

Lamentations 3:21-25

Sunday 11/4/2012

I want to say a couple of things before we get started. First of all, I have looked forward to visiting your church for a long time. As Bob said, of course, when you get compliments from a guy whose favorite verse as a teenager was, "Lying is a present help in the time of trouble," it is a little hard to take what he says as true. At any rate, I have looked forward to seeing Bob and Barb and coming out and seeing their kids all grown up, and just getting to see you and meet you.

When I called him, I told him we were heading down to Branson. We were going to fly into Kansas City. We just wanted to get together with him, and he invited me to come to preach. I appreciate that very much, and the sweet spirit here, and the generosity. Of course, we love Bob and Barb a lot.

What I want to say, first of all, is I am not here to teach you this morning. I am here to encourage you. Your teacher is Bob, and he is probably one of the best, if not the best, Bible teachers in the country today. I do not say that, as our mentor used to say, Mel Sabaka, "I am not blowing smoke." I will not say where he would say you were blowing it, but I am not blowing smoke. So if you are visiting this morning, you make sure you come back and hear the pastor here. He loves you folks. I got a little tired of hearing about it. "We got great folks. I love them. I just love my folks." I said, "Just shut up. I am tired of hearing about it." So I appreciate this opportunity.

The second thing, I have to make a little statement here that I have been doing this now for about a year when I am preaching somewhere where I do not usually preach. About eighteen months ago, my wife tried to kill me, and I had open-heart surgery. While I was in the hospital, they took a vein out of my leg, and it did not work. So one of the nurses said, "Here, take mine." And they sliced her out. Not really, folks, but I say, "Come on, give me a break. You do not operate on a nurse and give me my..." Anyhow, I say they put a woman's vein in there on the left side of my heart because I cry. I used to shout and kick things and run. I do not run much anymore, you know that. So if I get a little misty, it is because of this woman's vein that they put in my heart. I do not want you to say, "Boy, what a sap," because I may be, but it is not because of that.

All right, Lamentations 3. I just wanted to make that disclaimer. I was preaching in Canton. Mel Sabaka's nephew started a church about a year ago. We spent a good deal of time last summer trying to talk him out of it and helping him get things set up and talking about some of the things that have still, thirty-two years later, given me a headache, and to avoid those things. So he invited me to come for his first anniversary, and I enjoyed preaching there as I am going to enjoy preaching here.

I. God's Faithfulness: A Core Attribute

Lamentations 3. We are going to look at verses 21 through 25. We are going to read those verses, although we are going to look at most of the chapter. I hope this morning what God speaks to you about is His faithfulness.

Every time I go back where Bob and I grew up, and I pop in there, we do not have much family left anymore there. But when we did, after thirty years, they would always ask me, "How many are you running?" I would say, "About, I would try to average between five and ten to run off every weekend, try to run them off." They were interested in how many people did we have. When I did not have this humongous growth that is the main emphasis in a lot of churches today, they would say this, "Well, brother, you sure have been faithful."

Now, I appreciate that compliment. I really do. When I was at Chuck's, he said, "Man, this guy has been faithful." What I have realized over the years is that usually when somebody says that, they mean you have not done so good, but you have hung in there. God has been good to us. I have never been too excited about notoriety, never been too excited, like your pastor, about some of the things that everybody builds on today. But as I look back over thirty-two years—next week will be our thirty-second anniversary—as I look back over that, I have realized what God has done. To say that again, I have realized what God has done.

I was having lunch with one of the early members of our church. In fact, Bob interrupted that lunch; he called me in the middle of it. He is into the new tech stuff. I heard him say somebody texted him. I told him, "Anybody in my church texts me, it better not be important, because I am probably not going to read it. So you better call me if you want to talk to me."

But I was sitting with Bernie. His family, his daughters and son, are all down in South Carolina now. He and his wife, they always had a difficult time, and they have split up. He is pretty much by himself. He just retired from the post office and from the National Guard. We were having lunch, and he is going through some physical things. I just had lunch with him because he needed somebody to sit down and talk with him for a while. So we were talking, and we started reminiscing.

He said, "Last Sunday, I was sitting in church, and I realized that I was sitting in the same area the Sunday I got saved." That has probably been twenty-eight years since he has been saved. It was the back of our sanctuary, which used to be—we have two-room schoolhouses where we are—and before we put an addition on it, the very back of that was a wall, and we had a nursery back there. That is where we would send people that raised their hand that they wanted to know more about being saved. We would send them back there. Now that is part of the sanctuary. He was sitting in that spot. He said, "Man, oh man. Can you believe how long it has gone?" He said this to me, and I appreciate the compliment, and I am not trying to be sloppy humble here, but he says, "Man, Jim, I appreciate your faithfulness."

I appreciate that. I am not here today to say somebody should not say that about you or me or anybody else. But what I am praying, and what I have prayed, is that God would impress upon you this: He is the one who is faithful. It is God who is faithful.

Someone asked me years ago, "Why have you stayed so long in Vermont?" My answer was simple: "Nobody else wanted me." Plenty of times I would have quit. Plenty of times I thought, "Man, oh man. Heaven, I have done my did." Somebody asked me one time, and understand how Baptist churches are independent, and they said, "What did you do to make somebody mad to send you to Vermont?" I said, "Must have been the Lord, because here I am."

