Lamentations 3:1-21

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Date: 10 September 2023

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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. For all that you do.

If you would open with me to Lamentations chapter 3. Lamentations chapter 3.
Let me just remind you of what's going on here in the book of Lamentations. If you're wondering, are we at the happy part? The answer is no. If you're wondering where that is, go to Luke 2 with the birth of Jesus.
It gets better, but not in Lamentations. Let me just remind you a little bit of how this unfolds. If you go to Lamentations 1, you'll see there are 22 verses.
It's an acrostic. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. And so if you're reading Lamentations in the original language, you would see that each verse is just walking down through the alphabet.
[1:08] It's poetic. Though the situation is hard and dark and the information is bleak, it's beautiful in terms of the writing of it.

Being an acrostic was a way to be able to memorize it. It was a way to be able to pass it on. It was also a poetic way of saying that the grief and the heartache is full.
We would say A to Z. We've covered the grief from A to Z. We've covered the judgment of God from A to Z. It's going through in that way.
You'll also notice that there are three lines per verse in chapter 1. When you go to chapter 2, you'll see there's also 22 verses, also an acrostic, also three lines per verse.
It's also, as we looked at a few weeks ago, it's written in what's been called a limping meter. It's the style you would write for a funeral.
[2:15] A limping meter means that the verses don't line up. Just to give you an example, it would be as if I wrote a poem and every two lines rhymed, the first line might have eight syllables.

The second line would have six. Next line, eight. Next line, six. And it's just kind of offbeat on purpose. It's a limping meter. It's as if somebody had a broken foot and they were limping along.
That's the way that chapter 1 and chapter 2 is written. Not only is that because that's how you would do it at a funeral, which this essentially is a funeral message, it also just has in mind this kind of poetic roughness that things just aren't even.
They're not smooth, and that's how you're supposed to feel. When you come to chapter 3, you have 66 verses. If you're really quick at math, 22 times 3 verses gets you to 66.
That's what you have in chapter 3. Same thing as chapter 1 and 2, only it's now in triplicate. It's taking the same structure, and it's just drawing it out.
[3:33] But when you go to chapter 4, you again have 22 verses, and you can see why that is.

But we're going from three lines to two because the story is winding down.
When you go to chapter 5, it's no longer an acrostic. It's a prayer, not a poem. Though there are 22 verses again, it's not an acrostic, and we're down to one line.
So if you were to read this in its original language, there are some things we would pick up on that's harder to see in English. You would see a limping meter, which would help you to feel the dissonance of what's being said.
You would notice that we're going from 22, 22 to 66, hit a crescendo, and now we're going decrescendo, chapter 4, chapter 5. You would see we're going from three lines building up to two lines per verse to one line per verse.
[4:38] It's just a poetic way of saying we're winding things down. So there's some very interesting things in Lamentations 3 that if you're just reading it, chapter 1 to 5 in English, the theology we get, some of the hidden beauty and intricacy of it may not be immediately obvious.

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So I hope that helps a little bit. When we come to chapter 3, we've got 66 verses. And what we're going to do tonight is look at just the first section of chapter 3.
Lord willing, next Sunday morning, I want to step out of Mark and I want to preach verses 21 to 24 on Sunday morning for a couple of reasons.
One, are for those who aren't able to be with us on Sunday night, I want them still to get a flavor and a feel for what we're studying on Sunday nights. Also because it's some of the best known verses of the Old Testament.
Our hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness, comes straight from Lamentations 3. We'll look at that at the end of our time tonight. I also want to use that for our text next Sunday morning just to help all of our church understand more of where that hymn comes from and why it is so rich for us.
[6:02] And the next Sunday night, we'll finish the back part of Lamentations 3. So that's just a little bit of an outline of where we're going.

When we get into chapter 3, we're looking tonight just at the first section of this. And I've titled this, The Active Anger of God. The Active Anger of God.
It's not that God is just simply frustrated or upset with their sin. It's that He is angry and He is doing something about it.
He's not just ignoring it. He's not just watching His people be disobedient. He's doing something.
And as we go through this first part of chapter 3, while again, it's difficult and hard, I do want you to be encouraged to know that our God is always doing more than you see.
He's always doing more than you see. And that should be an encouragement for us. Verse 1 of chapter 3, I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of His wrath.
[7:23] He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light. Surely against me He turns His hand again and again the whole day long.

