

Lamentations 3 "Where to Find Hope When Hope Seems Gone" ^{***}

Main Idea: In Lamentations 3 we learn where to find hope when hope seems gone. We see hope from four perspectives in this lamentation.

I. Perspective #1: Hope sought (1-18).

A. Jeremiah affirms that he is suffering.

B. Jeremiah affirms that the Lord is over his suffering.

1. He took away my light (1-3).

2. He took away my health (4-6).

3. He took away my freedom (7-9).

4. He took away my life (10-12).

5. He took away my respect (13-15).

6. He took away my peace and prosperity (16-18).

II. Perspective #2: Hope gained (19-24).

A. Jeremiah made himself think about the Lord's attributes.

1. He meditated on the Lord's love and compassion (22).

2. He meditated on the Lord's faithfulness (23).

3. He meditated on the Lord's sufficiency (24).

B. Jeremiah chose to talk to himself rather than listen to his feelings.

III. Perspective #3: Hope shared (25-48).

A. Jeremiah encouraged others to affirm what he affirmed (25-39).

1. The Lord is good (25-27).

2. The Lord is sovereign (28-30).

3. The Lord is compassionate and loving (31-33).

4. The Lord sees injustice (34-36).

5. The Lord is the One who decrees both calamities and good times (37-39).

B. Jeremiah encouraged others to respond as he responded (40-48).

1. Let's take inventory and return to the Lord (40).

2. Let's acknowledge our sin to the Lord (41-42).

3. Let's acknowledge our desperation for the Lord (43-48).

IV. Perspective #4: Hope in the real world (49-66).

A. In the real world, you see things that break your heart (49-51).

B. In the real world, you experience things that break your heart (52-54).

C. In the real world, you must talk to the Lord about the things that break your heart (55-60).

1. He hears our cry (55-56).

2. He takes away our fear (57).

3. He takes care of our concerns (58-60).

D. In the real world, you must turn over to the Lord the people who are breaking your heart (61-66).

The Bottom Line: When the night is darkest, even a little light makes a big difference.

I'm always a little skeptical of people who try to give advice concerning things they know nothing about. For instance, if I told you I was offering a class on cooking this Thursday, I wouldn't come if I were you. Nor if I offered a class on sewing, or glass blowing, or how to repair a broken watch. You'd be wasting your time to listen to me talk about those subjects, for I know nothing about them.

On the other hand, if a person has *been there, done that*, he's gained my attention. I may not buy what he says entirely, but his experience merits at least a listening ear in my book.

Which leads to the following disclaimer. I'm about to talk to you concerning the subject *where to find hope when hope seems gone*. The disclaimer is, I've never experienced hopelessness before. Oh, I've faced some hard situations, but nothing in my mind that qualifies as hopeless. Yet I know that for some people in the world, it's a present reality. It is for tens of thousands of earthquake survivors in Haiti, for instance. Hope seems gone right now. More than one Haitian could say, "I have no house, no food, no money, no means of making my life any different. I feel *hopeless*."

I'm also aware that hopeless is a word that describes how some people in our own community are feeling about life right now, people who have lost the child of their dreams, for instance, or the spouse they've always depended on, or their health, or their job. Along with such losses comes hopelessness at times. Perhaps you can relate.

It's to those who feel hopeless, or know those who are feeling hopeless that I want to share some good news. I'm not going to address the subject from personal experience. Rather, I'm going to share with you the God-given testimony of a person whose circumstances were indeed hopeless, yet who experienced hope right in the midst of it all. And he can show us how to find hope in hopeless times, and he does just that in the book of Lamentations.

The prophet Jeremiah lived through something I can but barely fathom. His God-appointed task was to tell his people that judgment was coming. But not just tell them. His assignment was to go through that judgment with his people. And that's what happened. The Babylonians invaded his homeland of Judah, destroyed the countryside, and carried the surviving Jews into captivity. The exile happened in three waves. The first deportation took place in 605 B.C. and included Daniel and his three teenage friends. The second deportation in 597 included Ezekiel. The third and final deportation happened right after the enemy troops destroyed Jerusalem and demolished the temple.

I don't know how many thousands of people perished during that twenty year nightmare, but Jeremiah heard the survivors' wailing firsthand. And he did his own share of wailing, too.

