

## Lamentations Chapter 3 John Karmelich

1. Let me start with my single word title, "Hope". I should probably start by explaining what is the difference between "Faith and Hope". The explanation I got on goggle is, "Faith says, it is so now, and hope says in the future it could happen". Yes, Christianity preaches both. For example, based on biblical evidence, we're convinced that Jesus is God, He really existed, He died for our sins. He is also coming back to rule the world. That's "Faith" because we study the evidence and believe it is so. The idea of "hope" would be that we hope God will guide our lives to make a difference for Him. For example, there's always the possibility we could be dead tomorrow. We hope we won't die tomorrow so we can continue to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - a) I open with that, because that's what we're going to get into, in this third chapter.
  - b) I explained in the last lesson, Chapters 1 and 2 both have 22 verses. Each verse in Hebrew starts begins with a different letter of that alphabet in order. It's like A=1, B+2, etc. In the third chapter, we get 66 verses. The first three begin with the Hebrew equivalent of an A. Then three more with a "B". Now that you know that we can focus on the English.
  - c) In the last two chapters the author who I'm convinced is Jeremiah (unnamed in this book) focuses on the "corporate" pain of the fall of the Israelite nation and the city of Jerusalem in particular. The essential idea of the last lesson is we're grieved due to our own sins as we don't know what the corporate future will be for our nation. Jeremiah had faith God's still going to work with the Jewish people, but lacked hope as he didn't know specifics of how God would work or when again. Jeremiah knew it'd be 70 years, but he didn't grasp what would be the fate of his fellow Israelites until then. Bottom line, lack of hope.
  - d) With that said, Chapter 3 gets a lot more personal. The author focuses on how he's hurting himself. Let's face it all pain is personal. When we go through something horrible, it may be affecting many other people around us, but we can't help but focus on the pain that we are feeling at that exact moment. That's what the first third part of this chapter does.
  - e) Then, all of a sudden, Jeremiah focuses on hope. It's as if he got tired of complaining over his situation and needs to focus on something positive. When we're dealing with our own pain often we can't take it anymore and need something positive to hang our hats on. It is when hope plays in. That's why it's the focus of this lesson.
  - f) Let me try it this way: We may be hurting. We may know our bible backwards and we've got a pretty good idea (based on faith) of our long term destiny is. It still doesn't help with the pain we may be dealing with at the moment. That's where hope comes in the picture.
2. With that speech out of my system, it's time to focus on Chapter 3 of the book of Lamentations.
  - a) First let's keep in mind that this book is about the grief of the fall of Jerusalem when it was conquered by the Babylonians. Yes it's full of principals about dealing with grief so yes it's much bigger in scope than that specific event. Think of that event is the subject being used to discuss grief. With that said, Chapters 1 and 2 were, let's face it depressing!
  - b) Chapter 3 gets a little better. The first twenty verses or so, changes the focus from grieving on a corporate basis, to individual grieving. Let's be honest all grieving is personal. Many read this as Jeremiah's personal grieving after spending a lifetime trying to warn Israelites of the fall of that city. In fact, most historians believe Jeremiah died a few years after all of this preaching in his two books.
  - c) The good news is about a third of the way through the book, the topic switches from one's dealing with personal grief to one of hope. It's the idea that we hopes things will improve and one adjusts one's attitude based on that hope.
  - d) Let me put it this way, it's one thing to hope things will be better, than continue living in a miserable state of mind. It's another to realize that God didn't say, "You're saved, go away and we'll talk in the next life. Being a witness for God requires hope for our future!

- e) Grant it, a lot of Christians through history have been martyrs and hope for the future of a life here on earth is nothing they'd "write home about". However, I've learned God gives a "lifeline" to comfort us through the worst of suffering. I've known Christians dealing with cancer who were still great witnesses for Him in spite of the pain. My point is we can have hope no matter what the circumstances, and that's an underlying message of this chapter.
3. Is that it? Jeremiah goes through his own "pity party" here, after a tough life that he used making a difference for God? Then he develops some hope and that's 66 verses? Yes and no. I'll just say I see the rest of the chapter explaining why hope is so important.
- a) Remember this was written at a very low time in Israel's history. Hope was needed a lot at this time. Let's be honest, when things are going horrid hope is always what's needed. To give a bunch of verses explaining why we need hope is "just what the doctor ordered" so a better outlook on life can begin.
- b) Anyway, the second half the chapter (more or less) is the interesting part. It deals with an outlook of hope. It discusses how God wants us to handle suffering.
- c) Think of the second half as changing from a "pity party" to seeing our problems from His perspective. That helps. It's the idea of once we see our issues from His perspective yes it gives us hope but it also helps us to grasp the big picture. It is the idea that God allows us to go through such things to see if we'll still be a good witness for Him.
