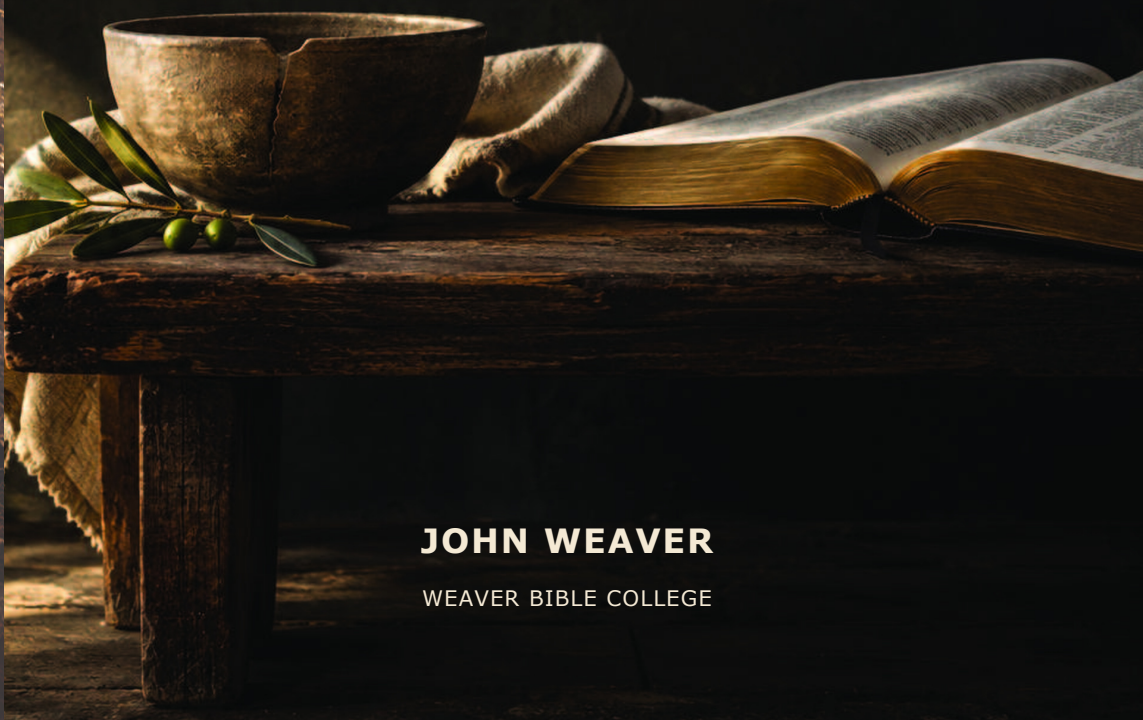
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The Cry of a Broken Heart

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



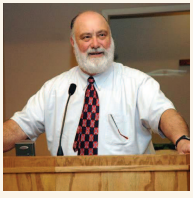
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

PSALM 51:17, EXCERPT

A broken heart may become the place of honest prayer and renewed dependence. John Weaver considers sorrow, repentance, confession, and the mercy of God through these messages. Scripture directs the reader beyond the defense of appearances toward the humility that acknowledges sin and seeks restoration in obedient faith.

“God's frowns are given reluctantly, but his favors are given graciously.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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Contents

Chapter 1: The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part One 5

Introduction to the Series and Text 5

Defining a Broken Heart 5

God's Nearness to the Broken 6

Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet 7

The Rejection of Jeremiah’s Ministry 8

Reasons for Jeremiah's Brokenness: Rejection of His Ministry 8

Jeremiah's Unique Calling and Ministry of Condemnation 10

The Cost of Faithfulness: Rejection and Persecution 12

The Parable of the Sower and Hard Hearts 15

Application to Modern America 17

Conclusion: The Need for Broken Hearts 19

Chapter 2: The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part Two 23

Introduction and Review 23

God's Nearness to the Brokenhearted 24

First Reason for Jeremiah's Broken Heart: Rejection of His Service 25

Second Reason: Refusal of His Supplications 26

Biblical Encouragement to Pray vs. Jeremiah's Experience 27

Jeremiah's Description of His Suffering 30

Why God Refused to Hear: National Sin and Decreed Judgment 32

The Limits of Prayer and the Urgency of Repentance 38

Conclusion and Prayer 39

Chapter 3: The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part Three 41

Introduction and Scripture Reading 41

Review of Jeremiah's Broken Heart 42

The Remembrance of the Sovereign 44

The Infirmity of Forgetting God 46

The Multitude of God's Mercies 47

God's Faithfulness in Trials 49
The Lord as Our Portion 51
Bearing the Yoke and Humbling Ourselves 54
God Does Not Afflict Willingly 56
Applications and Conclusion 57
Chapter 4: The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part Four 61
Introduction and Review 61
Reflecting Upon the Solace of God 63
The Solace of God 63
Complaining Against Providence 64
Blaspheming God Through Contradiction 68
Chastisement as a Necessity, Not Delight 69
God's Strange Work of Judgment 73
Applications and Illustrations 75
Closing Prayer 78
Topical Index 81
Scripture Index 83
Study Guide Link 87

