The Truest Hope

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Would you pray with me?

Lord, we are thankful today that your mercies are new every morning. We can hope in you and put our trust in you because you are faithful.
Lord, even when we are weak, you are strong. When our faith falters, you hold us fast.
When life would seem to threaten us, you are there to sustain us. When the darkness will not lift and it seems the storm will never pass, you are the tower to which we run right in the midst of the storm.
You are good. You are faithful. You are trustworthy. And I pray this morning that for each heart gathered here in this sanctuary, that they would sense the nearness of your Spirit, the help and the comfort that only you can bring and provide.
[1:26] Lord, I pray today for those who are weary, who feel broken, who feel anxious, that you would strengthen them and enable them to put their spiritual eyes upon you.

Lord, I pray, Lord, for those who just feel weary, beaten up by the world, who feel they have perhaps taken all of the loss or grief their soul can stand, that you would renew their strength, enable them to mount wings like eagles, to run and not grow weary, to walk and not be faint.
We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the city was so broken that it's hard to even describe.
Smoke would fill the air. Buildings had been set ablaze.
Debris filled the streets and rubble made it difficult to even maneuver around. Walls that once fortified the city had been destroyed and knocked over.
[3:03] Giant stones not only made it difficult to move, but would serve as a reminder both of what used to be and also of the pain that now is.

Homes and businesses largely empty. Most of the inhabitants of the city have been either killed or taken off into exile some 700 miles away to Babylon.
A few do remain behind. Most of them starving, lonely, afraid, uncertain of what tomorrow holds, and feeling completely devoured by their enemy.
The sound of music has ceased in the city, replaced only by the sounds of starving children crying out for moms and dads and the cries of parents wondering how they will ever provide for their children.
Laughter is no more. It's been replaced by the pain of grief and sorrow.
[4:30] The temple has now been knocked down. Not only was this their house of worship, this was their home.

This is a place that united them. It was the place where the Lord met with His people. It was a symbol of God's nearness and of their precious relationship they had with Him.
But now instead, the city of Jerusalem is overwhelmed by force and its inhabitants overwhelmed with grief.
I doubt anyone in this sanctuary has ever experienced what it's like to live through an invasion. But you know what it's like for your life to be invaded by pain.
You may have never experienced the exact kind of pain that happened in the Old Testament when Judah and Jerusalem were besieged and destroyed by the Babylonians.
[5:45] But you have felt grief. For some in here, it was the pain of a boss telling you you're no longer needed.

For some, it was a spouse telling you you're no longer wanted. For others, it was a child telling you they no longer believe.

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For some, it was your parents sitting you down and telling you that your family will no longer be intact. And for yet others, it was a doctor confirming for you that yes, it is cancer.
You may not have lived through an invasion of an army, but you've been through the invasion of pain. You've been through the invasion of doubt.
You've been through the invasion of wondering, is there any hope after this? You've been through the invasion of wondering, will life ever feel normal again?
[6:55] Will I ever feel safe again? Will I ever feel at home again? Will I ever laugh again? Can I ever sing again?

When we study the Bible, context is always of absolute importance. It's context that helps us to rightly understand the Bible.
It's context that helps us to understand the precious promises of God. That's so true when you come to Lamentations 3. If I were to ask many of you, can you quote a verse from the book of Lamentations, your first thought may be no.
Maybe, except for the last several weeks on Sunday nights, your answer may be you've never even heard a sermon from the book of Lamentations. You may not be very familiar with the story, and you may not feel like you could quote anything from it.
Yet, if I said to you, even before we sang this morning, can you fill in the line of great is thy, for most of you, you would be able to say faithfulness.
[8:09] You may not have known exactly where that song comes from. You may not have known what Scripture text from which it originates, but you're familiar, many of you, with the beautiful promise that the song has.

