse. Look again. He says, *"How lonely..."* Now, we don't know exactly who the author...historically, traditionally it's been thought to be Jeremiah. However, others have said, "Well, it's unnamed." In any event, he was at least present and very involved in the suffering of the people of God, and this is what he says concerning the city of Jerusalem. He speaks on behalf of the people of God, and he says, *"How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow..."* notice that word, *"...like a widow she has become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave."*

It's interesting, if you read in particular the first two chapters of Lamentations, you see that, over and over again, that the city of Jerusalem, the people of God, they are referred to in feminine language. So, Jerusalem is referred to as "her" and as "she." We see that, for example, Jerusalem is called, here in verse 1, a "princess." In verse 6, she's referred to as a "mother," in verse 15 as a "daughter," and as a "virgin." Over 20 times in the book of Lamentations, we find references to the people of God, to the city of God, in this kind of language: virgin, daughter, mother.

However, the very first reference is none of those. Rather, she is referred to as a "widow." It's just evidence, a reminder for them, and a reminder for us how far sin will take us apart from the presence of God. How very much our sin will cost us in terms of our relationship with God. She was a daughter among the nations. She was the very daughter of God. She was the apple of God's eye, and now in the very first verse, he says, "How lonely she sits. She is like a widow."

We see that their suffering was tragic. They had fallen far in their relationship with God. However, also we see that their suffering was just. Not only was it tragic, but we see also that it was just. This is where we need and we have to differentiate the suffering that we see in the book of Lamentations from, for example, the sufferings that we would find in the book of Job.

You remember Job 1:1 says that Job was blameless and upright. He was one who feared God, and he shunned evil. So, there was absolutely no necessary connection between the sufferings of Job and...excuse me, between the righteousness of Job, the character of Job,

and the sufferings that he endured. There was no necessary connection between his character, or the things that he had done and the sufferings that he was under. That's why we call it a righteous suffering, or an innocent suffering.

However, that is absolutely, fundamentally not the case when we come to the book of Lamentations. Their suffering was in direct relationship to their sin. We see it, for example, in verse 8. Look with me, if you would, in Lamentations 1:8. "*Jerusalem sinned...*" You can underline it, note it. "*Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore...*" Notice the "therefore," "...*she became filthy.*" It doesn't mean that she just became dirty with sin. It means that she has now endured the punishment of God. All the wrath of God is now resting upon her in such a way that she is now filthy.

"All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans and turns her face away." Again in verse 18, we see it even clearer. In Lamentations 1:18, we see the just punishment of the Lord. Verse 18, "*The LORD is in the right...*" I love that line. "*The LORD is in the right...*"

As a side note, this is really something that we all...that I need even more in my life to cultivate. Just a quiet, submissive, humble spirit before the Lord, even when the hand of the Lord is against us, even when we do not like what we have before God. Our natural tendency is to rebel and to chafe at the discipline of God, but we want to cultivate that in our own soul, to be humble and submissive before God.

It says in verse 18, "*The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering; my young women and my young men have gone into captivity.*" They discovered with tragic and devastating consequences that God always keeps His Word. He said He would bring devastation if they did not turn from their sin, and that's precisely what we see in the book of Lamentations.

Their suffering was tragic. They had fallen far in their relationship with God. Their sufferings were just. They deserved them. And then related to that, number three, their sufferings were God-given. Their sufferings were God-given. This is one of the things that strikes me more than anything as I read through the book of Lamentations. It's the affirmation, the deep confidence in the absolute sovereignty of God, even when it is not seemingly working for us. When that providence is a difficult one, when that sovereignty is something that brings the hand of the Lord against us, there still remains a deep, abiding belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. Yes, God uses means, and so God raised up Babylon. It wasn't God that was, as it were, shoving the spear into their hearts, but no doubt God was sovereign over every single detail, every single matter that occurred in 587 BC, in the same way that He's sovereign over everything that happens in our life.

We see it, for example, that confidence expressed in Lamentations 3:37-38. It's one of the most striking affirmations of the sovereignty of God that you'll see. Lamentations 3:37-38 says, "*Who has spoken and it come to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?*" It seems...you say, "Who has spoken and it came...who has spoken this destruction? Who has spoken this destruction of the temple?" The natural answer would be, "King Nebuchadnezzar, he has spoken and it has come to pass." However, they recognized that Nebuchadnezzar is nothing but in the hand of the Lord. So, they say, "*Who has spoken and it come to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?*" When we are disciplined, brothers and sisters, when we are disciplined, it is not a random event. It is not a random accumulation of circumstances. It is the hand of God.