CHAPTER 1

The Cry of a Broken Heart

Part One

Introduction to the Series and Text

This message is an introduction and is preparatory for the next two messages in a brief series titled “The Cry of a Broken Heart.” In Lamentations 3, looking at the first seven verses, Jeremiah says:

“I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

Defining a Broken Heart

“My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy.”

This is the first part, then, of a cry of a broken heart. Most of us have never really genuinely experienced a true broken heart. I am

not referring to a romantic broken heart, neither am I referring to the loss of a loved one, which most people have experienced. The broken heart I am referring to is one that is broken over our sins, broken over the sins of our families, broken over the sins of our nation, and in realization that those sins are against a holy, righteous, loving, just, and merciful God, who deserves only our praise, our honor, and our worship as well. We are not grieved with the fact that our sins basically have dishonored Him. And certainly they have.

Now, Jeremiah was a person who was actually broken. In fact, there is something else that we should be broken over. We are not, but Jeremiah was. He was even grieved and broken over the fact of the false prophets in the land who were preaching lies and teaching deceits. In Jeremiah 23:9, he said:

“My heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake.”

He was talking about the false prophets.

"I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness." In other words, he knew they were lying. He knew that God was holy, and he knew that God was going to judge them as well.

So, in light of the title of this message, let me ask you several questions. Do you desire to be drawn closer to the Lord? Do you desire really to live more effectively in the presence of the Lord? If so, there are answers that will give you an understanding in that area. First of all, let me quote Psalm 34 and verse 18: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

God's Nearness to the Broken

The Lord is nigh unto those who are brokenhearted. The way to get close to God is to have a broken heart. Psalm 51 and verse 17 is a passage everyone can quote. There David said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Turn in your Bibles back another few pages to Isaiah chapter 57, verse 15. Notice what God says: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Note this: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

God is especially close to those who have a broken spirit, a broken heart, a humble heart, and a contrite heart. In Isaiah 66:2, God says, "For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." The Word of God says in Psalm 147:3, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

One cannot mend that which is not broken. One cannot bind up if there are no wounds. So if we desire our Heavenly Father, the Great Physician, to bind up and to heal us, we must present Him with a broken heart and a broken spirit, and certainly He will indeed heal us from that state.

Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah has been known as the weeping prophet. Many people have known that truth, but most people have never really asked the question why Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. The truth is that he wept over his people. He wept over his nation. He wept over the sins and rebellion of those people. He wept over the fact that they were facing the judgment of God and refused to listen and refused to repent as well.

When you come to the book of Lamentations, Lamentations is the heartthrob of Jeremiah. The book consists of five chapters. In reality, they are five poems. Each chapter, or each poem, views the fall and destruction of Jerusalem from a different perspective. When we are in chapter 3, we are dealing with Jeremiah, and Jeremiah is identifying himself with his people. Jeremiah 14:17 says, "Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them, Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease. For the virgin daughter

of my people is broken with a great breach, and with a very grievous blow."

Why was he weeping night and day? Why did he not cease? Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because he was broken over his people. Have you ever considered his ministry? You may know that he was a prophet and you may know that he was a preacher. But do you know why he was so broken in the ministry and why he had such a broken heart?

The Rejection of Jeremiah's Ministry

Reasons for Jeremiah's Brokenness: Rejection of His Ministry

It is absolutely true that Jeremiah had no wife and no family to support him. In fact, God had forbidden him to marry. Jeremiah 16:1–4 records: "The word of the Lord came also unto me, saying, Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place. For thus saith the Lord concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land, they shall die of grievous deaths. They shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth, and they shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven and for the beasts of the earth."

Jeremiah had no one but himself. Everyone in this room could get angry with me and could get mad with me, and that would be bad. But as long as I can go home to Alice, and she is not angry or mad, and my children are not angry or mad, I can still have some comfort and consolation. Jeremiah, however, did not have a family.

So I want to give you three particular reasons why Jeremiah was such a broken man. If you understand these, you can see why we today do not have brokenness in our lives, in our hearts, or in our ministries. I am going to lay a foundation and then build upon it in the next two weeks. Next week may actually surprise you, and the week after that, I hope, will comfort you as well.