In fact, he wrote a Holy-Spirit-inspired book to help his people grieve God's way. In previous weeks we've discussed the structure of the book. The five chapters are actually five individual lamentations or dirges. These five dirges are actually acrostic poems. The first, second, and fourth poems have twenty-two verses, corresponding with the twenty-two verses of the Hebrew alphabet, and the verses begin with the successive letters of the alphabet, from *aleph* to *tav* (from *a* to *z*). The acrostic drops in chapter five, even though it too has twenty-two verses, for reasons we'll discuss in a later message.

But chapter 3 is different. It's a triple acrostic with sixty-six verses. Verses 1, 2, and 3 all begin with *aleph*, verses 4, 5, and 6 with *beth*, and so on to the end. There's something special about this third poem that grabs your eye. In reality, it's the climax of the book and it's here that Jeremiah shows us the key to finding hope when hope seems gone.^[1]

The book of Lamentations is sort of like a dark and dreary oil base painting. The canvas is filled with blacks and dark grays and deep purples. That's what we see in chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5, and most of chapter 3, as Jeremiah expresses in vivid, horrid detail the pain and agony of God's people experiencing God's judgment. But in the middle of chapter 3 we see a small but unavoidable pool of brilliant color and light—you can't miss it. In fact, the brilliant light stands out all the more because of the frighteningly dark background the rest of the book provides.^[2]

It's kind of like a Thomas Kincade painting. It's the light that grabs your attention. In this Lamentations painting, that light doesn't change the fact that the rest of the canvass is depressingly dark, but it does show us that there's a way out of the darkness.

So where do you find hope when hope seems gone? We find the answer in Lamentations 3. We see hope from four perspectives in this lamentation: *hope sought* (1-18), *hope gained* (19-24), *hope shared* (25-48), and *hope in the real world* (49-66).

I. Perspective #1: Hope sought (1-18).

Verse 1 begins, "I am the man who has seen affliction." Commentators have speculated about who "the man" is. Some link it to King Jehoiachin. Others say it's the personification of the nation speaking. I think the "I" is Jeremiah, and more specifically, it's Jeremiah speaking for the benefit of his suffering people. He puts into words what he's feeling and what they're feeling, for the feelings are the same.

That's why his message is so relevant for us. We too suffer. Oh, our circumstances differ, but the feelings are the same. In the first eighteen verses Jeremiah affirms two realities.

A. Jeremiah affirms that he is suffering. And two...

B. Jeremiah affirms that the Lord is over his suffering. When I say "over" I mean in control of it. We saw this in chapter two, and now again in chapter three. Jeremiah doesn't attribute this tragedy to fate, but sees the Lord's hand in it. In fact, he makes the Lord the subject of at least twenty pain-producing activities in this section. I've grouped them into six categories. Jeremiah says...

1. *He took away my light* (1-3). "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long." To Jeremiah it felt like someone turned the lights out on life, and that someone, he says, was the Lord. Again, he doesn't attribute his suffering to bad luck or chance circumstances, nor even to the Babylonians, but to the working of God Himself. The Babylonians were the rod of His wrath, but He is the one swinging the rod, says Jeremiah.

2. *He took away my health* (4-6). "He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead." Sometimes when you go through suffering, you feel like you've been beat to a pulp. It takes a physical toll. It did with me, says the prophet.

3. *He took away my freedom (7-9).* "He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked."

4. *He took away my life (10-12).* "Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows." To reiterate, it's the Lord that's doing this, says Jeremiah. He took away my life, my health, my freedom, and life as I knew it!

5. *He took away my respect (13-15).* "He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall."

His own people thought he was lunatic, or worse, a traitor. Pashur did. Pashur was the chief officer in the temple who heard Jeremiah preach and had him beaten and put in stocks for it. I love Jeremiah's response in Jeremiah 20:8-9, "The word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

6. *He took away my peace and prosperity (16-18).* "He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, 'My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD.'"

Jeremiah paid a great price to obey God, and that includes what he endured *before* the Babylonians came to town. Did you realize that God actually told Jeremiah not to marry and have children (check out Jer. 16:1-4)? There was no "good life" for this man. He took away my light, my health, my freedom, my life, my respect, and then my peace and prosperity.