They see that their sufferings were just. They were tragic. They were God-given, and number four, we see that their sufferings were severe; that their sufferings were severe. Now, I want you to turn to Lamentations 4, and we could look at a lot of different places in Lamentations to see the severity of their suffering, but I think maybe Lamentations 4 captures it better than any other text in all the book. It's some of the most gripping language, some of the most gripping images that we see in the book of Lamentations. Listen to what they were enduring as a consequence of their sin. It says, "How..." verse 1, "*How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed! The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street.*" What does he mean by that? Verse 2, "*The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are regarded as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!*"

Verse 3,

Even jackals offer the breast; they nurse their young, but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives it to them. Those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps. For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no hands were wrung for her.

Then, notice down in verse 10, "*The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people.*" "*The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children...*" It's one of the most disturbing images that we have in all the Bible, and it begs the question, at least it does to me, and I suppose it does to you, "Why do we have this in the Bible?"

You know, the truth is, we do not have this in the Bible simply for our curiosity, or simply to fill in the gaps. If you've been reading through the Bible, you recognize that we've already encountered the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. At the end of 2 Kings, the story is recounted, and then, again, at the end of 2 Chronicles, we have the fall of Jerusalem. It begs the question, "If we already have that in the Bible, if we already have those accounts, why do we have what we have here in Lamentations? What is the point of this book for us...for them and for us even this morning?" I would suggest to you this morning that we do not have the book of Lamentations simply for the history that it relates, but rather, we have the book of Lamentations for the questions that it raises, and I want to show you those questions at the very end of the book.

Lamentations 5. It's where all of it kind of heads as we move through the first lament, the second lament, third and fourth, until we get to the very last chapter of the book, and I want to show you where the people of God are. Then, we're going to come back to Lamentations 3, and we're going to look at an affirmation of faith, but I want you to notice the tension that we find at the very end of the book; the questions that they are asking.

Lamentations 5:16 and following. It says, "*The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned! For this our heart has become sick, for these things our eyes have grown dim, for Mount Zion which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it. But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations.*" At that point, we want to say, "Yes. Your throne does endure forever." However, notice the question. Verse 20, "*Why do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that*

we may be restored! Renew our days as of old - unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us."

Suffering brought about questions that were ...

Yes, their sin brought about suffering, but their suffering brought about questions; ones that were profoundly intense - "Are we forsaken?" They ask the question, "Are we forsaken?" "Yes, the Lord reigns, and yes, the Lord is supreme, and yes, we believe in God, but are we related to that God any longer? Is the covenant destroyed? Are we cut off from God? Are we forsaken?" Questions that were profoundly intense, and questions that were eternally significant - "Can we be forgiven? Can we be forgiven?"

Verse 21, "*Restore us to yourself, O LORD...*" Verse 22, "*Unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.*" You know, those were reasonable questions. You think about all that we have looked at as we've read through the Word together this year, and all that you now know, and all that we see of the people of God, and we see that in a moment, in one event, in one year, there is no longer any Jerusalem, no prophets, no priests, no sacrifice, no temple, no king, no food, and no water. They have lost every sign...every evident sign of the blessing and the presence of God. Because of their sin, they have forfeited their intimacy that they once had with God. They have endangered their very relationship with God. They are far off from God, and it's at that point, brothers and sisters, when we see that they are far off from God, that I believe that the book of Lamentations leaps off the page and into our lives.

I know there are many people here this morning who would say that, "I have made an absolute mess of my life. I have sinned, and I feel as though that I'm no longer close to God. I can remember times when I felt an intimacy with God. I know that there have been times in my life when there was a closeness, an intimacy, a relationship with God that was vibrant, and that was lively, but because of sin, I no longer feel the same way." There are people in here that are struggling within. There are people in here that are deeply afflicted by sin, and it may not always be an external reality. There are people here this morning that are struggling inwardly with all manner of sin, and that sin is driving us away, and away, and away from the presence of God, and the book of Lamentations comes to us and says, "It doesn't have to be that way."

The Comfort in Lamentations

There is comfort...not in your circumstances, not comfort in anything about you...there is comfort in God. That's what we see in Lamentations 3. The verses that, by far, we are most familiar with...I would submit they're probably the only verses that we are familiar with in the book of Lamentations. Probably for a good reason, but it's interesting, just from a structural standpoint, that all five chapters, except Lamentations 3...Lamentations 1, 2, 3, and 4 all contain 22 verses. They all make their way through the Hebrew alphabet, except for Lamentations 5, but they're all shorter, except for Lamentations 3. It's as if Lamentations 3 is accentuated in the book and said, "This is the center. This is where the center of the book is, and this is where you and I, brothers and sisters, this is where we need to center our lives as well."