What we see happening is these are the words of the prophet who is now speaking in what we would call the first person. Speaking of himself.
What he's experiencing. And the prophet here is representative of what all the people are experiencing. So the first thing I want you to make a note of here is that there are always the pains of judgment.
There are always the pains of judgment. And the first thing I want you to write down about that is the word darkness.
I'm a man who has seen affliction under the rod of His wrath. He's driven me into darkness without light.
[8:37] You can get that metaphor. Things seem more scary at night. It's hard when you feel like it's dark.

And the prophet says, I feel like I've been driven in the darkness without any light. It's a very apt metaphor for the condition of the people.
There's no hope of tomorrow. Not as they are looking at it right then. They've been judged. Babylonians have destroyed their city.
It's destroyed the temple. People are taken to exile. The city is burning. Smoke is constantly going up. It's hard to find food.
It's just a complete disaster. So much so that the prophet says, I feel like it's just a non-stop darkness.
[9:46] Now I want you to remember that as we get to the end of the message tonight for something else the prophet says. But he feels like, speaking as a representative of the people, this is non-stop darkness.

He says in verse 4, He has made my flesh and my skin waste away. He has broken my bones.
It's physical weakness. It's physical weakness. This trial has aged him. You know how you'll often see on the news, they'll take a president when he starts in office and then show a picture of when he's ended.
And it's just been four years or it's just been eight years, but it looks like he's aged 20 years. Just the constant stress of a life that every single day is dealing with non-stop problems.
The prophet says, My flesh, my very skin is wasting away. He also feels trapped.
[10:55] Verse 5, He has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation. He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. He has walled me about so that I cannot escape.

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He has made my chains heavy. Though I call and cry for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones. He has made my paths crooked.
Here's what he's saying. I cannot make any progress. It just seems like no matter what I do, it's darkness, physically I'm weak, and now I feel trapped.
There's just nothing I can do. As I read this, when I went back to October of 2020, when we had that horrific ice storm that came through, and I've never been more upset at my wife's dream to live on a property with trees than I was in October 2020, she's become a tree hater.
Not very environmental. But we lived there because it was her dream. That dream has since, I guess, left, but that was her dream. Until October 2020, and then it became a nightmare.
[12:12] Because we had just more tree carnage than I can even describe.

And we were driving back. We'd been in Branson, Missouri, on a retreat with Compassion International. And some friends of mine from church had called me and just warned me.
They said, I went by your house. I just want to warn you. It's really bad. And I waited for the, however, we've been working to clean it up. That didn't come.
So I told Marcy, we were driving home, and I said, I've had, you know, a few people call me. They've come by to check on our house, check on our property. They've told me it's really, really bad. And we're driving back to Mustang, and it's, there's some damage, but it's not terrible.
And we're getting close to home, and we see the evidence, but it's not terrible. And we turn on our street, and there's more damage, but it's not terrible. And then we get to our house, and it's worse than I ever imagined.
[13:13] And we were driving down, and I had called my oldest son, and I said, hey, I need you to come home tomorrow. We've got to clean this up. And I called my youngest son, and said, if you can drive down from Silver, we've got to clean this up.

And Cale, who was not married, dating Bailey at the time, said, you want me to bring Bailey? And I was like, don't bring your girlfriend. I don't need your girlfriend here. It's not that bad. I just need you. You can leave her alone.
And then I hung up the phone, I pulled up my driveway, and I called Cale, and I said, bring your girlfriend. And anyone else you know, if you've met them, bring them.
And it was just soul crushing. We got home, and I was kind of dressed up from the event, and I got out of the car, and it was getting close to dark, and I just went outside.
I didn't even change clothes, dress clothes on. I just started grabbing tree limbs, and pulling them together. And Marsha's like, what are you doing? I said, I've just got to do something. I mean, our house is surrounded by devastation.
[14:17] I've got to do something. And I worked until after dark, just trying to make some kind of headway, and I walked out the next day, and it was as if nothing had happened, as far as that I hadn't helped anything.