And yet, that statement, great is thy faithfulness, does not appear in a vacuum. It appears in a context. It's taken right from Scripture, namely from Lamentations chapter 3 that we read a few moments ago.
And it's not a context of great joy and excitement and victory. It's quite the opposite. It comes out of the darkest days of the people of God in the Old Testament.
A little background, Lamentations 3 will help us to be reminded that at this point, what we have seen is God has warned His people. God has told His people repeatedly that if they do not obey Him, they will face discipline.
Yet, rather than heeding the word of God for most in the nation, they instead chose to continue worshiping idols or seeking worldly gain, trying to live just like the pagan nations around them, most of them ignoring heaven's warnings about their sin.
[9:35] The Lord was gracious and He was patient, and the Lord raised up prophets to warn the people, to tell them that they need to repent, that they need to trust the Lord, that they need to turn their back on their sinful ways and instead obey His word.

But in spite of the warnings of Scripture, in spite of the calls to repent that came from the spokesman for God, most of the people ignored it altogether to their own demise.
About 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, in 722 B.C., the Syrian army came in and they overwhelmed and overpowered and defeated that northern kingdom that we know as Israel.
About a century later, in 605 B.C., another world power, the Babylonians, had been raised up and they marched into town and they began the work of overthrowing that southern kingdom that we know as Judah.
in 588 B.C., the Babylonians surround Jerusalem and just a couple of years later, they will destroy both the city and the temple.
[11:03] Reducing Jerusalem, this once proud city with this beautiful temple, the envy of all the world, to rubble and smoke. Now, Jerusalem is devastated.

Largely empty except for the debris and after effects of invasion. So many of its people now march some 700 miles away into exile.
And if I could take you and show you a picture of what was happening at the time of Lamentations 3, you would very quickly turn your head away and say, I don't want to see anymore.
It's too dark. It's too painful. The sounds and cries, too eerie. It just seems almost too much.
This is the background and this is the context behind some of the most beautiful, hope-filled words in all of Scripture.
[12:17] As I read a few moments ago in verse 16, the prophet says that it's as if he's eating gravel.

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His teeth grind on gravel. Something that armies would do in the ancient world. They would mix sand with food as they give their rations out so that even the simplest meal now becomes a burden.
Verse 17, he says, I feel like my soul has no peace. I don't even remember what happiness is.
Verse 18, I have no more endurance. My hope is gone.
Verse 19, he cries out, Lord, remember what I'm going through. Verse 20, because my soul continually remembers it. Please remember what I'm facing because I promise you, Lord, I remember it.
I can't get away from this. Lord, please don't forget me because I cannot forget how much pain I'm in today. And then something changes in verse 21.
[13:27] It won't be the circumstances. It will be his own heart. But this I call to mind.

There's something that he thinks about. It's not changing what he's facing. All of the devastating effects of war and invasion and loss are very much still there and will very much remain.
But, he has called something to mind. He remembers something. He thinks about something, verse 21, and therefore I have hope.
because of what he set his mind on, because of what he's thinking about, he has hope. What is it that brings hope in the midst of despair?
It's verse 22. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and his mercies never come to an end.
[14:32] They are new every morning. great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul.

Therefore, I will hope in him. In verse 18, his hope had perished. In verse 21, he remembered the Lord and because of it, verse 24, he now hopes again.
Now, I want to share with you four truths from this brief passage that I hope will be an encouragement to you, not only today, but the rest of your life, no matter what comes your way.
Number one, the hope of God sustains us no matter the pain. The hope of God sustains us no matter the pain.
verse 21, but this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Isaiah 26, 3 reminds us, you keep in perfect peace he whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.
[15:51] There is a peace that comes to the believer when they remember and set their mind on the faithfulness of God. there is a hope that God gives us that sustains us no matter the pain we may face.

