

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

When You Can't Find a Way

Lamentations 3:19-26

Sunday, February 5, 2023

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If B.B. King had written a book of the Bible it would have been Lamentations. It contains five poems of cries, regrets and pain. It is filled with “the blues.”

But unlike most blues songs Lamentations does not express heartache over some bad luck or lost lover. Lamentations expresses the heart-breaking aftermath of Jerusalem being destroyed by evil Babylon.

You don't read Lamentations as much as you feel it. Jeremiah wrote these poems and you can feel his pain as he cries out to God. His agony is tangible as he expresses his grief over the loss of his homeland. The special places he grew up with were destroyed. Many of his friends had been killed. Everything he knew and loved had been wiped out.

Take a look at the verses from Jeremiah and feel him expresses his pain:

The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. –Lamentations 3:19-20

Ever felt like Jeremiah? Ever felt so much pain that you are bitter inside? Ever felt homeless and homesick, desperate for love and connection? Ever lost something or someone so special that your grief was almost unbearable? That's where Jeremiah was. Maybe that is where you are today.

You see, contrary to how some Christians portray the Bible, it is not an antiseptic book, out of touch with the pain and suffering of life. Throughout the Bible we see people crying, yelling and aching to God and others over the pain in life. The Bible is filled with people who feel helpless and hopeless. And Jeremiah was no exception.

Yet Jeremiah, in the midst of his pain, would say this:

Yet I still dare to hope... –Lamentations 3:21

Jeremiah was down but not out. He still had the audacity to hope in the midst of his mess. He still had hope that

one day he would find help and healing and relief from his pain. And what gave him such hope in the midst of such agony?

How could he find hope after all he had been through? Jeremiah dared to hope because he remembered something crucial. Listen:

Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. –Lamentations 3:21-23

(You may be more familiar with another way this verse is put, “God’s mercies are new every morning.”)

How could Jeremiah dare to hope? Because he remembered the help of God in the past. He remembered God’s faithfulness to him. He remembered God’s long-suffering mercy. He remembered how God’s love had not failed him yet. He trusted God. He put it this way:

I say to myself, “The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!” –Lamentations 3:24

It is easy to read about Jeremiah’s hope and trust in God. It is easy to talk about trusting in God. I think most of us would agree that God is there to help us. It is easy to agree with it. What’s difficult is actually trusting it when life gets tough. It is hard to find hope when everything in life seems to be coming apart. Even remembering God’s help in the past doesn’t always cut it when we are faced with unfamiliar problems and hurdles.

Surely Jeremiah was in that boat. He had never experienced such devastation before. He had never seen such annihilation, blood, and evil. It was all so foreign and frightening. And yet he still dared to hope and trust in God for help.

Perhaps you are faced with unfamiliar pain and difficulty today. Maybe in the past when you got into

trouble it was easy to trust God for help because you had been there before. However, perhaps the trouble you are in is new terrain for you and your hope has run out. Maybe it is the loss of a job you've had for years. Maybe it is losing someone special. Maybe it is the realization that you are not as young as you used to be and you can't do some of the things you love anymore. Perhaps life has forced you into some kind of change that is very scary and you don't know how to respond.

How can we find the kind of trust in God that empowered Jeremiah to dare to hope? How can we find the confidence to believe that God will help us? How can we find God in our darkness when we don't feel God at all?

Well Jeremiah would tell us the secret to having such hope and trust in God in the midst of such unspeakable tragedy and pain. Take a good look at what Jeremiah says:

The Lord is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him. –Lamentations 3:25

After Jeremiah says that he dares to hope in pain and waxes poetic on the mercies of God being new every morning, he gets down to the business of how hope works. He gets down to the brass tacks of learning to trust God.

He plainly says the Lord helps those who depend on him and search for him. The word "search" really means "crave." In other words, God helps those who ask him for help.

That's sounds simple doesn't it? But let me tell you one of the biggest things we forget. God loves us and cares for us and wants what is best for us. God wants to help us but God is not going to barge into our lives. That's not the kind of God we have.

Have you ever experienced someone who tried to push their opinions on you? Ever had some insufferable person try to force their agenda on you? It is not very fun is it? I have to confess to you that one of my pet peeves, one of the things that annoys me the most, are people who try to control me or force me into things. Anyone with me?

It is not fun dealing with pushy people. Our God is not a pushy God. He is not going to force anything on you. Now his Spirit will gently nudge you but God is not going to push you into anything. That's what Jeremiah means when he says the Lord is good to those who

depend on him and search for him. In other words, **"The Humble Get the Help."**

I don't know who said that but it is true. Now, don't let that mess up your theology. This doesn't mean that God will not help us unless we grovel and feel terrible about ourselves. Nor does it mean that when you see someone struggling that they are not humble enough. It simply means that God will not show up in your life uninvited. He will help you when you ask him for help and make room for him in your life. He will help you when you let go of control and depend on him. Once you do that, you can have hope and confidence because God's help will be on the way. This is why Jeremiah said this next in verse 26:

So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord. –Lamentations 3:26

Because Jeremiah depended on God and asked for help he could wait in quiet confidence in the Lord for salvation. "Salvation" means "wholeness."

So, you need help from God today? You need hope? Ask God for help and wait quietly and confidently for his help. Let me tell you what I have learned: "God may not come early, but he will never be late!" He is always on time. Don't give up!