I want you to know something this morning: God is not interested in what you have done. He is interested in what He has done through you. Remember that. Because as God uses you and blesses you, as has happened to countless thousands of Christians, they begin to think that they have accomplished something. We have not accomplished anything. God has accomplished it.

II. The Anchor of Hope in Lamentations

I want us to read verses 21 through 25, and then we will get started.

Lamentations 3:21-25

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

I am going to stop there. We are going to look at some things. Let us pray.

God, as we come before You this morning, we are very grateful for just the opportunity to come before Your throne. We realize and recognize that this privilege that we have is because of the shed blood of Your Son, the Lord Jesus. We approach You this morning in His name. I pray, God, today that as we open Your Word, that it would be Your Word that the Holy Spirit would take and impress upon us that which we individually need. Lord, may we not play church, but may with our hearts and our entire being focus upon You today so that You can be glorified. And Father, in that we will be blessed. God, I pray today, if anyone does not know our wonderful Savior, the Lord Jesus, that today would be the day that no one would walk out of here unsaved or not right. God, we just leave it up to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

I want to take you through some verses, just a few verses about God's faithfulness before we look into Lamentations.

Deuteronomy 7:9

Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.

Think of this for a minute: a thousand generations.

Deuteronomy 32:4

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

Listen to this: "just and right is he." I do not care what the world says. I do not care what the world says about this book. I do not care what the world says about me. I do not care what he says about Bob. God is right. God is always right.

We were having our wives—Bob's wife Barb and my wife, who are such lovely women and revere their husbands—kept telling us that we are never right. We are never right. Then we got to talking about one of my wife's old boyfriends whose last name happened to be Right. And Bob said, "He is right." And then all of a sudden Bob was right about something. But ever since then, we have always been wrong no matter what. I got news for them: they are wrong too, because God is always right. I could have told them I was not all right. I am not God, but God is always right.

Joshua 21:45

There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

Have you ever had anybody break a promise to you? When you were a kid, your mom said, "Oh yeah, you know what? If you are good, we will go do something," whatever you wanted to go do. And you said, "Oh, Mom, really?" She said, "Yeah." And then something came up, and I am not even saying it was not legitimate, but something came up, and she said, "Oh, sorry, we cannot do this today. We will do it next week." You thought to yourself, "Yeah, right. You told me that yesterday." Now she may not have meant to break her word. She may not have meant to have not told you something she was going to do. Listen, for ten thousand generations, God has never broken His word. I believe He is coming soon, but if He goes another ten thousand generations, He will never break His word. Never break His word.

Psalms 25:10

All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Psalms 89:8

O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?

Who else are you going to trust? Peter said to the Lord, "Are you going to leave us?" He said, "Where are we going to go?" Where are you going to go, folks? There is no place else to go. We will talk about what the world offers you in a little bit. I am telling you, there is no place else to go.

Taken together, these verses establish God's faithfulness, and not just a little bit, not just a little secondary part, not just a minor part, but these things together say that God is faithful, and that

goes to the very core of who He is. God is faithful. It is His very nature. He is knowable. He is holy. He is omniscient. He is omnipotent. God, at His very core, is faithful. He is faithful.

Paul writes about that in 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

There are times in my life, in my ministry, that I have promised I am going to do something, and it is my very intent to do it, and I am not angry about it. I want to do it, but for some reason or another, I cannot do it. Something happens. My wife makes me do something else. Something happens, and I am unable to accomplish what I wanted to do. God never does that. God never does that. He is also always true to His word. He will do it. He will do it.

Sometimes, you know, we get to think, "Okay, He said He is coming back," and you get saved, and all these goofy preachers on television say, "Oh, you get saved, and everything will be happy, and everything will be good." Hey, listen, folks, and I know your preacher, and I know this church loves His Word. Listen, God is going to do it. He is going to do it. Just hang on. Just wait. He is going to do it.

Now we say amen to that. Some of you are shaking your head. Some of you are saying, "Who is this wacko?" We say amen. "Yeah, God is faithful," but you know what? Each of us come to some points in our lives where we say, "I am not so sure. I am just not, I am not so sure." Now if you are sitting here and you are thinking to yourself, "Not me," then you are lying, because all of us have at one time ever said, "Man, Lord, what is going on? What are You doing?" Have you ever thought that? "God, what are You doing?"

My youngest daughter is unable to have children. Her husband, Josh, is our youth pastor. My son-in-law, I instructed my daughters that when they got married, they needed to either marry somebody rich that would take care of me when I am old, or somebody who has some mechanical carpentry ability. Today, being very obedient daughters, both married carpenters by trade. My sons-in-law are kind of big, husky guys, and Josh would kill me if he knew I was going to say this, but I have been with Josh when he has wept about the fact of not being able to have a child. Certainly, my wife and I have been with our daughter.