It was just as bad the next day as it was when I got home and tried to do something about it. And you just feel trapped. You just feel like there's nothing we can do.
That's what I thought of when the prophet says, I feel like I cry for help, and my prayer is shut. My ways are blocked.
My paths are crooked. There's just no way. If it's dark, but sun is coming, it's okay. If your life's a mess, but it's going to get cleaned up, it's okay.
You can handle that. But if the buildings are burning, and there's no immediate hope of the fire being put out, and there's nobody coming to clean up, and there's nobody coming back to reinvest in the land, and the people have been taken away, you're not going to see again, and the cries of the babies who are left starving, as he describes, are not getting any help.
[15:30] There's just nowhere to turn. That's what the prophet is saying. It's not just the devastation. It's the feeling of being trapped.

There's no way out. Which leads to feeling overwhelmed. Verse 10, 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. He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver.
What's the prophet saying? He's saying it's as if the bullseye was right on him, and the bullseye was nailed.

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Now, just to remind you, all of this judgment, they had been warned was coming. All of this judgment, they have been warned from the beginning that if they disobey God, judgment's coming.
[16:36] This wasn't new. This wasn't random. This wasn't capricious. They had been warned about this. They had been told by the Lord, and they had been told by the prophets of God that you must repent.

You must turn things around. You cannot get by with continually just disobeying the word of God, or judgment will fall. They just ignored.
And it led to a fifth pain for the prophet, and that was that he felt mocked. Verse 13 and 14, I have become the laughing stock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long.
Jeremiah would preach words of warning, and his own people would mock him. And now, the judgment has come, and now it's the neighboring nations who taunt and mock the very people of God.
There's pain that comes from judgment. But secondly, I want you to notice there's also dangers to avoid in judgment. When judgment comes, even in those moments, there are some dangers that we must avoid.
[17:56] The first danger we must avoid is bitterness. Verse 15, He has filled me with bitterness and has sated me with wormwood. He has made my teeth grind on gravel and made me cower in ashes.

You know what they used to do in the ancient world at times when a nation would overtake another, when food supply was very scarce.
Just to be cruel, what they would sometimes do is they would take sand and add it to the food. Not to be filling, just to be cruel.
You're waiting for just a small fragment of food you're getting served, and as you chew it, it's as if you're eating sand because often you were.
And what he's saying here is even the most basic parts of our life, just a common, basic meal no longer satisfies.
[19:07] The first time I got COVID, December 2020, woke up, felt perfectly good, brushed my teeth, tasted nothing, got scared, got some cologne, sprayed it on a piece of paper, smelt it, couldn't smell anything, and I thought, oh, you've got to be kidding.

Most people I knew lost their smell and taste for three or four days. It came back. I pretty quickly felt good. I didn't taste food from December 2020 until June 2021.
I went seven months without tasting anything. First thing I tasted was a root beer in June. I was just at a meal at home and I thought, I can kind of taste this.
I went six months with no taste. And it got a little heavy because there was, there was no joy in eating.
I mean, you would eat because you had to, but nothing was satisfying. You would eat to keep your body alive, but there was no meal you looked forward to. And I thought, well, you know, I'll take this season of life to try something I've never tried, like fruit.
[20:46] Fruit's just as bad if you can't taste it as it is if you can taste it. People said, you ought to try all these weird foods that I've never tried. It didn't work.

It was no good. If you're just trying to daily things, not a big fancy meal, not a anniversary night meal, just a sandwich, just the smallest thing.
And the prophet says, my teeth grind on gravel. Even just trying to eat to keep myself alive, he says, it is a reminder of my misery.
And we've got to be careful when we go through judgment or discipline to not become bitter. We secondly have to avoid the danger of becoming forgetful.
Verse 17, my soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is. When life is especially hard, work more than ever to remember and be on guard against forgetfulness.
[22:06] The third thing to be on guard is against hopelessness. Verse 18, so I say, my endurance has perished, so has my hope from the Lord.