Again, Jeremiah isn't merely talking about his own suffering here. He's putting his experience into words to help his people who also were suffering. And yet this goes beyond his people. It's for us, too, for we suffer. But it goes beyond us. Jeremiah's testimony points ultimately to One who would suffer so His people would never need to suffer again. [\[3\]](#)

Wasn't that Jesus' point in John 5:39? He said the Scriptures testify of *Him*. So Jeremiah's suffering mirrors for us His own suffering. Jesus too bore the rod of God's wrath. God made Him walk in darkness (2) and turned His hand against Him (3). He walled Him in so He could not escape (7). When He cried out for help, He shut out His prayer (8). He pierced His heart with arrows (13). He made Him the laughingstock of His people (14). He filled Him with bitter herbs and gall (15). And why?

Man of sorrows, what a name for the Son of God who came,

Ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah! What a Savior!

That brings us to the second perspective. First, *hope sought*.

II. Perspective #2: Hope gained (19-24).

Watch how the darkness gives way to light in verses 19-24, "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'"

Jeremiah is painting with different colors, isn't he? He's moved from *hope sought* to *hope gained*.

What made the change? Certainly not his situation. It's the same. But he's changed. He says in verse 21, "I have hope."

What brought about this change? He says he called something to mind. He began to think about something other than how hard life was and how bad he was hurting. No, he didn't put his head in the sand and ignore how bad things were (he's been reflecting on that for two and one-half chapters). But now it's time to focus his attention on a different subject. He says, "I called this to mind and therefore I have hope."

What is *this*? What subject did he call to mind that produced hope in hopeless circumstances? That's the million dollar question if you too want to gain hope. The answer?

A. Jeremiah made himself think about the Lord's attributes. It's the knowledge of God that gave Jeremiah hope. That's what he called to mind. He forced himself to focus his thinking on the attributes of God.

1. *He meditated on the Lord's love and compassion (22).* "Because of the LORD's great *love* we are not consumed." Jeremiah here uses one of the most important words in the Old Testament. It's the Hebrew word *hesed*, and there's no one English word that captures the fullness of this term that describes how God deals with His people.

We find it in Exodus 34:6, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in *love* [*hesed*] and faithfulness." It's significant that John picks up on this in John 1:14 and says that the Word who became flesh was "full of *hesed* (grace) and truth."

Hesed appears about 250 times in the Old Testament and incorporates the concepts of *love*, *compassion*, *grace*, *truth* and *faithfulness*, *goodness*, and *forgiveness*.^[4] Put it all together and you have *hesed*, and *hesed* is what God is.

Hesed refers to God's *gracious love* to His covenant people. It's because of His *hesed* that He chose a pagan idol worshipper named Abram and promised to bless Him. It's because of His *hesed* that He turned the descendants of Abraham into a nation and gave them the promised land. And it's because of His *hesed* that He gave them promises and kept His promises, even when they didn't.

Here Jeremiah says that *hesed* is the reason his nation, though terribly devastated, was not completely destroyed. "Because of the Lord's *hesed*, we are not consumed."

Why is it that you and I woke up this morning rather than dying in our sleep? The wages of sin is death, isn't it? Yes. Did you sin this past week? I know I did. So why did He grant us another day that we don't deserve? Because of His *hesed*.

When we're suffering we tend to focus on what we are *not* getting out of life that we think we deserve. We need to focus on what we have that we don't deserve. Jeremiah says, "When I call to mind God's *hesed* and compassion, I have hope!"

2. *He meditated on the Lord's faithfulness (23).* "Great is your faithfulness," Jeremiah affirms in verse 23.

When do we tend to say that? Usually it's after God has met a need, or answered a prayer, or worked in a special way in our lives. That's when we say, "God, great is your faithfulness!"