Read with me, if you would, in Lamentations 3, we'll begin in verse 18, and then read all the way to verse 24. The culmination of all the suffering, he says, "*My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.*" Writing on behalf of the people of God, he says, "*My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.*" Verse 19, "*Remember my*

affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood..." it's a word for poison, "...*the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.*" "I am absolutely beaten down," he said. "My prayers are unanswered. Darkness has overtaken me, walled in, cut off from God."

However, verse 21, "*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.*" "Therefore, I call this to mind," verse 22, "*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 writer found comfort in ...

What do you do when you're separated from God by sin? What hope do you have? What hope do we have when we are separated, cut off from God by our sin? First...I want to show you the strategy that we see here in these verses. First, we must find comfort in the fresh mercies of God. We must find comfort in the fresh mercies of God. The end of 22, "*His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.*"

I love the imagery here for that word "mercies." It's taken...the same root word for a mother's womb. So, as there's an intimacy between a mother and a child, there is the same kind of intimacy...there is the same kind of compassion that exists from the Lord to His people. They are new every single morning.

Not only does he tell us about the nature of their mercies, that there is compassion in the Lord, but he tells us that we can not exhaust the mercies of God. Isn't that good news? We can not exhaust the mercies of God. Now, some of us are trying our best to do so, but we will never exhaust the mercies of God. Richard Sibbes said this...he said, "There is far more mercy in Christ than there is sin in us." "There is far more mercy in Christ than there is sin in us." Why is that the case? Why can we count...how can we be certain of fresh mercies when we have failed, when we have sinned against God? How can we be certain that God is going to be merciful toward us?

Rooted in ...

I'm going to give you two reasons that we see in verse 22 and verse 24. Number one, because it is rooted...these mercies are rooted in the unfailing love of God. How can we be certain of the mercies of God? Because they are rooted in the unfailing love of God. "*The steadfast love...*" verse 22, "*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases...*" It's the word that we see over and over in the Old Testament that speaks of the covenant love of God to His people. The idea is that God has set His affections upon us. There is no explanation for that. In fact, you read in Deuteronomy 7, "*Why have I chosen you, Israel? Not because you were greater, but because I've loved you.*" The steadfast love of the Lord. God has set His affections upon His people.

A couple years ago I was preparing to preach on John 3:16, and I was thinking through just how we really doubt the love of God. We think about other people. "God loves other people. Certainly God loves this Christian or that Christian, but can God really love me?" You ever thought that? We think about all of the things that we have done, all the ways that we have failed God, and, "There's no way that God could love someone that has done the things that I've done, or even is thinking the things that I am thinking even now."

When I was preparing for that sermon...and for a sermon illustration, I guess the Lord gave that night as I was preparing. I heard a cry, and I went in, and I found out that my two-year-old, Jonathan, had slapped my five-year-old up side the head. A little display of the love of a brother and sister. So, I went in to Jonathan, and I disciplined him. So, he

immediately began crying, and he ran to his mother and said, "I love you, mommy. I love you, mommy." Rachel, trying to intervene and make some family peace at five years old, said, "Well, Jonathan, remember, you love daddy, too." He said, "No, I don't." So, I said, "Well, son, I love you.", and I just kept saying that. I said, "I know you love me." "No, I don't." I just kept repeating that, "I love you; I love you." He kept repeating, "I don't love you; I don't love you." I knew in a couple of minutes that he'd love me again, but never for a moment did I even consider stopping loving my son, and I thought of Matthew 7, and I know the context is a little different, but Jesus said in Matthew 7, He said, "Which of you, fathers, which of you if your son asked for bread would give him a stone? Or which of you, if he asked for fish, would give him a serpent?" Then, Jesus turns, and He said, "If you, fathers, if you then, being evil," in other words, in comparison to God, "if you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more our Father in heaven will give good gifts to those whom He loves."

I just thought about the fact that I'm not nearly the father that I should be. I never will be. Certainly, according to that verse, and rightly so, in comparison to God as a father, I am evil, and if I, an evil father, would not stop loving my son, how much more an infinitely good, an infinitely gracious, an infinitely awesome and sovereign God, how much more will that God never, ever, ever stop loving you, brother or sister.