- d) Think about this from Jeremiah's perspective. He's pretty much spent his whole life being a witness for God. Now that the conquering is all over, now that the "pity party" is over, I believe it's time to consider the whole situation from God's perspective. That's the rest of the chapter in a few thoughts.
4. Before I start, think of this lesson as a guide on how to have hope. The first part that deals with a lot of personal suffering is necessary to "get out of our system". Then we can focus on how it God wants us to deal with suffering and how we can have hope in spite of whatever we have to deal with at this moment. Think of Chapter 3 as a "primer" on proper perspective so we can have the type of hope God wants us to have about the future, whatever that holds.
- a) With that semi-positive statement made, it's time to start on the 66 verses.
5. Chapter 3, Verse 1: I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.
- a) If this is Jeremiah writing, we can tell here in Verse 1, he's hurting. Let's be honest, here is a man who spent his life saying "Judgment is coming unless we (His people) live our lives as He intends us to live (as a witness for Him!)". The bottom line is Jeremiah preached the messages God gave him all his life and for all intents and purposes he was ignored. That's why the Israelites had to go into captivity to get them to turn from idolatry.
- b) Since Jeremiah has now lived through all of this "rough life", he's looked back at his life as he's realizing how tough it's been. Most of us who've lived life for a good while have seen our own share of suffering. We may not have witnessed a nation destroyed like Jeremiah, but I'm sure most of us have seen horrible things occur that we could call "God's wrath" as He ended the lives of those we've loved. Yes life's hard. We can choose to be happy or we can choose to be miserable. We can't control our circumstances (in most cases), but we can always control our attitude through it. That's a key point to remember in tough times!
- c) Just to warn you the first twenty verses are Jeremiah dealing with his personal pain so we need to deal with that for the first part of this chapter.
6. Verse 2: He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light;<sup>3</sup> indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.
- a) Anyone who's lived the Christian life for a while knows that there are times where it feels like our prayers are "bouncing off the ceiling". We take inventory of possible sins and we wonder what we're doing wrong. The simple truth is God often tests us to see if we'd still trust Him even when He goes silent. To quote a classic expression, "Tough times don't last but tough people do". The point here is even though Jeremiah feels like his reason to live is over as his lifelong mission work is done, we don't know what God has in store for us.

- b) Verse 2 says "God has driven me away". Again, I don't think it's about literally moving a person (say Jeremiah) from Point A to Point B, as much as he feels he lacks His presence. I am well aware the bible is teaching God's always guiding us even when we don't sense His presence, but once one has lived the Christian life where we now normally sense the idea of Him guiding us, I know the "emptiness" is real. As one who's gone through it, all I can say is "this too shall pass".
  - c) Let me also address those who've never felt God's presence. It's not like He literally opens the front door for us. I think of His presence a little it was portrayed in the movie (and the play), "Fiddler on the Roof". In that story, the main character goes through his life talking to God while He goes through his daily routine. I'm not saying we have to talk out loud to God like that. I'm just saying if we make God a part of our daily lives, we'll also sense His guiding us. God wants a personal intimate relationship with us. When we draw close to Him, He in turn is drawing close to us. Once we accept Jesus payment and all that means, ask Him to guide your life and He does.
    - i) So if that's true, why the "silent treatment" like these verses. Sometimes God wants to ask us in effect, "Do you still trust Me, now even when I'm silent?" If one lacks a sense of God's presence, ask why. Consider any sins that require confession. If it's not that, then simply accept it as a test and trust Him through it.
    - ii) OK then, we got a long way to go.
7. Verse 4: He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones.<sup>5</sup> He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship.
- a) I have to admit, these are not the most pleasant verses. Remember we're reading a dirge, which is a "sad song" as the author is pouring out his pain in these verses. If nothing else they are reminder that God can relate to our pain and we're not alone with what we deal with as God's guiding us even through the tough moments in life.
  - b) Some of the lectures I've heard on this section very much "personalized it". I've listened to a few professional pastors (etc.) state how difficult that occupation is. It wears them out. I think it's more "general than that". Here's Jeremiah who's spent a lifetime preaching what God told him to preach and he's worn out from a lifetime of suffering for "His sake". Not all Christians are called to a lifetime of suffering. I do know that when one uses their lives for the Gospel, I am convinced "stuff happens".
  - c) Yes living the Christian life can be hard at times. Even life in general gets hard as we age. What we have to remember is God is still going to guide us "to the end". Our bodies may not function as well as they used to (for my younger readers, enjoy it while you can!) but we have to remember God's guiding us through the pain of whatever we're dealing with. Yes of course we should seek whatever medical help is needed. Taking care of elders is a responsibility we all must deal with at some points in our lives.