That was true in Jeremiah's day. That's been true for all time for those who have trusted in the Lord.
God some of you will know the name of John Owen.
John Owen was a theologian. He was also an administrator at the University of Oxford in the 1600s.
Long considered one of the premier theologians our world has ever known.
And for some who may be just vaguely familiar with this man's name if you know him at all you know him because he is known for his brilliant theological studies.
Even to this day his works are printed and reprinted so that people 400 years later can continue to learn from his brilliant mind.
[17:06] What most people may not know though is that John Owen while he was a theologian was also a family man. 1643 at the age of 27 he married a lady named Mary Rook and together they had 11 children.

Only one of the 11 would live to adulthood. The other 10 died in childhood. His one daughter who lived to be old enough to get married did so and then died of tuberculosis just shortly after her wedding.
It was a life that was so filled with pain it would be almost impossible to consider all that this man and his wife had to endure.
In fact if you've ever read anything of John Owen if you didn't know the background of all that he went through in grief and you re-read him you're going to be tempted to wonder and ask yourself how did this man hold on to his faith at all?
How is it that he could suffer so much loss and so much grief and still be able to express in such beautiful ways and with such spiritual theological depth of the character of our God?
[18:30] God the summer of 1647 was especially difficult for him and his wife they buried two daughters Mary and Eliza one month apart from each other that same year Owen's book one of his most well-known works a book called The Death of Death in the Death of Christ was published interesting that in a year where he would bury two of his own young daughters his own works

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reminding God's people that spiritually the power of death has been completely defeated in the death of Christ would come out that is the hope we cling to not that this life is going to be simple or easy but that ultimately our victory is secured because of Christ's work on the cross the spring of the very next year he had a son named

Thomas that died one year later his firstborn son John would die at the age of five a year later a daughter named Elizabeth would die you put it all together that's five children he and his wife buried in four years to read of his biography is to think that you have somehow by mistake picked up a horror filled fiction book surely nobody has been through such loss but this was the reality that met John Owen head on before his own death he would suffer with severe kidney stones and asthma and a year later after his death at the age of 67 one of his books called the glory of Christ would be published in it he would write before his passing but alas after our utmost and most diligent inquiries we must say how little a portion it is of him that we can understand his glory is incomprehensible! and his praises are unutterable! Some things an illuminated mind may conceive of but what we can express in comparison of what is in God himself is even less than nothing in those moments where you would be tempted to just think of your own loss or your own grief or to wonder God what are you doing or God why don't you do something different John Owen says when I think of the glory of God the best I can say is how little of his greatness can I comprehend this is not the words of some brilliant theologian let everything go his way this is the words of a man who suffered more loss and more personal grief than most of us in this room will ever even touch and so sometimes we have to say as
Lamentations 3 reminds us the hope of God sustains us no matter the pain and you don't need to compare your life or your suffering to somebody else because while it may be true that you've not suffered near as much as John Owen did or you haven't suffered near as much as somebody else maybe even in this own sanctuary has the reality of it is all you can really respond to is your life and your suffering and maybe by comparison what you've been through seems small but if it's your life and your heart whatever pain and suffering it is is very real and in that moment here's what you have to know that the hope of God sustains us no matter the pain the prophet says that I call this to mind I think on this verse 21 and because
I'm thinking on the right thing therefore I have hope if you think of your circumstances you will not have hope if you think of the world you will not have hope if you think of government trying to save you you will not have hope if you think of a financial fortune trying to be your refuge you will not have hope if you think of your body having to fight off everything that may come your way eventually you will not have hope here is where the people of God find their hope by setting their thoughts on the Lord therefore he says because I thought of God I have hope so first I want you to remember the hope of God sustains us no matter the pain second the love of God shelters us no matter the season the love of
[24:02] God shelters us no matter the season verse 22 the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases love love love love love love recordings mercy and and truth and goodness and steadfastness and forgiveness and grace all of that wrapped into one word the steadfast love of the