He became hopeless. Now I want to say, when you're in your season of suffering, you're in your season of suffering. And the suffering may be for any number of reasons. Your suffering may be because of sin.
Your suffering may be because of somebody else's sin. Your suffering may simply be the result of we live in a fallen world. Your suffering may be God preparing you for something greater.

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Our suffering can be any number of things. But in your day of suffering, make sure you protect against bitterness and forgetfulness and hopelessness.
Here's why. Your enemy would love to meet you in the pit of hopelessness. He would love to meet you there. He would love to get you full of self-pity.
[23:07] He would love to get you to think nobody loves you. God has abandoned you. The enemy meets in the pit of hopelessness.

Don't go there. There's pain that we feel in judgment. That's always true. There are dangers to avoid in judgment.
And then third, there are prayers to pray in judgment. When you find yourself under the discipline of God, when you find yourself in the hard days of providence, when you find yourself brokenhearted, there are prayers to pray in days of judgment.
And because it's hard to pray and it's hard to express our hearts when things are hard, this text is so helpful. It just gives us two simple, short prayers to pray.
In your day of suffering, in your day of judgment, first, pray this, Lord, remember me.
[24:25] Verse 19, remember my affliction and my wonderings, the wormwood and the gall. My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.

He says, Lord, please remember me. Like Jonah in the belly of the fish in chapter 2, it's dark. There's no seeming way out.
It seems like life is over. Jonah in chapter 2, what does he do? He prays. What does he pray? Scripture. Every verse of Jonah 2, you can check it against the Psalms.
the prophet in the belly of the fish is praying Scripture. You are in the belly of the fish because of your sin and the discipline of God and yet you can pray to God.
Lord, remember me. The thief on the cross, moments before death, being executed because of his sin, being put to death as a just payment for the way that he has acted and the way that he has treated his fellow man on the cross, what does the thief say?
[25:47] Lord, what does he say? Remember me. Remember me. If you know me, if you're aware of me, if I'm one of yours, even if I don't deserve anything, if only by your grace you would call me and make me your own, if you would remember me in that sense, then I'm going to be okay.

And he says, Lord, remember me. This is the prayer of Lamentations 3, verse 19 again. Remember me. And I love the way the prophet says it.
Remember my affliction, verse 20, my soul continually remembers it. He's saying, Lord, please remember my pain, because I sure remember it.
Lord, be aware how desperate I feel because I sure feel it. Lord, know how hopeless I feel because every day I wake up, I remember how hopeless I feel.
Lord, remember me. And the second prayer, Lord, help me to never forget you.
[27:06] Lord, help me to never forget you. I get this from verse 21. But this I call to mind.

This I'm remembering. I have hope. And therefore, I have hope.
It's still dark, but there's hope for light. He's still trapped, but there's hope for rescue.
Lord, remember me and help me to never forget you. If you find your life so burdened, you don't even know what to pray, just start there.
Lord, help me to never forget who you are. Help me to never forget your character. Help me to never forget your promises.
[28:15] Lord, remember me and Lord, help me to never forget you. He says something so interesting in verse 21.

This I call to mind. This I remember. There's something that my mind has gone back to even though the prophet says, I feel my flesh wasting away, verse 4, my bones feel broken, I feel bitterness, I feel darkness, verse 7, I feel like there's no way of escape, verse 8, I feel like there's no answer to my prayer, verse 9, I feel like stones block my path, there's no way out, verse 10, I feel like a bear is about to snatch me, verse 12, I feel like someone has shot me right in the heart, with an arrow, verse 13, I feel like the arrow went in my kidneys and it's taking my life, verse 14, I feel like the whole world is laughing at me, verse 15, I feel bitter, verse 16, I feel like even a simple meal reminds me of my pain, verse 17,
I feel like I have forgotten what happiness even is, verse 19, I'm filled with affliction and wonderings, verse 20, my soul is crushed, verse 21, I'm thinking of something for the first time and all of a sudden, my soul has hope.