  - d) The point of the verse here is that Jeremiah is feeling the pain of a lifetime of suffering. It hurts. He knows it's not forever, but it still hurts to deal with it and it's ok to let it out!
8. Verse 6: He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.<sup>7</sup> He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains.
- a) Talk about feeling "down in the dumps". I don't think the author is sitting in a dark room fastened with chains. Yes I could be wrong and it could be literal. However I suspect it is just what the author is feeling at the moment. When one doesn't sense God guiding us it's a lot like being "chained" or being in the dark. If it's literal, then the author's telling us the aftermath of what he's dealing with after Jerusalem was destroyed.
  - b) Keep in mind the city was burnt to the ground. I don't know where Jeremiah slept when he was penning this, but it may have been in a gloomy place. Any of us can feel like life's got us in such places when we're really down. The question is, "Will we just accept it, or will we do something about it? Grant it if we're "stuck in bed", we may have to heal for a period of time. The question is are trusting God even when darkness is overtaking us?

9. Verse 8: Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.
- a) I mentioned earlier the idea of "our prayers bouncing off the ceiling". In times where we're praying for relief and none comes, that's when we feel like God's shutting off our prayers.
  - b) We need to remember that we're not here to do our will, but His. His will may be to teach us something through the tragedies we are going through. A little over a year ago, I could not leave the house for 45 days. I was in a lot of pain and I remember yelling out to God in many of those days. I felt like my prayers were shut off at that moment. Over time, I got a lot better and now I have my full health back. What did I learn from that time? Trust. It's a harsh but necessary lesson in trust when life is at it's worst.
  - c) So how do we know when God's "cutting off" our prayer life? The simple answer is if feels like we're not getting answers to our prayers. To state the obvious, sometimes He says no to our prayer requests. We may be praying for a loved one to be saved or even healed and things aren't going our way. At times like that, first we have to remember how He worked in our lives in the past to remind us He's there and at least in the past, we got evidence He cares for us. Then we simply need to remember, "God doesn't change". This answer may not be a great comfort to you, but times of testing is there because God's constantly asking us in effect, "You trust Me now, even through this? Even now?" Faith is trusting that His promises are true. Hope is a desire for things to get better. God wants us to have hope in these moments where it feels like our requests are, "bouncing off the ceiling".
10. Verse 9: He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.
- a) A parallel idea to "blocked prayers" is "blocked paths". We may have a routine that we do daily and God's guided us that way for years. That blocked path may be the way we work or the way we prepare for some aspect of our lives. Times can come where we don't know what to do next as what we think we should do or can do is blocked. In such cases all that we can do is make the best decisions we can given the information in front of us.
  - b) Think about Jeremiah at this point in his life. Jerusalem was burnt to the ground. All that Jeremiah would do as a priest was dead. The people he probably depended upon even to provide food were gone. I'm sure he felt like God has blocked His paths.
  - c) So what to do if one is in a situation where we don't know what to do next? Try things as to see what works. To state another famous biblical idea, "God can't guide us unless we're moving". What if we're stuck in bed due to sickness? Obviously we can ask for help. I'm not saying we have to go through life alone. I'm saying just sitting there, feeling sorry for our self won't solve our problems. I know I'm stating the obvious, but I've seen people try the same thing over and over again hoping for a different result. When it feels like God is the one "blocking our path", try praying for guidance. Then simply make the best decision we can, ask for help and never give up no matter how deep a hole one is in at this time!
11. Verse 10: Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, <sup>11</sup> he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. <sup>12</sup> He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. <sup>13</sup> He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver.
- a) Wow, just when one thinks it can't get any tougher it does. First we had the idea that he's (Jeremiah) feeling like his prayers were blocked. Then he expressed that he felt blocked in as in he can't go anywhere. Now he feels like God himself is "hunting him down". I don't know about you, but if things got that bad, I might go hide in a corner too. I suspect most of us know the feeling when one is having a bad day, and all we want to do is go home to crawl up in bed!
  - b) When we think of the prophets of God, we think of bold men who weren't afraid to go to wherever they feel is necessary and nothing can go wrong. Here's the author of this bible book saying, "My prayers aren't working, I don't know where to go and I feel like God is working against me." My point is fear is real and it's ok to cry out to God when we get a moment like this in our lives. Therefore, lets talk about those horrid days where it seems like God's "fighting against us" as it does in these verses.

- c) First let's describe "bad day". It's one thing if those we respect say bad things about us or say we get a ticket or lose our job. It's another if the whole world around us get destroyed like Jeremiah is experiencing. The world is full of situations where disasters wipe out the world we know of. My point is it can be a "simple thing" or a big thing. Either way it can feel like God's "shooting at us" like these verses are describing. So what do we do?