Lord never ceases and in the original text this is in the plural it's it's overflowing it's it's the steadfast love of God it's his grace his mercy his kindness his truth his patience his forgiveness his steadfastness just flowing and flowing until it's over flowingly full it never ends so it's true that God's people may know the hard hand of God's providence but they will never know a day without his love never you may know what it is to be heartbroken and you may know what it is to be sleepless and you may know what it is to feel alone but you'll never have one day as a child of
God where his love has ceased for you never and not only is it speaking of the steadfast love in verse 22 it's the steadfast love of Yahweh you see Lord most likely in in all caps when you see Lord in all caps that's alerting you this is Yahweh this is the personal covenantal name of God this speaks of the Lord not just as powerful and strong but as personal and near the steadfast love of Yahweh he's still the same personal God he's always been so the prophet has lost his city but has not lost his God he has lost his temple but he has not lost the Lord he has lost family and friends but he has not lost the one who holds his life together you need to remember that truth because some of you in this sanctuary will lose your job and you will lose your spouse and you will lose your retirement but you'll never lose your
God you'll never lose the nearness of the only true God who is on his throne and his steadfast love will be new for you every single morning maybe for you the storm clouds are gathering maybe for

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you you feel like you've been in the midst of a storm that's just lasting forever maybe for you you wonder how much more you can take and while there may be a thousand questions you can't answer and I never could answer for you for sure this much we can know that as a child of God the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases not today not tomorrow not down the road his love for you is constant in this storm you're facing today and in the next storm that you'll go through later you will know pain you will know grief and you will know loss you will never know a day without the steadfast love of the
Lord for the believer the hope of God sustains us no matter the pain and the love of God shelters us no matter the season third make note of this that the mercies of God shine on us no matter the darkness the mercies of God shine on us no matter the darkness this comes right from verse 22 the steadfast love the Lord never ceases his mercies never come to an end his mercies shine no matter the darkness his mercies never come to an end now it's true that sometimes as the people of God he allows us to enter into the furnace of affliction that's true Shadrach Meshach and Abednego when when faced with their life stood strong and they said that we will not bow down to the image of the king of
[30:29] Babylon and if anybody wonders well how strong was this king of Babylon it was his army that inflicted all the pain you read about in Lamentations and yet Shadrach Meshach and Abednego said we will not bow and in chapter three of the book of Daniel they make this strong declaration that God whom we serve is able to deliver us and he will deliver us but even if he does not let it be known we will not bow down to your image oh king and in the midst of that they were still thrown into the fiery furnace and maybe for you you've stood strong and you did the right thing and you stood for righteousness and you lost your job anyway you are forgiving and you are patient and your spouse abandoned you anyway to be sure sometimes there are lessons we have to learn in the furnace of affliction but understand this

God's mercies continue no matter the darkness you may be familiar with the words of Robert Browning Hamilton that says this 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 if I could take people in our church that are 80 85 90 years old and I could ask you when are the seasons of your life you learned to trust God the most you would not tell me about the seasons of life where things were simple and easy you would tell me about the days that were hard and the nights that were long and how you learned to trust in
God even in the pain and in the midst of the darkness God's mercies still shine and he says in verse 23 speaking of God's mercies they are new every morning every single day the sun rises and as the sun rises it reminds the people of God that we have new hope in God each day brings new mercies and new mercies bring new reasons to praise our God verse 23 great is your faithfulness if you were raised in the church you've sung this song more times than you know it's one of the hymns that has survived it's one of the hymns that is still sung worldwide and churches all over you've heard it sung at funerals and maybe if you don't know the background of the song you may be tempted to think that the words of great is thy faithfulness must come somewhere from the Psalms after some great victory after some mountaintop experience it must be the words of some victorious warrior in scripture that looks at all that he has gained!
and all that he has accomplished and returns praise back to the Lord and says great is your faithfulness but that's not where it comes from instead it comes from a prophet whose heart is crushed who sees his city the temple and his friends devastated it says one author said of this statement great is your faithfulness that this word comes to the prophet when nothing looked possible when nothing looked hopeful nothing looked worthwhile and nothing looked comforting and in that day the darkest of days the
[35:16] Holy Spirit inspires the prophet to set his mind on the Lord and say in the midst of all this chaos yet great is your faithfulness hope I hope you can relate to that that in your hardest moment not that saying some magical prayer not that singing some certain song takes away all the tears and takes away all the questions and makes everything fit nice and tidy but where you can set your mind on the character of God and say truly if all