The steadfast love of the Lord, it never, ever ceases, and the mercies of God are rooted in that love. They're rooted in the unfailing love of God, and two, they are rooted in the unceasing faithfulness of God. They're rooted in the unceasing faithfulness of God. The one consistent thing about us is that we are never consistent. We promise one thing, and before the sun sets, we have broken that promise, and many others. It is not so with God. Every single promise God makes, and in the context here, the promise to love us with an unfailing love, and to give us mercies that are without end, and that they are new every morning, in this context, the faithfulness of God, it will never end.

Great is God's faithfulness. Every single promise that He makes, every single promise that He has made, He will keep. Not a single one of the promises of God will fall to the ground unanswered, and out of that come to us over and over, washing over us like the waves on the seashore, the mercies of God. The mercies of God, rooted in the unfailing love of God, and the unceasing faithfulness of God.

Which gave rise to ...

Notice how that gives rise to what we see in verse 24, a settled hope in the provision of God. It gives rise to a settled hope in the provision of God. Verse 24, "*The LORD is my portion, says my soul, therefore, I will hope in him.*" It is striking, is it not, if you look at verse 18, where he, the same writer, has said, "*My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.*", and then you look over to verse 24, where he says, "*Therefore I will hope in him.*" No hope in verse 18, hope...abundant hope in verse 24, and the only thing that has changed...don't miss this...the only thing that has changed is his mind.

He has set his mind...and again, this is not the power of positive thinking, this is the power of believing in the promises of God. He has set his mind on the love of God, which never ceases. He has set his mind on the mercies of God, which are new to us every morning, and he has set his mind on the great faithfulness of God, and now he has hope. There is no better strategy for you. There is no better strategy for me. When you feel far off from God, the answer is not personal reformation. The answer is God. It is a meditation upon the character and the love and the grace of God.

It gave rise to a settled hope in the provision of God, and it gave rise to a deep confidence in the character of God; gave rise to a deep confidence of the character of God.

Look at verse 31 through 33, "*For the Lord will not cast off forever...*" He has reminded himself of the love and the mercy and the faithfulness of God. So now, in verse 31, he can confidently declare, "*The Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief [He caused it], he will have compassion [same word] according to the abundance of his steadfast love...*" He's just restating what he's already said.

Then, verse 33, "*For he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.*" Do you see that? He says in the very same...he says, "He causes grief." The Lord brings it about. Why? Because God will not leave us in our sin. Praise God, He will not leave us in our sin, but He will discipline us. He will bring the hand of the Lord against us.

He does cause grief, but notice this, he says, "*He does not...*" in verse 33, he says, "He does not willingly do it." "*He does not...*" literally, the idea is He does not do it from the heart. Isn't that a great picture? That even though He causes grief, even though He disciplines us, He does not enjoy doing it. He does not enjoy afflicting us or bringing us grief. There's a settled hope in the provision of God, but there is also a subtle confidence in the character of God.

All of this leads to what we see there in your notes: an urgent desire to repent before God. That's where I want this to lead in my own life. That's where I want this to lead in your life as well. It leads to an urgent desire to repent before God. Look at verse 39; this is the progression that he walks through. He sets his mind on the promises of God, settled hope in the character of God, and then, out of that, we see verse 39, "*Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?*" Verse 40, "*Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!*" I don't want to miss it. I don't want you to miss it. I don't want us to look at the book of Lamentations and come away thinking, "You know, there's a lot of gruesome things, there's a lot of bad things in that book. I've never quite read anything like that. I don't want to read that and be unchanged."

I want to read that, and I want the kindness and the goodness of God to lead me to repentance, to lead you to repentance, to turn from our sins, though it may be small in our eyes, or though it may be great, to turn from whatever God would reveal to us that we are in opposition to His ways, to turn from those sins and to avail ourselves, brothers and sisters, of the great and inexhaustible mercies of God. To turn from our sins and to turn to God. That's the bottom line.

The Christ of Lamentations

Now, I want you to think about something for just a moment. If an Old Testament saint, in the midst of all that affliction and all that despair, and truly living the reality of a faint hope in a devastated kingdom...if an Old Testament saint could declare the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, the mercies of God are new every morning, and great is His faithfulness, how much more for those of us in this room, on the other side of the cross...how much more, having seen what God has done for us in Christ, how much more can we not be assured of His love and His mercy and His faithfulness toward us?

Christ has endured the penalty of sin in the place of His people.