- i) The first thing I accept is simply, "This is God's way of getting my attention!" Yes, I would argue God wants us to change our plans in a dramatic way. Again we do have to make the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us.
  - ii) Next we must remember God doesn't hate us. He may be testing us or He's trying to guide us down a different path. What if what happened was caused by another person or a major disaster? Pray for His wisdom, digest it, and have the hope it is not going to be forever. It is essential to have hope. We can go through life having a big pity party or we can move on and have hope God has a plan for our time left on earth to be used for His glory.
  - iii) One of the great things I've learned in hard times is to go be of service to someone else. It helps to get our minds off the pain if we're being helpful to other people.
  - iv) In summary, sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves doesn't solve the problem. Yes sometimes we need to digest it like Jeremiah is doing here. Consider eternity is well, "eternally longer" than this life. God only gives us one lifetime to make the type of difference for Him that He desires.
  - v) When we go through times where it feels like God's fighting against us, then pray for wisdom. Ask why. If we don't get a great answer, make the best decision that we can and continue to use our lives for His glory. Hope all that helps.
- d) Well, Jeremiah isn't done being depressed yet. Let's continue:
12. Verse 14: I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long.
- a) When one is feeling low, we can feel like the whole world is picking on us. Especially in our youth, when other kids are cruel and pick on us, we can feel like our whole world is coming to an end when we're picked on. Even when we're older and negative articles are written about us, we can get the same sort of sensation being described here.
  - b) I remember my father going through a period where he had to deal with false accusations against him. In hindsight I'm proud he didn't wallow in pity. He took action to deal with it. I remember he told me of the phone calls he got supporting him at that time. My point is when we feel we're mocked we need to look to others to help us in such times. If there's no one else, remember that God is not in the crowd laughing at us. If anything He is there to give us comfort when we feel we have been rejected this strongly. Again "hope" is key.
- c) Hang in there, the set of "depressing verses" only has about a half dozen to go!
13. Verse 15: He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall.
- a) I admit, this verse confused me too, and I had to look up alternative translations. What the King James says is "filled me with bitterness, made me drunk with "wormwood".
  - b) Bottom line is whatever he's trying to say, it isn't good. Wormwood's a bitter tasting thing so again, let's just say Jeremiah isn't in a good mood as he writes this. I doubt this is some sort of literal ritual. I think he's expressing the sorrow he's feeling dealing with everything he knows being gone. Yes we're coming to the "hope" part of the chapter. First I want you to grasp how low Jeremiah is feeling at this point. If God can give hope to Jeremiah here, I would say he can help with any of our problems.
14. Verse 16: He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.
- a) Other translations say it's more like "eating dirt". Either way, Jeremiah is expressing how he feels. He's not being literal in the sense that God's breaking his teeth. It's more like the feeling that everything around him is destroyed, so what's they're to eat or where to walk and not feel discouraged. The literalness is a debatable topic. The point is he's hurting as he tries to express it the best he can in a colorful way.

15. Verse 17: I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. <sup>18</sup> So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." <sup>19</sup> I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. <sup>20</sup> I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.
- a) Let's face it, Jeremiah is really "down in the dumps" right now. How many of you relate to having a moment in your life where you feel like all is lost and there's no hope in sight? It is a description of the author of Lamentations at this moment. He has no peace due to all that's gone wrong and the fact he doesn't sense God's presence in his life. Everything he'd hope to accomplish (I suspect he thought he'd get lots of converts and fame as he spoke all that God told him to speak). Bottom line, everything Jeremiah hoped for has failed and he is "singing the blues" like there's no tomorrow.
  - b) So what does one do when one gets that low? We're not talking about salvation but just in the sense of what do we do about our lives when we feel like everything is going wrong? The answer is my lesson title, hope. Thankfully, Jeremiah is thinking the same thing:
16. Verse 21: Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: <sup>22</sup> Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
- a) If I had to pick the "memorization" verses it'd be these. If that's too much, Verse 23 is the best place to start. It's the reminder that just because "today is horrible" that's doesn't also mean tomorrow will be horrible or the next year will be horrible. That's why God desires we have hope. Remember the purpose of living, to glorify God with our lives. Sometimes we just need to survive today or the short term so God can use us in the future. I can't tell what tomorrow will be like and neither can you. All we can do is have hope, and then do what is logical based on what's in front of us. That's what hope is all about.
  - b) So why did it take Jeremiah so long to hit bottom? Why are there two and a third chapters of misery before we get to hope? Think about when we're down. We need to process that before we can deal with solutions. Think of the people you know who took a while to hit "rock bottom". Sometimes it means exhausting every other option before we can let go as to really trust God with our future. Sometimes hitting a point of "hope is all I got left" we have to not only process the pain but wipe out every other option.