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Not only has his circumstance not changed any, there's no promise of his circumstances changing in his lifetime. What is it that in the midst of this absolute pit of despair brought him hope?
Verse 22, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end.
[30:30] They are new every morning. great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul.

Therefore, I will hope in him. It was remembering the character of God that gave him hope.
it wasn't change in circumstances. It wasn't change in the prospects of what the world was going to do with him.
It was remembering the character of God. And he said in verse 2, I feel like you've brought me into darkness without any light.
It's as if it's just one never-ending night. But when he thinks about the character of his God, verse 23, he reminds himself morning is coming.
[31:49] and every time the sun comes up, his mercies are new. Every time the sun comes up, it's a new day and the character of God will be displayed again.

when we had the ice storm, I went to bed that night, I woke up the next day and I looked at our property and there was just trees.
I couldn't even move around my property at all. And a couple of church members called and said, could we come over and help you?
And I said, please come. and a friend from church called and said, I've got COVID. I don't feel bad. You want me to come? I said, please come. Don't broadcast it.
Please come. And any COVID infected friends you've got, bring them too. And the sun came up.
[33:03] And I felt overwhelmed and I felt frustrated and I felt discouraged. But you know what? God brought some friends by. And we started making a little bit of progress.

And Cale had brought Bailey by. And I said, we might as well do some family business here. Let's see what this girl's all about. Didn't know her that well. I said, Bailey, I've got a job.
We're going to load up my trailer and you and I are going to go to the dump. And we're going to unload. limb after limb after limb. I want to see if this girl can work.
And she helped me for hours unload this stuff. And Benjamin brought this friend named Mary.
We're just friends. We're just friends. And they helped us.
And then they got married. Be careful who you bring home to clean leaves. And little by little there was some hope.
[34:17] there was a path. And what the prophet is saying is when I look at my circumstances I feel so trapped.

It's like stones are everywhere all around me. It's like darkness won't lift. And yet when I set my mind on the character of God something comes to my mind and I remember this.
With every new sunrise his mercies are new every morning. So when you sing great is thy faithfulness this is not the words from scripture of someone who is saying life has been so good.
My plans have prospered. My family loves me. My best friends are there for me. I feel so hopeful and joyful. I just have to write this hymn of praise.
Our God is great and faithful. No. This is the prophet who is saying I feel like I'm squashed in darkness and I cannot even move and the only thing that gives me hope is to think of this my God is faithful.
[35:32] That's why the song is so beautiful because it's an honest expression of a prophet in a city crushed under the discipline of God who has nothing but God.

He'll go on to say in verse 24 the Lord is my portion says my soul therefore I will hope in him.
Hopelessness starts to give way to hopefulness.
verse 29 let him put his mouth in the dust there may yet be hope. What's he saying?
Maybe we should talk a little less there may be hope after all. Circumstances haven't changed but I remember who God is. My enemy is still there but I remember who God is.
There may be a morning after all there may be light after all there may be hope after all not because of what I can do but because my God is faithful then when you're in the midst of your season of suffering you don't even know how to pray just pray those two things Lord remember me and Lord help me to never forget you and if your circumstances never change and if your prayers never answered the way that you want it to be remember this the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases his mercies never come to an end they are new every morning and great is your faithfulness Lord

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willing Sunday morning I want to take just verse 21 to 24 and I want to try to take the truth of that and just pray for the
[37:33] Holy Spirit to take the truth of that short passage and let it just fall on our congregation next Sunday morning and just glory and rest in the faithfulness of our God Lord we thank you for your word tonight and we do pray that it would bring hope to each heart it's true that judgment comes discipline comes and when it does there is real pain and when it comes there are real dangers we must avoid but help us in those moments of danger to pray Lord remember me and Lord help me to never forget you may your word even this night strengthen the weary soul and bring comfort to the one who feels hopeless for this we bring to mind great is your faithfulness amen

God bless you church you're dismissed my worth my worth is not in what I hold not in the strength of flesh and bone but in the costly wounds of love at the cross my worth is not in skill or name in but me for for me and for me as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as

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