But when did Jeremiah make this pronouncement? Listen to Walter Kaiser's observation, "The startling fact about this announcement is that it is made against one of the bleakest backgrounds in the Old Testament. It would be as if someone had stood up in one of the prison camps of the Third Reich and announced loudly, 'Great is God's faithfulness.' That might seem ludicrous enough to bring the scornful sneer of every destitute soul confined to those barracks."^[5]

Keep in mind what Jeremiah and his people have lost. They no longer have a son of David reigning as their king. The city of Jerusalem is in shambles. The promised land is in the hands of foreigners. The temple is now charred ruins. The ark of the covenant is gone, as well as the mercy seat, the altar, the priests, the table of the bread of presence, the morning and evening sacrifices, the festivals. It's all gone.

Their homes are gone, their family members are either dead or in chains somewhere, their next meal is a question mark. And it's at this lowest point that Jeremiah calls out, "Great is your faithfulness."

That's strange, isn't it? As Kaiser rightly observes, "It was not sung (as we so often sing the hymn based on this verse) immediately after a body of believers had just experienced another evidence of God's blessing on their lives. On the contrary, this word came when *nothing* looked possible, hopeful, worthwhile, or comforting."^[6]

Jeremiah and his people had just lost everything important to them. No, says, Jeremiah. Here's something we have not lost. God's compassions are new every morning because *He is faithful*. He will always be what He has always been. He may take things from us, but He will not take Himself from us, not if we are His people.

You say, "How can I become one of His people?" By faith, and specifically, this side of the cross, by putting your faith in His Son, Jesus the Messiah.

3. *He meditated on the Lord's sufficiency (24)*. "The LORD is my portion," says Jeremiah, "therefore I will wait for him." What's a portion? If I offer you a portion of my lunch, I'm taking something that is mine and giving it to you for your nourishment and enjoyment. That's what the Lord is. He's our portion. He's our source of nourishment and joy.

And did you notice that Jeremiah didn't just *think* about these truths? Verse 24 says, "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion.'" In other words...

B. Jeremiah chose to talk to himself rather than listen to his feelings. Why is it that two people who know Christ can go through the same kind of suffering, while one exhibits joy and the other bitterness? Here's a key reason. One person is active while the other is passive. One talks to himself and affirms God's truth, while the other listens to himself and lives by his moods.

I appreciate so much D. Martin Lloyd Jones' counsel in his chapter on "Feelings" in his book, *Spiritual Depression*. He writes, "You have to speak to yourself...Remind yourself of certain things. Remind yourself of who you are and what you are. You must talk to yourself and say, 'I am not going to be dominated by you, these moods shall not control me.' If you allow these moods to control you, you will remain miserable, but you must not allow it. Shake them off."^[7]

That's how Jeremiah moved from hope sought to hope gained. He talked to himself. He called these things to mind and affirmed them. My God is loving and compassionate and faithful. He is my portion. Therefore, I have hope!

Amy has a body that's twisted by cerebral palsy. That's a terrible disease, especially for a young lady to bear. Amy comes in a wheelchair to our current Counseling and Discipleship Training course. She doesn't come to *get* counseling, but to prepare to give it. As she has told me, "I want to have a counseling ministry with the disabled."

Now there's a person who is talking to herself rather than listening to her feelings! *I may feel like I've gotten a raw deal out of life, but that's not true. The Lord is my portion. And the Lord says in His Word that He has a good purpose for me and through me! So let's go, self! Let's get some training and get on with life! There are hurting people all around me, and I'm going to share with them the hope God has given me!*

Which is precisely what Jeremiah does next. Hope sought, hope gained, then...

III. Perspective #3: Hope shared (25-48).

In verse 25 Jeremiah shifts from the first person pronoun "I" to the third person "him." That's because in section three Jeremiah is encouraging others to do what he just did, namely two things.

A. Jeremiah encouraged others to affirm what he affirmed (25-39). What's that? The hope-giving truth about the Lord! He highlights five such truths in verses 25-39.

1. *The Lord is good (25-27).* "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young."

The emphasis on His goodness is even more obvious in the Hebrew text, where verses 25, 26, and 27 each begin with the same Hebrew word: *tov, tov, tov*. Good, good, good. That's what the Lord is. He is *good*.

But who benefits from His goodness? He is good to those who *hope in him*, says Jeremiah, and who *seek Him*, and who *wait quietly for His salvation*, and who *bear the yoke when young*.