Help is on the way! In the meantime, don't try to guess what God is going to do. Just trust his word and stick close to him. And don't look at everything at once. Just do the necessary things God calls you to do, one step at time. After you have taken several steps the answers will begin to appear. In those times you will find that your hope and faith will grow.

You don't have to understand to know that God has a plan. Trust him. He knows what is best. Remember these words from Proverbs?

In all your ways acknowledge him. And he will make straight your paths. –Proverbs 3:6

You see, most folks think this verse means, "Pray to God, ask God for help and he will show you the way. It will be clear which way you should go." That's not what it means.

You see, God's path is not the path we would typically take. God's idea of a straight path is not necessarily our idea of a straight path.

Acknowledging God in all our ways means being prepared to go wherever he may be leading us. Where God may be leading you may be the last place you want to go. The way God wants you to go may be filled with obstacles. In your mind, it seems impossible. You may be at a dead end in your life and you think there is no way around it or through or out of it. You may want to run away from it and God wants you to run through it!

Trusting and acknowledging God means even if you don't see a way, you know in your heart God will make a way. He will remove the obstacles. That's what it means when it says God will make the paths straight. He will make a way where there is no way. He will make a path where there seems to be no path. He will remove the obstacles and clear the path. But you have to trust him to do it.

Moses did. When Moses got to the edge of the Red Sea he thought he was at a dead end. When the children of Israel were finally set free from Egypt after 400 years of slavery, they started marching out to freedom and the first thing they came to was the Red Sea. There were impassable mountain ranges on two sides of them, the sea in front of them.

In hot pursuit behind them was the Egyptian army. Pharaoh had changed his mind about letting them go. The path the Israelites were on looked like a dead end.

But it wasn't a dead end to God. He knew exactly what He wanted to do. He could see what they could not see. He opened the Red Sea and they walked through it. Years later, the Israelites looked back and sang,

"Your road led by a pathway through the sea—a pathway no one knew was there!" (Psalm 77:19 LB).

If you are faced with a dead end today, God can see a path that you don't know about. If you will trust God and keep on moving in faith, even when you don't see a way, He will make a way.

Today's message: **Even when you don't see a way, God will make a way.**

(<http://rickwarren.org/devotional/english/trusting-god-when-i-don't-understand>)

I can't tell you how many times this has been true in my own life. Every time I have faced a dead end it has come down to this question: Will I trust God to make a way where I see no way? Examples...every time I look back and think. I did not see that coming! I had not even

thought of that! How did that happen? How did I get here? It has to be God. And it happened because I was willing to put my life in his hands.

Blondin was a 19th century acrobat, famous for his tightrope act 160 feet above Niagara Falls on a rope which was over a thousand feet long.

In 1860 a Royal party from Britain saw Blondin cross the tightrope on stilts, and again blindfolded. After that he stopped halfway and cooked and ate an omelet. Next he wheeled a wheelbarrow from one side to the other, and returned with a sack of potatoes in it.

Then Blondin approached the Royal party. He asked the Duke of Newcastle, "Do you believe I could take a man across the tightrope in this wheelbarrow?"

"Yes, I do," said the Duke.

"Hop in, then," replied Blondin.

Well, the Duke declined Blondin's challenge. He might have believed Blondin could do it, but he wasn't about to trust him with his life.

If we want to move across the chasm between where we are and where God wants us to be we must trust God with our lives. If we want our dead ends to turn in to new beginnings the only option is to trust God with our life. If you desire for God to remove the obstacles before you, you must put all of your life in his hands. God In all your ways acknowledge him, submit to him, depend on him trust him and he will make straight your paths.

Throughout my life I have learned this to be true. God is always right on time. Through all my pain and problems and confusion I have learned I can trust God. Even though I can't always see God at work or even feel him, I know I can trust God to see me through my suffering and redeem it. I have learned that God is bigger than my problems.

Mary Ann Franco of Stuart Florida understands this as well as anyone. ABC News reported that "twenty years ago, Mary Ann survived a car accident, but her injuries left her legally blind. Until recently, when she fell in her Okeechobee home and injured her spine.

"Mary Ann underwent surgery at the hospital to fix the damage but the surgeon fixed more than he knew. She

awoke and asked a nurse for pain medication—and realized she could actually see the nurse!

“According to Dr. John Ashfar of Stuart, Florida, what he witnessed at Martin Memorial hospital was something beyond what his medical training taught him to expect. ‘The restoration of Mary Ann Franco’s vision is a true miracle. I don’t have a scientific explanation for it.’

“Doctors have offered plausible theories for how she could have regained her sight from a totally unrelated surgery, but none of them explain another oddity—before the accident, Mary Ann was colorblind. Now she’s not.

“She’s seen her grandchildren for the first time, and her beloved cat and dog. She’s experiencing life anew, a gift she says, that can only be described as an ‘act of God.’

“‘In the mornings I get up and I look out and the sun is coming through the trees and the beams are coming down,’ Mary Ann told WPBF. ‘Oh God, it’s so wonderful to see.’” (source: ABC News Affiliate WPBF of West Palm Beach).

Now I know what you are thinking. “How come she was healed and others are not?” I don’t know. I don’t why. I wish I could tell you why. I know some people who have prayed for healing their whole lives and have never been healed. And I also know folks who prayed for healing and were truly healed. I don’t why that is. But I do know this: God answers prayer and his love never fails us. God may not show up the way you expect him to, but God will show up. And I also know this. The day we stop expecting miracles to happen is the day we stop believing in the power of God!

Are you in darkness? Ask God for help and help will be on the way! “God may not come early, but he will never be late.”



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