We see it there in your notes. How do we know? How do we know of the love of God toward us? We see, for example, that Christ has endured the penalty of sin in the place of His people. How do we know...how do you know that God loves you? Other than some trite song, or other than something that you just naturally assume because we're such loveable people, how do we know that God loves us with a steadfast love? Because Jesus has shed His own blood for our sins. He has paid the penalty for our sins. He has endured, He has taken your wrath, your pain, your guilt, your punishment, He has taken them upon Himself, and then He has taken them to the cross, and He has died a bloody death to demonstrate, God says, to demonstrate that even while we were yet sinners, Christ loved us. He died for us.

How do you know? You say, "I don't really feel the love of God." The answer is not to get worked up in some kind of emotional frenzy. You want to feel the love of God? You want to know the love of God? Spend some time reading His Word and seeing Christ crucified for you. How do we know the love of God? We look to the cross.

Christ has ensured the mercies of God for the sake of His people.

How do the mercies of God come to us? Number two, we see that Christ has ensured the mercies of God for the sake of His people. Not only has He paid the penalty, He has also ensured the mercies of God for the sake of His people. Ephesians 1:3 and 7, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ...*" Listen to this, "*He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...*" Everything that you need, everything that I need, every grace, every mercy, every time, opportunity, every occasion of forgiveness, Jesus purchased it with His own blood.

He has died on the cross, risen from the grave, and as a privilege to the resurrected Messiah, He now gets the honor of pouring out the blessings of God upon His people, and so He pours out mercy, and He pours out grace, and He pours out forgiveness, and He pours out every single thing that we need for our relationship with God.

How do we know? How do we know that God loves us? We look to the cross. How do we know that we're going to get mercy? Because Jesus has died and triumphed over the grave. How do we know...how do we know that God will be faithful to us? How do we know that when we come to God, God will certainly forgive us?

Christ has entered the presence of God on behalf of His people.

Last, we see that Christ has entered the presence of God on behalf of His people. How do we know that God will forgive us? Because Christ has entered the presence of God on behalf of His people. Write this verse down, Hebrews 7. Hebrews 7:25. It says, "*Consequently, [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost...*" I love that phrase: "*He is able to save to the uttermost...*" You say, "I am far from God." He is further down the road. "*He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him,*" speaking of Jesus. Why? "*Since he always lives to make intercession for them.*"

I don't know where you're at this morning. I don't know what sins you've committed. I don't know how you've made, in your own mind, a mess of your life. But I do know this: for those that repent of their sins and place all of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have an advocate whose blood can make even the foulest clean. We have an advocate who ever, ever, ever lives to make intercession for you. I mean, do you get that, brothers and sisters? Right now, as we are thinking about things that we should not think about, He is even now making intercession for you and for me. How do we know that we're going to make it? How do we know that we can come back to God? Not by anything that we have, but because we

have a faithful high priest who has gone into the heavenly places, and has presented not the blood of goats or animals, but He has presented His very own blood, and now, He is interceding on behalf of that blood.

The Challenge from Lamentations

Trust in the character of God.

So, let me close. Let me close with some encouragements, but also some challenges from what we've seen in the Word this morning. Number one, would you trust in the character of God? Brothers and sisters, would you trust, would you believe that God is for you in Christ? Would you believe in your heart, by the power of the Spirit, with the help of the Spirit of God, would you believe in the steadfast love of the Lord?

Would you believe that His mercies are new every morning, believe that He is great in His faithfulness? Listen, don't look to yourself. Don't look and say, "Well, let me find something that's loveable, and therefore, I'll know that God will love me." No, look to the God who is love. Don't look for reasons why God should show you mercy. There are none. Look only to Christ, who has purchased those mercies for you. Don't look at your faithfulness. Look at the very faithfulness of God, that all of the promises of God are "Yes" and "Amen" in Jesus.

Confess the depth of your sins.

Trust in the character of God to confess the depths of your sins. Confess the depths of your sins. Romans 2, it says that the kindness of God, or the patience of God is meant to lead us to repentance. Do you hear that? That the patience, the long-suffering of God is meant to lead us to repentance, so that when we hear it, like we do in Lamentations 3, that God is loving and merciful, and He is faithful, that is meant, then, to lead us, to turn away from what is not God, to God and God alone, to confess the depths of our sins.

Bank on the mercies of Christ.

Last, to bank on the mercies of Christ; to bank on the mercies of Christ. Having done that, having believed in the character of God, trusted in the character of God, repented of our sins, confessed the depths of our sins, would you then...would you then, in honor of Christ, to bring glory to Christ and His work, would you then bank on His mercies?

He says in John 6...He says, "*All that the Father gives me will come to me,*" and I love this line, "*and whoever comes to me...whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.*" It doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, where you've been, how deep your failures, how broken your life. "Whoever comes to me," He says, "I will never cast out."

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