They started the adoption process. That is a sort of a long process. It used to be that we had orphanages, and parents that wanted to adopt would go into an orphanage. In fact, my mother used to threaten me. She used to say, "If you are not good, I am going to put you in an orphanage." I was always good, though, so it never happened. If you watch Shirley Temple movies—do not you guys say, "No, never," you bunch of liars, you watch it—little Shirley Temple, and she is always hanging around an orphanage or something. Somebody always picked her up, and when you are in an orphanage, and they had these old people taking care of them, and they are eating mush, it is a horrible place. The truth of the matter is that orphanages were a pretty needed thing. There were probably some older people or people that took care of it, and yeah, sometimes they were run down, they did not have any money, and they took care of these little kids hoping that they would be adopted. We do not have orphanages today because in the

wisdom of our society, we just decided it was easier to kill them, really, with abortion, take their lives.

So it is a long process, and it is a hard process, not easy. So they started this process, and about eighteen months into it, they got a call, and they said, "We have a little boy in Indiana that is about to be born. Would you be interested?" Yeah, I think they would be interested. They got everything set up and all taken care of. They were going through Bethany Adoption Agency, which is the largest Christian adoption agency, and this mother had picked them out of the portfolio, picked them out. So, man, we were excited. Church had a big shower thing for them, and he had all these presents. Of course, I immediately went online. As soon as I heard, I bought him an Ohio State football. He was not going to be a Hoosier. I got him an Ohio State football, and brought him a little outfit and the whole nine yards. So we were all excited. Everything was happening. This was just, I guess it was before or after Christmas, just before Christmas.

Just about two weeks before the baby was supposed to be born, the mother changed her mind. I remember this. I will remember this all my life. I was down in the family room. Kathy got a phone call, and she said, "Oh, no, Beth." I knew something was up. She hung up the phone, and she said, "We got to go up to Bethany Adoption Agency." I said, "What is going on?" She said, "They are not going to get the baby." First words out of my mouth. First words out of my mouth: "What are You doing, God? What are You doing, God?"

So, time went on, and we got over that. Well, not really, but we survived it. In fact, that day, his family, our family, my other daughter and her husband, we all gathered at the house. We prayed. We cried. Did all those things. Then life went on. They are still in the process waiting for an adoption.

Just about February, I guess, they got a call. And the agent said, "Hey, listen, we got a three-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy," or maybe two and three, or two and four, I do not know. "We got a brother and sister. Dad is in jail. They are going to take her from her mom. Would you be interested?" "Yes, we would be interested." Man, those kids came, and we immediately fell in love with them. I mean, this was wonderful. Most thing I was excited about: no diapers. And you could play with them right away. You did not have to watch the burping and all that stuff and say, "Hey, Dad, we will get the burp." And then they would look at you and say, "You are really stupid." And you could play with them right away, and we loved them. In fact, every time we went to the house, we had presents for them. Beth said, "Dad, stop bringing the presents. Every time you guys come, they think you are going to give them something." I said, "I am."

And then a call in March. And the call in March said, "You know what? There was an aunt who stepped up, and she said she wanted to take the kids." We gathered at a restaurant, Josh's family, our family. Everybody was there. We had breakfast with them in a restaurant. And they took that little boy and girl, put him in a car. And Kyle was just crying. I stuck my head in the door and wrapped my arm around him and said, "Kyle, it is going to be okay. It is going to be okay." And I closed that door and said, "God, what are You doing? What are You doing? You are killing my kids. What are You doing?"

And sometimes we just do not know. I did not tell you that story to get you all stirred up, because five weeks ago, they got a call. They said, "We have a mom who has just given birth to a little girl. And they have given up their parental rights. The judge has said, 'Either you let these children go for adoption or the state is going to take them.'" And someone had said to the mother, some Christian somewhere else said to the mother, "You know, if you are going to give those kids up, you ought to really go with Bethany and look at their portfolio where you have some say to where your children go, your child goes." And sure enough, she opened the portfolio and she picked up Beth and Josh. And we have a seven-week-old granddaughter. And I do not mind the diapers so much anymore. I even hold her and go, "I feel so good." Her name is Jasmine. If you say it really fast, it sounds like James. You see, God knew what He was doing. And He did it. I am not so dumb to think that is the end of the story. I do not know what is next. But I will tell you this, folks: God is always faithful.

III. Jeremiah's Despair and God's Unfailing Compassion

The Book of Lamentations is a collection of sad songs, really, or what we might call laments. It is a mournful postscript to the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is wondering, "How did all this stuff that happened happen?" Jeremiah loved the people of Israel. They did not treat him so good, threw him in jail, put him in a pit filled with dung. I told the people at church, "You ever get mad about what I am preaching? Fire me, get rid of me. But do not put me in a bottle of dung. Just send me away." All through all that, Jeremiah loved his people. He knew something, though. He knew that they were disobeying God, and they were moving farther and farther away from God. Neither he nor any other of the prophets of that day were able. They were preaching. They were telling them God's Word. They were telling them the truth. They loved them. And the people just said, "No, no." As the people were being carried off into captivity, Jeremiah's heart was breaking. He was breaking because the people that he loved were denying the God that had called them, the God that loved them. And his heart was breaking because he loved them as well.

When we come to chapter three, Jeremiah bears his heart. You know, sometimes we think that preachers and preacher's wives and those in the ministry never, you know, that they just go on and everything is wonderful. You know, we make big bucks and we drive big fancy cars and we have living big mansion houses and we are on TV all the time. You have seen me, I am sure. And we never have any difficulties. We never have any hurts. Well, I will tell you something. There are times when we do, just like you. We have some hurts. And Jeremiah was hurting. He was hurting. My take is he was a little ticked off. He is a little upset with God.