That reminds me of Wendell Kempton. As far as I can recall I've heard only one sermon from Lamentations in my life, and I was a teenager at the time. A man who later became a mentor in my life, Wendell Kempton, preached a message on verse 27, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young." The world says it's good when you get what *you* want out of life. But God's Word says it's good when you bear the yoke God puts on you in life, for He is the wise master and we were created to serve Him. The question is, are you going to affirm what the world says or what God's Word says?

2. *The Lord is sovereign (28-30).* "Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust— there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace."

In these verses Jeremiah is showing us how to put verse 27 into practice. This is what it looks like for a man to bear the yoke. It's the picture of living as a servant. He sits in silence. He buries his face in the dust. He offers his cheek. In other words, he submits himself to God's will entirely and unreservedly, come what may. And he does so because He knows that God who is good is also *sovereign*. So if it happens, then we can be sure He has a purpose for it.

3. *The Lord is compassionate and loving (31-33).* "For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men."

It's a matter of perspective, isn't it? If you think you deserve the world, then you're not satisfied with a mansion. But if you realize you deserve destruction and yet your life is spared, you are thrilled.

And so Jeremiah praises God for His unfailing love. Why? Because though life was hard and getting harder, he was still alive. And though Israel had been chastised severely, God didn't eliminate her from the earth but left a remnant through which to fulfill His promise to bring the Messiah into the world. This was Jeremiah's hope and this is why He can praise God in hopeless times, because of His *unfailing love*.

By the way, verse 33 helps us answer the difficult question, "If God is good, sovereign, and loving, how can He bring suffering into the lives of His people? That doesn't seem very loving, does it?" Jeremiah's answer is, "He does not *willingly* bring affliction." In the Hebrew *willingly* literally means "from His heart." That's key. He brings the affliction or it wouldn't happen, for He is sovereign. But the affliction doesn't come *from His heart*, since He's loving and good (and certainly not sadistic).

So if it doesn't come from His heart, then from where? I can't answer that question, not fully, but I can illustrate it. As a dad I have done things freely to my daughters that I didn't want to do. I've brought pain

into their lives by administering discipline. I even caused them to cry by my actions. I did it—no one forced me to—but I did not bring that affliction *from the heart*.

Well, if I didn't bring that affliction from the heart, why then did I bring it at all? Because I...*love them*. I inflicted the pain because I was operating by an agenda bigger than the moment, a loving agenda. My parental goal is to prepare my daughters to live life for the glory of God, and sometimes it takes pain to fulfill that agenda.

That's true of our Heavenly Father, too. Yes, He brings affliction our way at times, but He doesn't do it *willingly*. He does it because He knows we need it, and He loves us enough to give us what we need no matter how painful it might be for us (and for Him) in the moment.

Here's a fourth truth about God that Jeremiah encourages us to affirm.

4. *The Lord sees injustice (34-36)*. "To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land, to deny a man his rights before the Most High, to deprive a man of justice— would not the Lord see such things?" Yes, He sees it.

5. *The Lord is the One who decrees both calamities and good times (37-39)*. "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?"

Do you see what Jeremiah is doing? He told us he found hope by meditating on the attributes of God, and now he's encouraging us to do the same. Are you facing hardship and looking for some hope? Then affirm the truth about your God. He is good. He is sovereign. He is compassionate and loving. He sees injustice. And yes, He decrees both calamities and good times. If you will call this to mind, you too can have hope!

You say, "Is that all it takes, just a change of thinking?" No, thinking leads to *action*.

B. Jeremiah encouraged others to respond as he responded (40-48). You'll notice another pronoun shift in verse 40, this time to "we" and "us." That's because Jeremiah is inviting us to join him in making three life-changing responses.

1. *Let's take inventory and return to the Lord (40)*. "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD." That's not a given, for sure. So often hurting people turn *away* from the Lord rather than back to Him. No more trying to run our own lives, says the prophet. Let's go home where we belong.

2. *Let's acknowledge our sin to the Lord (41-42)*. "Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: 'We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.'" Don't just *think* it. *Say* it, says Jeremiah. *Say*, "We have sinned." And say it to the One you have sinned against. "We have sinned."

3. *Let's acknowledge our desperation for the Lord (43-48)*. "You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us; you have slain without pity. You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through. You have made us scum and refuse among the nations. All our enemies have opened their mouths wide against us. We have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction. Streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed."