I had was the Lord in him I would have all I need which leads us to a fourth and final truth from this passage the goodness of God satisfies us no matter the result the goodness of God satisfies us no matter the result verse 24 the Lord is my portion says my soul therefore I hope in him this is the

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truest form of hope this is the prophet saying when I look around the nation I don't know that anything's getting better I don't know that in my lifetime I'm going to see this all put back together and restored what I do know is the Lord is my portion the Lord is my gift the
Lord is my inheritance the Lord is mine and because he is I will hope in him this whole idea in verse 24 the Lord is my portion comes from earlier in the Old Testament namely from Numbers chapter 18 verse 20 when the people of God are settling there in the promised land and the Lord told Aaron that they will have no inheritance meaning there will be no specific land that the tribe of Levi which were the priest they don't get a specific piece of land in the promised land because the Lord himself would be their portion!
and borrowing that language the prophet says as long as I have the Lord I have hope as long as I know him I have something to hope in and when you go through your season of loss and your season of grief and your season of heartache what we tend to think of is that which we've lost which I get it you lose a job you mourn that you lose a loved one you grieve for sure you lose a marriage your heart breaks but understand that the promise of the Lord is this that no matter what the world has done to you no matter what anybody!
else has done to you that the Lord himself is your portion your inheritance your gift and as long as you have him you have hope and the good news of the gospel is the Lord does not forsake his own that's how in the midst of the storm the people of God press on that's how in the midst of pain and heartache you endure that's how you keep from giving up that's how you remind yourself you're not forsaken You've not been abandoned!
[39:53] God has not left you alone! As long as you have him you have hope! And as the prophet writes the words here in Lamentations 3 there is no promise of a restored economy no assurance he will see his friends again no certainty that life will ever get easy but also there is no doubt that his Lord is with him forever and forever and no amount of burnt buildings or turned over stone will be able to dash the hope he has in the Lord there is what we call when we study scripture the term is called an inclusio it's brackets it's a literary device to bring your attention and your focus to something in verse 21 it says therefore I have hope verse 24 therefore I will hope this is an ancient way of saying underline this put this in bold put this in all caps circle this this is a way of emphasizing there is hope for the people of God and between the brackets of verse 21 and verse 24 it reminds us to dwell on the faithfulness of our

God that no matter what you're facing the best thing you can think of in any season of pain is the faithfulness of God whatever you're experiencing it's the faithfulness of God that you put your mind on whatever you've lost you put your attention upon the Lord because when everything comes to its final conclusion that which is most meaningful to you is something the world can never take can never lose value can never be stolen from you so this morning for you it's not an invading army that keeps you awake at night but it may be that invading pain of a broken relationship or of a dissolved marriage or of a diagnosis or of the deafening sounds of loneliness or of children who have gone astray whatever you face in that dark night of grief turn your thoughts to the character of
God who is the same yesterday and today and forever and with each sunrise train your mind to say just as the sunrise is new this morning so are the mercies of God and because there are new mercies there are new reasons to sing and new reasons to trust and there are new reasons to hope 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 can I ask you just very quietly and just very reverently stand with me and I just want us to leave this morning with these words on our lips as a church now that you know where it comes from and the background that produced it and even if in your own heart today there is sorrow and uncertainty and even fear set your hope in God and remember his faithfulness and whatever it is you're facing let us leave this place today declaring that his mercies are new every morning and so is his faithfulness let's close as we sing this hymn together one more time let's sing so we can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can see or can or can see or can see or can see or can see fathers fathers or they know or they they like fathers they or they fathers they fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers

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