Look at verse one. He says:

Lamentations 3:1

I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

He is angry. God is angry. And Jeremiah, he has seen this trouble coming. He says, "I am the man that has seen the affliction by the rod of his wrath."

Look at verse two. Jeremiah says, "I am in the dark."

Lamentations 3:2

He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.

I do not know what is going on. It is like I am in a dark womb, and I do not know anything. It says, "And God, actually, it feels like You are against me."

Lamentations 3:3

Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

"God, I have served You faithfully. I have served You faithfully. It feels like You have left me. Like You have turned Your back on me. I feel like I am in a dark room."

Look at verse ten.

Lamentations 3:10

He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places.

Have you ever been face to face with a bear? We had one come across our backyard a couple years ago. At least my wife said so. I did not see him. But she swears it was a bear. I think it was a big dog. But she thinks it was a bear. Our dogs were going crazy. I was downstairs either reading my Bible or watching Ohio State football. I am not sure which one. But I was one of those two things I was doing downstairs. And the dogs were going crazy. And Kathy starts saying, "Jim, Jim, Jim." My other son-in-law was down there with me, it must have been Ohio State because Matt was there. And we were watching together. And he jumps up and he runs up the steps and trips on the steps. "I cannot get up the steps." We get out there and there is nothing. She said, "There was a bear out in our backyard." I said, "Kathy, what have you been drinking? We live in the city." Now, it is not much of a city, but we live in the city. Can you imagine coming face to face with a bear? Or a lion? Jeremiah says, "I have seen, I have felt, I feel like I am right in the mouth of a lion." I do not know what I would do. I would probably just let him eat me.

Look at verse four. He says in verse four:

Lamentations 3:4

My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones.

He was physically and mentally tormented. And he does not know how to get out of it. "I do not know what to do."

Look at verse five.

Lamentations 3:5

He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.

Verse seven, he says:

Lamentations 3:7

He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy.

He is like a man trapped in a maze. Have you ever been in a maze? Have you ever been in a maze when nobody else was there and it was midnight? We used to do in Ohio, we used to do a haunted house every Halloween. And Bob was a big part of that. And I was involved. And one year, we had this house way out on, I do not even remember the road, out in Fulton Road. Remember that, Bob? And they built a maze. And that sucker was dark. And so Bob and Dan Sabaka and me, and I cannot remember if somebody else or probably somebody else was, decided we would spend the night because it needed to be guarded. So we are up in this maze. And it is pitch black. I am not kidding you, folks. There was no light. Even the light of the Lord in our hearts did not shine in that place. That is how dark it was. And I am feeling a little nervous until Bob does what Bob does. He says, "Do not worry, fellas, look what I brought." And it was a Magnum .45. Now let me tell you something, folks. The last place you want to be in is a maze with Bob Alexander with a Magnum .45. Yeah. I was praying for somebody to break in and save me.

Jeremiah was in a maze. He said, "I cannot get out. I do not know which way to go." Do you ever pray like your prayers were unanswered?

Look at verse eight.

Lamentations 3:8

Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.

Cannot get a prayer answered. "I have been praying and I have been praying and I have been praying and I cannot get an answer." People made fun of him.

Look at verse fourteen.

Lamentations 3:14

I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day.

"I was a joke to everybody." Jeremiah was not a prominent prophet, not in the eyes of Israel. The prominent prophet was Isaiah, not Jeremiah. Jeremiah was so uncommon that when they carried away the prominent people like Isaiah, he got left behind.

Ready to give up. After all he has been through, he just wants to bag it. "I am done. I am going to throw in the towel. I am going to hang it up." Read 17 through 20. I will not take time to read all that, but if you read 17 through 20, you find out that he says, "My hope is gone. My hope is gone."

Do you ever go to bed at night with that heart hurting? And you want to fix it. You wish somebody would fix it, and it is just not fixed. And it seems like the Lord has left you, your friends have left you, and you are all by yourself. That is where Jeremiah was. His hope was gone. He could not forget his troubles because no matter what, they ambushed him. He tries to

minimize his problems. He cannot help it. He is trying to make it, "It is not so bad. It is not so bad." But then when he starts to think about all the stuff going on, all of the affliction, all of his wandering, the bitterness just floods in.

And then he remembers something.

Lamentations 3:21

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

You know, you get to a place where you feel like God is mad at you, and you feel like you are in the dark, and you feel like God is against you, and you have mental and physical pain, and you cannot find any release, and your prayers are not being answered, and you are ready to give up, and your hope is gone. I want you to remember what Jeremiah did. He said, "This I recall to my mind. Therefore have I hope."

Lamentations 3:22

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

That is the hinge, in my opinion, of the whole book and of Jeremiah's life. "Then I recall in my mind, and therefore have I hope." You know what, folks? As a believer in Jesus Christ, you never run out of hope. We only feel like we run out of hope. We never run out of it. We just do not see it.