The colors are dark again, aren't they? Has Jeremiah lost his hope? No. He's helping his people put their desperation into words, into a prayer. And that brings us to the final movement. We've seen *hope sought, hope gained, and hope shared*. Now...

IV. Perspective #4: Hope in the real world (49-66).

There's not much light in scene four, just blacks and dark grays again. Why's that? Because that's the

way hope works in the real world where four things are true.

A. In the real world, you see things that break your heart (49-51). “My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief, until the LORD looks down from heaven and sees. What I see brings grief to my soul because of all the women of my city.”

I still remember my conversation with her. I was in KaoLak, Thailand, three months after the tsunami devastated her country, when I walked from the storefront counseling center we were helping establish, to her store. She was a Thai businesswoman and she and her small child were trying to get rid of the water damage from her facility.

“Where is your husband?” I asked. She dropped her head and said softly, “He is gone.” And then I wished I hadn’t asked, for I knew he wasn’t coming back.

That’s hope in the real world, my friend. When you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you still see things that break your heart. But not just see them...

B. In the real world, you experience things that break your heart (52-54). “Those who were my enemies without cause hunted me like a bird. They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me; the waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to be cut off.”

Jeremiah was a man of God, but that didn’t immunize him from pain. Jesus Christ was a man of God, the perfect God-man, but that didn’t immunize Him from pain either. He felt the hatred of wicked men who responded to His love by nailing Him to a cross. And on that cross He felt the fury of His Father’s wrath as He endured the punishment that sinners deserve, not because He sinned, but because He bore the sins of others.

My friend, I have good news for you. Though you entered this world as a sinner cut off from God, you can be reconciled to God because of what His Son endured. On the cross Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sin if you will repent and believe in Him. And God, who raised His Son from the dead on the third day, will give you the hope of eternal life if you’ll call on Him.

But please realize this. It’s a hope in the real world, for if you come to Christ, you, like your Savior, will experience things that break your heart. Which is why thirdly...

C. In the real world, you must talk to the Lord about the things that break your heart (55-60). Jeremiah gives us three reasons why we can and must talk to the Lord.

1. *He hears our cry (55-56).* “I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: ‘Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.’”

2. *He takes away our fear (57).* “You came near when I called you, and you said, ‘Do not fear.’”^[8]

3. *He takes care of our concerns (58-60).* “O Lord, you took up my case; you redeemed my life. You have seen, O LORD, the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause! You have seen the depth of their vengeance, all their plots against me.”

Now that’s real praying, and it’s the way you and I can pray, too, if we’re in Christ. *You took up my case.* We’ve got a defense attorney, and our case is His.

D. In the real world, you must turn over to the Lord the people who are breaking your heart (61-66). It’s on that note that Jeremiah concludes his poem, “O LORD, you have heard their insults, all their plots against me— what my enemies whisper and mutter against me all day long. Look at them! Sitting or standing, they mock me in their songs. Pay them back what they deserve, O LORD, for what their hands have done. Put a veil over their hearts, and may your curse be on them! Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD.”

You say, “Jeremiah doesn’t sound very spiritual.” Yet He is. He’s not being vindictive. Throughout this

poem he's been trying to help the very people who had spurned his prophetic ministry, and now in this final prayer he does the only thing you can do with people who refuse to change. He turns them over to the Lord. That's the way hope works in the real world. One final thought...

The Bottom Line: When the night is darkest, even a little light makes a b

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] He actually refers to some aspect of hope three times, in verses 18, 21, and 25.

[2] As I mentioned previously, I am indebted to Walter Kaiser's commentary on Lamentations, *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering*, and found his explanation of the structure of chapter three quite helpful.

[3] Kaiser explains, "Because he suffered representatively as God's delegated sufferer he mirrors perfectly, and by divine design, another prophet who would one day also suffer as did the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52:13-53:12." Walter Kaiser, p. 77.

[4] Kaiser, p. 80.

[5] Kaiser, p. 80.

[6] Kaiser, p. 81.

[7] D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 116.

[8] It reminds me of how many times Jesus encouraged His disciples not to fear.