  - c) I think Jeremiah is hitting that point here. Does he know what'll happen next? Of course not. Does he know if his future will be better? Of course not. However, trusting in God's a matter of having hope that He can still use us, in our broken and sinful state so we'll still use our lives for His glory. Jeremiah died a few years after this and was never used again for any more of God's visions. However, tradition holds that he preached God all the way to the end of his life. I think the idea of "hope" in spite of all that misery hit him here and I would argue he decided in effect, "I'm tired of complaining. I'm going to have hope that I will still be used by God for His glory.
  - d) Does that mean there are no more negative verses in this book? Unfortunately no. We're still processing pain and we'll jump back and forth from this point. However, despite the pain of it all, we can sense Jeremiah having hope from this point onward. OK, then, with that in mind, we're ready for the next verse.
17. Verse 24: I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." <sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; <sup>26</sup> it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.
- a) Remember Jeremiah is probably still at that moment in Jerusalem in its destroyed state. I am just point out that it's really easy for Jeremiah to be down in the dumps. Yet here we see him having hope in God. These verses sort of answer the question, what does it mean to have hope in God? It means we're trusting that He still wants to guide our lives. It also means that we'll still go through life making the best decisions we can and trust that He is guiding us and will "but in" when He wants to.

- b) Let me explain what these verses do not mean: It doesn't mean we should kill ourselves as to hasten our salvation. It doesn't mean, sit there and do nothing and wait for God to lead us. A classical saying goes, "God can't lead unless we're moving". To "wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" is to still use our lives for His glory and trust that He'll work on His timing.
  - i) Let's talk about that for a second. It's been 2,000 years (more or less) since Jesus did say He's coming back. How do we know it's true? God's timing is His timing. The reason He's waiting so long is to increase the number of believers in the church as to have some specific number that only God knows. If Jesus returned say 100 years ago, none of us wouldn't be saved. Also ask yourself, won't heaven have a specific number of people? Of course. Therefore there has to be a final believer. No one is able to state when the last one comes in but I trust it to be so. God designed it this way to "keep us on our toes" that He could return at any time.
  - c) Finally, let me say a few words about "The Lord is good to those who hope is in Him." It's not a guarantee that one will live say a 100 years. It means we will have joy through all of the circumstances we face in life. It means peace through trials. It means hope that God is still guiding us in spite of all we're dealing with.
- 18. Verse 27: It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.
  - a) I admit, it's a strange transition from talking about hope through suffering to bringing up the issue of "bearing the yoke while he's young". A couple of thoughts:
    - i) It could be the fact that it's easier to bear with suffering when we have a physical ability to do so. However, I don't think that's the point.
    - ii) I suspect it's that it's better to realize there's hope in God while we're young than if we only figure it out when we're old. It's the idea that we'll appreciate life more if we realize that God wants to guide us when we're young and carry that attitude in how we live out the rest of our lives.
    - iii) All that lead to the next few verses, which admit are "Debbie downer's" again:
- 19. Verse 28: Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. <sup>29</sup> Let him bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope. <sup>30</sup> Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. <sup>31</sup> For men are not cast off by the Lord forever.
  - a) Loose translation: In order for young men to have hope in God, let them suffer a little.
  - b) I recall a story told by Chuck Swindoll describing a very talented young singer. Someone else commented, "She's good, but wait until she's suffered before she's really got talent". I am just saying sometimes to grow it is necessary to face hardships. In order to have hope, first one has to be brought low in order for one to appreciate hope. The idea is when we're suffering we should accept it as a time when God is testing us. The prayer I'd always lead with in times of suffering is "Let not these lessons be wasted".
  - c) By the way these verses aren't saying, "Let yourself be beat up on purpose!" In the painful situations of life, run away, get help, don't just sit there and let others hurt us. I'd say God is saying in those situations, "Get out of there, as fast as possible!"
  - d) Yes the text says to offer one's cheek to those who'd strike him. Yes it's similar to what the Gospels tell us when Jesus says to "offer the other cheek" when struck. What Jesus meant was not to "sit there and take it", but to point out the wrong and then not resist. The point here of these verses is simply when God allows us to go through horrible trials, He desires we have hope and not "wallow in misery" the rest of our lives. When we face those who want to hurt us, do our best to "end it", but be willing to "offer the other cheek" as stated.
- 20. Verse 32: Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.
  - a) Here's another positive verse that's good to memorize. The text says "he brings grief", did it mean God inflicts horrible things upon us? The proper way to look at this idea that is God allows suffering ultimately for His glory. He allows martyrdom, cancer, and things I would rather not think about. Ultimately, it's all done for His glory. How is that?