Now while the outward affliction and inward turmoil push Jeremiah toward despair, Jeremiah forces himself, makes himself to bring truth to the forefront of his mind. I know your pastor very well, and I know he is going to tell you this and has been telling you this: Never, ever get out of that book, because when everything else is gone, and the time comes that there are no preachers there to help you out, and there is nobody on television to help you out, and you feel like you are all alone, you will have the book, unless they take it. If you put it in your heart, you will be able to call it up when you need it. That is what Jeremiah did. Jeremiah said, "When all this stuff is going on, this is what I did. I recall to my mind, and when I recalled it to my mind, I had hope." There is only hope in what God has said.

You know what I realized when Mel Sabaka died? The great preachers are going to die. Even Bob and I are going to die. We are not in that group. Well, Bob is. But we are going to die, and the next generation, if there is another generation of preachers, are going to die. God's Word always remains. Always remains. You better hide it in your heart. You better hide it in your heart, folks. That is how it works.

If Jeremiah just focused on the things that were filling his mind, he would really be bummed out. If he spent all his time thinking about how bad things are, people talk about, "Oh, this economy is so bad." You are all getting ready to vote on Tuesday. Is it Tuesday? I have already voted. So my vote does not count. We only have three electoral votes. They do not even drop us a leaflet when they fly over. We do not count. But I vote anyhow because it makes me feel good. It is sort of like getting a room and yelling at somebody just because it makes you feel good. So I voted.

We are all getting ready. Everybody is worried about the economy. "What are we going to do about the economy? What are we going to do about hospitalization? What are we going to do about this?" Oh, the Christians are saying, "What if this guy does not get elected?" And the others are saying, "What if this one does not get elected?" I remember when Reagan and, what was it, Mondale. Mondale was running. I met a preacher in town, and I ran into him at the store, and he said, "Oh, Jim, what are we going to do if Mondale gets elected? Oh, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?" I said, "I do not know about you. I am going to lunch." God is on the throne, folks. You ought to vote. Vote. I mean, you have a right that a lot of places do not have, but good night. Let us get that junk out of our minds and our hearts. And the poor evangelical and a lot of fundamentalists are saying, "Oh, we got to get this guy in. He is our only hope." Well, if our only hope is an unsaved Mormon, we are in big trouble.

And Jeremiah, all this came to me when he started, "Oh," I said, "I do not know how to do it. What am I going to do?" I keep saying, he says, "Remembering in verse 20, remembering mine affliction and the misery."

Lamentations 3:20

My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

"The wormwood and the gall." "Then I recall to my mind. Then I recall to my mind." You see, in order to break out of this pattern and cycle of despair, Jeremiah said, "I need to bring up something that I hid deep in my heart."

By the way, folks, can I tell you this? Having the Word in your head and having it in your heart are two different things. God has never been interested in how smart you are. He has always been interested in your heart. God wants your heart. If your heart—I tell people this all the time. I have some older folks in my church, and they want me to preach on how you dress or how you do not dress. And I say, "Look, I have got news for you. God is not interested in that."

Now I will confess to you that this is a first. And if it gets back to the kids in my church, my son-in-law in particular, that I have preached today without a tie, I am going to be run out of the church. Not because of them, but because I always wear a tie. And Bob said, "You do not have to wear a tie." I said, "Okay. I probably will." He said, "Well, you can do what you want to do, but you do not have to wear a tie." And then my wife started talking to me. It is going to be a long ride to Branson. She is the best there ever was. And I am thinking the "was" might be true instead of the "is." Anyhow, I tell those guys this. I said, "Listen, if we can get the hearts right, whatever the outside is supposed to be will be okay." God is interested in heart. He is not interested in the rest of it. Oh, He is interested in some of it. We know somebody said, "Do you have a dress code in our church?" I said, "Yeah, you got to wear something." God does draw a line, and the "something" is the line.

Jeremiah said, "Then I recalled to my mind." In times of despair, folks, we need to focus on God and His faithfulness. That is where our focus needs to be. What did Jeremiah focus on when he was hurting? What did he lock onto when he was trapped in the rubble?

Look at verses 22 and 23.

Lamentations 3:22-23

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." Why does not God just destroy us? I mean, honest, folks, come on. Christian or not, why does God need us? God does not need us. God does not need me. The birds could tell the gospel. The trees could sing it out. The bears could preach. God does not need me. I need Him.

Think about what God has done for you. Do you know what grace is? Grace is giving us something we did not deserve. Grace is giving us something we did not and do not deserve. You and I do not deserve the presence of God in our lives. We do not deserve the Holy Spirit residing with us. We do not deserve that book that we hold in our hand and have three or four copies because we leave it here and there and lose it. Sometimes I go into church every morning and look at the Bibles laying around in the pews, and then I remember that my preaching Bible is probably up on the pulpit. We take this book for granted, folks. Not everybody has got a book like you have. Not everybody has got a preacher that preaches a book like you have.

God has given you eternal life. My dad died here about five or six years. I do not know how long. I lose track a little bit ago, not that long ago, maybe within ten years. He was in Oklahoma. My mom had died, eighty-two or something, and my dad had remarried. My dad, I told him that if his last wife would have died, he would have been in a nursing home looking for a new one. After my mom died, then he married, he found another lady and married her. She was a great gal. I performed, I did my mom's funeral for him, and then I performed the wedding for them, and then about five years after that, she had a heart attack and died. I did her funeral. When he met Patsy and told me he was getting married again, I said, "No more free funerals, no more free weddings. You got to start paying." He got the last laugh. He died first. Guess who preached his funeral?