- i) One way is for people to show their faithfulness through that suffering.
    - ii) Another is others may watch us go through that and it leads them to Jesus.
    - iii) The important point is God never guarantees a long life. He simply wants us to be a good witness for Him no matter what we're going through in this life.
  - b) The important point of this verse is simply to remember that God loves us no matter what we are going through. No matter how bad we've messed up. Hope is about trusting the fact that God loves us. Does that mean we're saved no matter what? Didn't say that. I've always argued that one has to believe Jesus is God, in charge of our lives and died for our sins. We also need to accept the bible as God's word, and do our best to live as He desires we live as a witness for Him. The point is when we mess up and we all do, it's a matter of trusting that He still loves us, wants to guide us and we can have hope that He still wants to use our lives for His glory.
21. Verse 33: For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.
- a) Remember I asked earlier if God purposely causes us pain? As I said earlier, God allows it to occur, but God doesn't make us suffer, "to watch us suffer". God's not sadistic. Yes, He wants us to grow in our trust in Him and therefore He allows tough things to occur in our lives to test our faith. The point here is He doesn't put us down "for the pleasure of it"!
22. Verse 34: To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land,<sup>35</sup> to deny a man his rights before the Most High,<sup>36</sup> to deprive a man of justice-- would not the Lord see such things?
- a) There's a classic joke that religious Jewish people refer to God as "a God of justice" while a standard Christian line is God's a "God of love". The truth is God's fully loving and fully a just entity at the same time. He's "100% of both" so to speak. The idea is when people face His judgment then He will be completely fair in how He judges us.
  - b) So if that's true why do all nonbelievers get sent to hell forever? The idea is God is perfect in justice. To reject His free offer of full payment for our sins and try to appease Him with our works is to put it simply a waste of time. Given that, will say an unrepentant woman or man of say 1,000 murders be punished worse than someone who's "only" guilty of just rejecting God's free gift of salvation? That's God's business. The same way I'm convinced that there are eternal rewards based on our faithfulness, maybe there's different levels that one can suffer. However, I never want to find out, so I don't "go there".
  - c) In the meantime, I think these verses are focused on life on earth. To use a simple biblical example, Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden for disobedience. The Israelites at the time of Jeremiah knew a lot more than Adam and Eve did, so they got held to a much higher standard. That's why not only were they kicked out of the land, but many of them had to suffer and die in horrible ways for failing to live as God desires we live.
  - d) Bottom line is I think Jeremiah is reflecting on why God allowed His people to be taken in captivity and His temple destroyed. It's the fact that He holds us accountable based on the information we know about Him. Yes that scares me, and hopefully you!
23. Verse 37: Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? <sup>38</sup> Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?
- a) Amos 3:7 says, "God doesn't do anything unless it's revealed to His servants the prophets" and I'd argue that Jeremiah is in effect stating that principle here. It's a reminder that yes, Jeremiah predicted all that calamity will happen and it did.
  - b) So why state that here? Because if Jeremiah wants to argue that we can have hope in God for His faithfulness then we must accept His punishment decrees as well.
  - c) Let me also answer the question, if this is true, why didn't God warn the Israelites of other punishments? Let's use the Holocaust as an obvious example. Some would argue He did because collectively as a nation they failed to teach the law to others. I don't know why it happened from His perspective other than the fact that it led to the existence of Israel as a nation today. To give another famous quote, "If I knew all things, I'd be God". What I'm sure of is the bible is a guide to how to live and the consequences for failure is laid out!

24. Verse 39: Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?
- a) Speaking of "bible knowledge" that leads us perfectly to Verse 39. The verse is saying that if God punishes people for a failure to be obedient, how can we complain if we knew or if we could have known what's the right thing to do and we failed. As far as the truly naïve or those who die as babies or children, I trust in a perfect God to judge people fairly.
  - b) Bottom line is we have no right to complain about a perfect God. This relates to my theme of hope by saying, "If we can trust God to fairly punish us collectively then we can also be in a trust relationship that He'll judge us fairly and we can have hope for a future of being used by Him further for His glory." In other words, "trust" is what can give us hope!
25. Verse 40: Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. <sup>41</sup> Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: <sup>42</sup> "We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.
- a) These verses lead to my favorite topic, "what's next". The idea is the Israelites collectively did mess up badly. Now what? Jeremiah is still a priest. He's figuring out that although he no longer has to deliver the bad news of judgment, it's still his job (and our job) to help lead people closer to God. That in essence is what a priest does.
  - b) OK John, that's all well and good. Why does Verse 42 say, "You (God) have not forgiven?"
    - i) One has to separate forgiveness from punishment. I believe God always forgives a sin when we sincerely turn from it, no matter how often we mess up.
    - ii) Punishment is about teaching us the consequences of our sins and a price must be paid for sins. Let's face it, if God just forgives us and "that's that", what incentive is there for us to not sin? The Israelites still had to go into captivity. They must have hated the Babylonians. They must have felt God didn't forgive them. One reason for the seventy-years was for the Israelites to let it sink in how bad idolatry was as a sin to begin with. In that sense, God didn't forgive them yet.
  - c) Jeremiah continues that idea for a few more verses.
26. Verse 43: "You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us; you have slain without pity. <sup>44</sup> You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through. <sup>45</sup> You have made us scum and refuse among the nations. <sup>46</sup> "All our enemies have opened their mouths wide against us. <sup>47</sup> We have suffered terror and pitfalls, ruin and destruction."
- a) I guess it's time to talk about God and anger again. We covered this in the last lesson. The thing to remember is "perspective". God's always perfectly angry at sin and perfect in His love for us. The point is if we see the consequences of sin play out, we assume His anger is playing out. Obviously we're not God and we can't assume any disaster is directly due to some sin we've caused. All we know is we're in trouble. As I said earlier in the lesson, all we can do is take inventory of our sins, confess them, turn from them and then we deal with whatever is in front of us.
  - b) In the early part of the chapter, we talked about God's anger, a feeling like our prayers are "bouncing off the ceiling", the fact that people see us as refuse, etc. So why repeat all that here after Jeremiah talks about hope? Is it a matter of saying, "It can't get any worse, so it's only a matter of hope now?" Possibly, but I don't think so. I think it's simpler than that. It is a matter of saying "God's a "man of His word"" so to speak. If we can trust Him to keep His word about punishment, then we can also trust what the bible says about forgiveness and willingness on His part to forgive us and in effect "start over". Need proof? They did return to the land after 70 years and they are there today.
  - c) Let's make this a little simpler. When things go wrong, yes we confess sins and we go deal with the issue. At the same time, we must remember God's still on the throne, Yes He still desires to use His people for His glory so despite our sins, we can have hope about what's going to happen to the future of God's people, let alone our own salvation.
  - d) Let me end with the tough question: What if we're saved and die with unconfessed sin? That means you're normal. Yes we're forgiven as Jesus died for all our sins.

27. Verse 48: Streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed. <sup>49</sup> My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief, <sup>50</sup> until the LORD looks down from heaven and sees. <sup>51</sup> What I see brings grief to my soul because of all the women of my city.
- a) Try to imagine what Jeremiah saw with the destruction of Jerusalem. It was far more than the destruction of God's temple. He saw so many dead bodies they couldn't bury all them. Chapter 4 tells us cannibalism existed. I'm sure Jeremiah pondered, where's God when all this took place? His response in effect is "I warned them to turn and the consequences had to play out." Still, it had to be painful beyond belief.
  - b) Now think of the horrid things we've had to face in our lifetime. We see horrid stories on the news and we wonder, "Where's God?" The answer is He's there. Free will is still part of our world. God allows evil to play out if for no other reason than to show He's greater than all the "evil" this world can muster.
  - c) OK where's the hope here? It's the idea that God's still willing to work with "His people" in spite of all of that. It's the fact the Israelites were allowed to return to the land after all of that took place. In our life, the hope is good can still happen as we don't know what is in the future for our lives or our families. In the meantime, yes it's all painful and it needs to be "grieved out of the system".
28. Verse 52: Those who were my enemies without cause hunted me like a bird. <sup>53</sup> They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me; <sup>54</sup> the waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to be cut off. <sup>55</sup> I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. <sup>56</sup> You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief."
- a) I suspect these verses are more personal. If you've studied the book of Jeremiah there was a handful of times where people tried to kill him. That book says he was left in a pit. We don't get references to "waters over his head", but bottom line, he's describing suffering on a personal level here. So did God answer these cries of relief? Let's look at the next verse:
29. Verse 57: You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear."
- a) Grant it, not all acts of relief come. For example, John the Baptist was put in prison until he was killed there. In the book of Acts, James (one of the 12, was killed by Herod's order.) I am just saying that just because we have hope, does not guarantee God will rescue us in every situation. Yes, our salvation is secured, but hope is well, "hope" we hope God still wants to use our lives for His glory. Hope in the biblical sense is about remembering God is well, God. He'll forgive us and He'll let us be with Him forever if we accept His terms of salvation (i.e., Jesus is God, Lord and died for our sins). In Jeremiah's case here, God isn't done with Him and He reassures Jeremiah that his faith will pay off.