I drove it into Colgate, Oklahoma. It is a real metropolis place of about three homes, and I drove into where that was at, and there was the funeral home, and I thought, "Well, I better go in and introduce myself to the funeral home director." So I went in and I said, "I am Jim Lake. I am Jim's son, and I will be doing the message, you know, the funeral." He said, "Okay, good." He said, "Listen. He said, you know, there are no calling hours. We just leave the door open, and people can come and go." He said, "Well, your dad is in there if you want to go see him." I said, "Sure." Kathy was not with me. It is a long story, but she was in Ohio, and we had to, anyhow, she just waited for me to get him back to Ohio. So I walked into the funeral home, the director was in there, it was an empty room, funeral home, and I walked up to the casket, and this is the honest to goodness truth. I looked in that casket, and I said, "Dad, what is it like? What is it like?" There was the man that led me to Christ. "Dad, what is it like, Dad?" Do you know what we possess? We possess victory over death, is what we possess.

Why does God need us? We need Him, folks. You know what mercy is? Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. What has this world ever done for you? What has the devil ever done for

you? Given you a broken heart. What has he ever given you? Addiction? Alcohol? Someone says, "You ever see that verse in the Bible that says wine maketh a merry heart?" Do you need your heart that merry? Is that what you need to get happy? The Lord is not enough? Are you kidding me? What has the world ever given you? Heartache, sin, death. What has God given you? His Holy Spirit, eternal life, real joy, real joy. God's grace and mercy. How we need to cling on that.

You know that "consumed" and that "compassion" are kind of interesting words. Consumption or consumed is an absolute destruction of you. Why does not God do that? And then He talks about His compassion. It is because of His compassion, because of His love. This is talking about a loyal love. This is not talking about an emotional love. That is what you get just before you get married, sorry. Where is William at? I know he is with the kids. She knows, she knows where he is at and where he better be in about three minutes. He told me last night he had a prospect. No, did he tell me he had a candidate? No, I cannot lie. He did not say that. I said, "Do you have any candidates?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Have you voted yet?" And he said, "I am working on it."

I had a young couple who were getting married in my church, and I am preaching a message. I was not preaching this, something similar to this. And I said, "You know what? Young people do not even know what love is. When I got married to Kathy, we were strangers." Thankfully she did not know me. When we got married, because she probably never would have married me, but we got married, and you know what? It takes years. The love we have now is real love. We were in love. Now we are love. There is a big difference. Being in love is an emotional thing.

So I am preaching that, and I said to this young couple getting married, I was going to do their wedding in about a week or so. I said, "You guys do not even know what love is yet." And the guy was not part of our church. He was from some other church, Georgia or someplace, and they had met in college or something. So after the service, he said, "I need to talk to you." I said, "Sure." So we go in and sit down. And you just thought he had a heart transplant and they put a woman's vein in because he was so trembling. He was tearing up. He said, "You do not know how much I love this woman. You do not know how much I love her. You cannot say that. You cannot." He was just carrying on. I am saying, "Man, come on, get a grip." I said, "I will tell you what, I am going to marry you next week, and then you call me in twenty years and tell me if there is any difference." The love I have for my wife does not even compare to what I had. I have now. I am telling you, folks, it is not even close. I start a sentence, she finishes it, and I always say, "Yes, ma'am." We have a marriage. We have a love for one another that is beyond an emotional love.

God's love is greater than that. God's love is a loyal love. Where do we get the gall that we are going to make a commitment to God? I was somewhere, I do not even know where I was at, and they said, "If you would like to make a commitment to God," and I thought to myself, "Where do we get off thinking that we are going to make a commitment to Him, folks?" He makes the commitment to us. He commits Himself to us. He promises to love us. He promises to save us. He promises to take us to heaven. He promises to save us from sin. He promises not to throw us in hell that we deserve. It is His commitment. We are just taking it. We are taking the gift. It is not our commitment. We do not commit to Him. He commits to us.

1 John 4:10

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

We did not love Him first. God did not love us after we got lovely. You folks, I love the friendliness of this church. In fact, you remind me a lot of my church, except we wear more ties, but no, I am just kidding. Actually, you look more like Vermonters than I do. That is why they call me a flatlander. But the reality is this, that they are always hugging each other. We dance, this is the hardest thing, trying to get everybody. I know we do the same thing. They are all around hugging. My wife is the worst one. She is hugging everybody and kissing everybody. I am really not a hugger. I am just not a hugger. Now, every time I try to remind the church that, ten people at least on the way out grab me and hug me, just for fun. They do not really love me. They just want to make me uneasy. So I appreciate that. I kind of wish I could do that. But beyond that.

His compassion for us is so much greater than our compassion for Him. He loves us, folks. God's grace, God's mercy, God's love emanates from the very being of His character of who He is. You know, when I was a young preacher, before I was preaching really in a church or anything, the liberal churches would always talk about, "Well, God is love. God is love." And those of us that believe the book, quit talking about God's love. We would prefer to talk about hell. We would prefer to beat people over the head with the Bible. Well, I got news for you, folks. About God's love, no matter what you do, you are leaving out the message. Because everything God did for us was because He loved us. And He loved us when we were unlovely. He loved us when we were in our sin, when we were absolutely ugly, when we were absolutely our worst. God loved us. God loved us.

If you are here this morning, you do not know Christ, God loves you. You are here this morning, you use His name as a curse word, God loves you. You leave here this morning and say, "I do not have anything to do with God." He still loves you. He still loves you. And the end will not be because He did not love you. It is because you would not receive Him.

IV. God's Daily Provision and Unfailing Faithfulness

When will God meet my need? Well, verse 23 says this:

Lamentations 3:23

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

You remember the manna that God provided? I am taking Bobby's word that you go forever here. I am halfway through, I am not. Verse 23 says that it is new every morning. You remember the manna? The children of Israel out in the wilderness, you know, they escaped from—God had led them out of Egypt, and they got across the Red Sea, and all this stuff that would happen, and they were hungry. And God said, "I will take care of your need." Okay, they probably did not say they would take a big slice of ham, but they said, "Okay, what are we going to get? Tomorrow morning, when you wake up tomorrow morning, I am going to give you the best meal you ever

had." They get up in the morning, and there it is all on the front lawn, sweetest bread ever ate. Man, they loved it. God said, "Okay, every day you go out, you take what you need. You try to keep it because if you hoard it, it is going to turn into worms. So do not do that. But go out every day, every day you go out, it will be there for you." "Okay. Wow. Is not this great? Praise the Lord." They had a whole thing. They probably had a dance band. Everything, they just got all together and did all the wonderful things they did and praised the Lord for it. The next morning they got up, there it was. And the next morning, there it was. And the next morning, there it was.

How would you like to wake up every morning and find your car filled with gas? Every morning, there it is. How would you ladies and gentlemen like to never have to go to the grocery store again? It is always there for you. Always there for you. You say, "That would be great. I would love to have that. Yes, yes, yes." Well, before long, they did not like it anymore. They wanted something else. "We miss what we had in Egypt. We miss what we had when we were in slavery. How about some meat? I want some meat. Give me some meat. I am a meat eater."

We do the same thing with God's blessings. Being saved is not enough. Coming to church and opening God's Word is not enough. "I want something else. I want something new. I want something more exciting. I want something that gets me up and gets me going. I need something."

I was at a real, I do not know what I call it. If it was a church that was described, they would describe it as our churches, King James Church. These folks, I mean, they were getting into the service. They were singing and running around the auditorium. There was a guy who grabbed the flag and started running around. I told my wife, "Next time he comes around, I am tripping him." I am sitting on the end, and Mel said, "Go ahead." He was preaching next. He said, "Go ahead." I said, "I love Mel, but I feared my wife, so I did not."

It has got to be more exciting. It has got to be something stupendous. Got to get a band. One song leader? Come on. Let us get four or five up here. Everybody get some mic. Let us do it. Guy in town told me, "You know what you need over there?" I said, "What is that?" He said, "You need a praise team." I said, "Oh, man." You know, I said, "We are so far ahead of you guys. We have had a praise team for years." He said, "You have not." I said, "For years. It is called a congregation."

Here is what God says. Here is what Jeremiah says. God's faithfulness, God's compassion, they are new every morning. Great. Great is thy faithfulness. You think you are faithful? And I know the Bible says that the Lord requires a steward that a man be found faithful. I understand that. I understand the concept of it. But folks, do never compare your faithfulness with God's. Because yours are not fresh every morning. Your compassion are not fresh every morning, and neither are mine. God's is.

Jeremiah says, "I have got to get my mind off all these troubles and all these difficulties. I want to recall something that was in my mind, something that was in my heart. Here is what it is: Oh, God did not consume me. As a matter of fact, He loves me. Great is Your faithfulness. You are great, God. Your faithfulness. Every morning, Your faithfulness is there. When you get up

tomorrow morning, God will be faithful to you. By the way, whether you are faithful to Him or not, He will be faithful to you every morning."

Folks, when we get down in the dumps, I do it. I do it. I got my prayer closet. When we did not get baby India, it said, "What are You doing?" And by the way, it is not wrong to be there. It is just wrong to stay there. And how do you get out of that? Start thinking about what God did do. Every time I pick up Jasmine, every time I pick up Jasmine, I say, "Thank you, Lord." And watch over, baby India. Every day, I get to hold that baby. And I find an excuse to go to my daughter's every day. And she always says, "All right, you want to hold her? She cleaned?" "Yeah, okay, I will hold her."

What is my hope for living? Great is thy faithfulness. If it was not for God's faithfulness, folks, I would be gone. I would say, "Forget it." I would be gone. But I look at God, and I do not say, "Boy, God, You are lucky to have me. I have been here for thirty-two years. Tell me how many Baptist preachers have been in one church for thirty-two years. God, You picked a good one. You picked me. Yes, sir. I, you know, You are lucky, Lord." That is all I got to say. We are kind of arrogant, are not we? When we put ourselves next to God, it is like, "Hmm." You are great. I am not so great. But I become great by Him. Folks, listen. You have a great God. You have a great God. You have a great Savior. Man, He died for me.