30. Verse 58: O Lord, you took up my case; you redeemed my life. <sup>59</sup> You have seen, O LORD, the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause! <sup>60</sup> You have seen the depth of their vengeance, all their plots against me.
- a) So is Jeremiah speaking collectively or for himself? In context it's probably individually, I think in either case, he's still reeling from what's happening. I'm sure he's got hope that it will get better because they're still His people just as we're (believers) still His people. The issue here is about trusting in God to continue to work in the world.
  - b) Remember that Jeremiah gave two long chapters about how Babylon will be destroyed in Chapters 50-51. He also described all the nations around Israel and in essence they'll also suffer for knowing about God and not doing anything about it.
  - c) So if we believe God is God, why pray for Him to "uphold my cause"? First let's describe what Jeremiah's cause is: It's about His people making the effort to be a witness for Him. It's about God continuing to work with His people despite the destruction that occurred. It is a prayer for hope for better things to come. Did Jeremiah trust God would keep His word about the 70 years? Sure of it. I suspect what Jeremiah also wanted was for God to continue to use him for His glory. As I said earlier, history records he died a few years in the future, so God did preserve Jeremiah as long as God wanted to.

- d) Let me put it this way: How long will I live? Forever is the correct answer. As far as my life here on earth, I hope God gives me a long life until my old age, but in effect, it's up to Him how long I live. Obviously, it's up to me not to do anything stupid, but still my hope is that God will continue to use Me as long as He desires. That's what this chapter in effect is all about. OK then, we're almost there.
31. Verse 61: O LORD, you have heard their insults, all their plots against me-- <sup>62</sup> what my enemies whisper and mutter against me all day long. <sup>63</sup> Look at them! Sitting or standing, they mock me in their songs. <sup>64</sup> Pay them back what they deserve, O LORD, for what their hands have done.
- a) So is it ok for us to pray for God to harm our enemies? In effect that's what these verses do here. God wants us to be a good witness for Him. He does for us what we can't do. What Jeremiah's praying here is in effect for God to make it obvious He's god and work more in his life. Did God respond? Well, the Babylonian empire didn't last long. Yes the Israelites did return home after 70 years. So it didn't happen on Jeremiah's timing but God still did it in a way that the world "marveled" that a dead and scattered people could return to be a nation again!
- b) Let me try this one more way. Is it ok to pray that God send a horrid person to hell? Who goes to hell in my opinion is His business not mine. I just know that when I pray for those who've hurt me, it's biblical (Matthew 5:44), but it also eases our pain by praying for those who've hurt us. So was Jeremiah wrong in Verse 64? No. He's talking about God making an example of those who refuse to acknowledge Him as God. So should we pray that? I'd argue we're supposed to pray for salvation, but at the same time realize God's in charge of vengeance so it's "His business".
- c) Bottom line, these are tough verses and one has to consider carefully how we're to pray in situations for those who've done harm. If we mess up, I'm positive He'll forgive us!
32. Verse 65: Put a veil over their hearts, and may your curse be on them! <sup>66</sup> Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD.
- a) The last two verses continue this tough discussion. Jeremiah's basically praying that those who don't believe in God to be "blinded to the truth" and His curse be upon them.
- b) First thing to say is it's ok to express our anger at those who sin. It's biblical to love what it is He loves and hate what it is He hates (Proverbs 6:16-19 are good on what He hates.) It's ok to express our anger at sinful people as part of our hope that God will make life better.
- c) What we have to remember is we're angry at the people He's created. I've had many times in my life where I've been angry at someone and wanted the worst for them. It takes time to see people as God sees them and it's ok to pray out one's anger. Forgiveness is the hard part but I've learned that if we keep praying for someone, it changes our perspective. Yes, I believe in punishment for wrongdoing. I'm grateful for police.
- d) Still the question comes down to is it ok to pray for God to "put a veil over people's heart" so they don't repent? I'd say yes until we let go of the anger, and no once we have. That's the best I can do with a tough verse like this. Remember that Jeremiah was living in a time when an army destroyed all God treasured. In that sense, he could be praying what's His God's promise to destroy those who already oppose His word.
- e) Yes this is a tough note to end a lesson on. It reads like a contradiction to other scripture. The best one can do is read it in context. The context has to do with those who destroyed God's people and His temple. In that sense God answered that prayer. Hope that helps.
- f) Either way, we made it through the 66 verses. The next lesson will be easier!
33. Heavenly Father, As believers in You and Your son's payment for our sins, we hope that You do continue to use our lives as a witness for You. We don't know what tomorrow holds. All we do know is that through good and bad times, you've called us to be a living witness for You. Help us in spite of our sins (which we confess) to turn from them and hope in Your promises for our lives. Guide us by Your spirit, so that our lives will continue to be used for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.