You just had this terrible hurricane and flood and everything down in New England and down the coast in New Jersey. I hope you are thinking and praying for the folks at First Bible Church and Staten Island. All those folks down along the seaboard, they got up. Said there is a storm coming. You know, two weeks ago, they did not think they would be living in shelters today. Think they are down? I will bet they are. Discouraged. How about if you did not have a home to go to today? How about if your two little kids are snatched out of your hands by the raging waters? Find them in a heap of pile of shrubs three or four days later. What if you had to go pick them up? My, my, my. You know God loves them? Somebody says, "Well, why did God let that happen?" God did not let that happen. That was a world, folks. That is what the world gives you. You know, storms and bad weather are not God's doing. It is a sinful place we live. This earth is cursed. Do not hug a tree. It has been cursed. Honestly, folks, do not fall in love with this earth.

We used to sing when we were teenagers: "This world is not my home. I am just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckoned me from heaven's open door. And I cannot feel at home anymore." This is not my home. Vermont is beautiful. It is not my home. I have a nice home. But it is not my home. This body, thank God, is not my home. Someday, God is going to yank me out of it. You come to think of some things when you face that straight on. When it looks you straight in the face. And they tell your wife and your daughter, "Here are the options." They had me doped up. But "Here are your options. If he does not survive this surgery, and we think there is only a forty percent chance he will, he will either have to have a heart transplant." What was the other option? "Oh, I would be dead." Is that what they said? I was not there. They did not tell me. I said, "Do I get to vote on this?" You face death in the face. You spend twenty-eight days in the hospital. And you say, "God, You sure are good." Because whether I live or whether I die, You sure are good.

V. Three Reminders of God's Faithfulness

Three things I want you to remember. Three things.

1. When you get down in the dumps, when you are in the valley, call to your memory what God has put in your heart, that God is faithful. Call that up. Quit thinking about how bad things are. And start thinking about how good God is.
2. When you are tempted, and I do not mean tempted necessarily to do something terribly evil, although that is fine, maybe just quit. Remember you are just tempted to quit or to mope around. "I am not going to do that anymore. I do not like me down that church. I am just not going to do it anymore." I am sure you heard about the guy that his wife said, "Come on, honey, it is time to go to church." And he said, "I am not going today." And she said, "What do you mean? You are not going. We go every Sunday." "Nope, I am not going down. Those people down there do not like me." She said, "Get up. We are going to church." He said, "Give me one good reason." "You are the preacher."

When you get tempted to mope, when you get tempted to cry in your bucket, when you get tempted to walk away and quit, when you are just absolutely tempted to feel sorry for yourself, remember God is faithful.

1 Corinthians 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

You remember that.

3. Here is the third thing. If you have messed up, and who has not messed up? If you have absolutely messed up, remember this: The faithful God is a forgiving God. He is not like you or me. He forgives. We say things like, "Well, I will forgive, but I will not forget." I got news for you. That is not forgiving. God forgives and forgets.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is a forgiving God. "I do not want to be a Christian." God, I do not care what you have done. I do not care what you have thought about dying. I do not care where you have been. If you will come to Him and say, "God," not these words, but "God, I have messed up. I have messed up. And I am sorry I have messed up." God is going to say, "It is okay. Come on. It is okay. I love you. Come on." God is faithful. And God is going to make a way of escape when you are tempted to quit or anything else. And God is going to say, "I forgive you."

If you are here without Christ today, you might say, "Hey, God would never save me. A loving God would never save me." Yeah, He would. Of course He would. Jesus died for you. He was buried for you and conquered death by His resurrection. He has paid the price. You know the

most astounding thing to me, when I think about what Jesus Christ has done for me, when the Bible tells us that He became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God. Folks, let me tell you something. When Jesus hung on that cross, He thought of every vile, dirty, filthy thing I ever thought in my life. He knew about everything I did, everything I was going to do. He knew all about it. And He became guilty for me. He did not just take my place. He took my blame. It was put on Him. When I think about that, I say, "God, I am glad I do not have to pay for it because I never could. I never could."

We sing the hymn, and I am sure you sing it too, written by Thomas Chisholm, 1923. And he wrote this song:

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!
Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.
Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!*

Someone asked Thomas Chisholm one time, "What were you going through? What was the valley when you wrote that?" You know when Spafford wrote that song we say today, "It is well with my soul?" He wrote it because his two daughters had been lost at sea. And he got to the very place where they suspected that they were swept away. And he sat down and he wrote that song, "It is well with my soul." So somebody asked Thomas Chisholm, "What valley were you in?" He said, "Just my own experiences and Bible truth. Just my own experiences and Bible truth."

Folks, I do not know you very well. I know your pastor. And despite all these compliments, I always have not been the friend I should be. But I want to tell you something. Your friends will

fail you. Your parents will fail you. Your preacher will fail you. God is never going to fail you. You hook up with Him. You come to Jesus Christ by faith. You stay in this book. And in the darkest valley of your life, you realize God's faithfulness. And you will get through. And someday when we get to heaven, we will get to set kneel and stand in His presence and sing, "Great is Thy faithfulness."

Every head bowed, every eye closed. Thank you.