Why was Jeremiah known as the weeping prophet? First of all, here is the whole point I am going to cover today: there was a rejection of his service. Let me say it another way: there was a rejection of his ministry. Jeremiah, in one sense of the word, was identifying himself with the nation that was going to be destroyed by God.

Ever stop and think about this? You and I are hurt, insulted, and feel slighted when someone does not acknowledge our presence, our gifts, our service, or our cares. We say, “Hey, you don’t want me around; I’ll leave.” I have walked into several restaurants in times past where no one would even acknowledge me. They would not speak to me or wait on me. I simply turned around and walked out. I will find one that will.

What if that had been your entire life? What if that had been your entire ministry, where no one would listen to you, no one would pay attention to you, and everyone hated you? In Lamentations chapter 3, here is how Jeremiah is describing himself and describing his ministry.

He said, “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.” In other words, God’s rod of wrath has been upon the nation. It is also upon me. Look what he says in verse 2: “He hath led me and brought me into darkness, and not into light.” In other words, I don’t see any light at the end of the tunnel. Seemingly, there’s no hope in this ministry, in this situation. Then he said in verse 3, “Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.” Lord, Jeremiah said, I don’t have success. I can’t have success. The nation is fighting against me, and it appears that God is fighting against me as well. And then he says in verse 4, “My flesh and my skin hath he made old.”

“He hath broken my bones.” So he says, I’m old before my time. I’m worn out. I’m exhausted, and it looks like I’m half dead. And then he said in verse 5, “He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.” Gall is extremely bitter; travail is sorrow and anguish. He is basically saying that God has built against him and hedged him in. “He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.” He’s like a walking dead man. There’s no life in me. And then he said, “He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out:

he hath made my chain heavy.” In other words, this is basically a description of his ministry.

Now, Jeremiah had preached for approximately 40 years. His ministry was basically from 627 BC to 586 BC, which would have been the fall of Jerusalem. 586–587 is the date normally given there. But not once in the entire 40 years of his preaching did he ever see any success or any part of success. He was like Isaiah: no one would listen. He was like Noah: no one would listen. Other prophets in the Bible had some success, which may have been temporary, but at least they had some success. Jeremiah had absolutely no success. It was like he was beating his head against a brick wall. No one wanted to listen. No one wanted to hear. He was basically casting his pearls before swine.

Jeremiah's Unique Calling and Ministry of Condemnation

And yet at the same time, God had commanded him to teach. God had commanded him to preach. Jeremiah was unique. He was like John the Baptist in a very unique sense of the word: both of them were called by God while they were in the womb, before they were ever born.

In Jeremiah chapter 1, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Note, before he was born. "Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak."

Tradition states that Jeremiah started preaching around the age of seventeen. In the Hebrew culture, a young man was not even counted a man until he was thirty. Our Lord did not begin His ministry until He was thirty years of age. When you look at Jeremiah 1:6-7, Jeremiah said, “I cannot speak: for I am a child.” Then the Lord said, “Say not, I am a child.” The word “child” in Hebrew actually refers to a boy, a lad, or a youth. Since Jeremiah would have begun preaching and teaching at such a young age, he would have been laughed at, mocked, and ridiculed by the men of that culture.

Here is what God tells him: “Be not afraid of their faces.” In other words, they were going to criticize, mock, and laugh at him. “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.”

Not everyone is given a ministry of reconciliation. There was only one Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one George Whitefield, one Jonathan Edwards, and one John Knox. Everyone wants to be the preacher who reaps the harvest. Yet the Bible says, “one soweth, and another reapeth,” and that one sows, another waters, but it is God who gives the increase. There has to be someone who turns the ground and plows it, someone who sows the seeds, and someone who waters. But only one individual basically gets to reap the harvest, is what it amounts to.

Isaiah 55:11 says, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” God has promised that His word is going to prosper in that which He pleases. God’s word is never going to fail or return void; it will accomplish that whereto He sends it.

God may send His word either in reconciliation or in condemnation. If God sends His word in reconciliation, it cannot be made a word of condemnation. If God sends His word as a ministry of condemnation, it cannot be made a ministry of reconciliation. They are two different things.

In 2 Corinthians 2:14, the Scripture says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” We are never going to fail; we will always triumph in Christ. He “maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.” Then, in verse 15: “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” And who is sufficient for these things?

God can send His word either for condemnation or for reconciliation. When His word is preached, whether it is a ministry of reconciliation or a ministry of condemnation, it is still a sweet

smell to God because we are preaching His Word and the truth in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is another inconvenient truth: the preacher or the prophet does not get to choose his ministry. It is a ministry that is given. I am sure Jeremiah would have loved to have had a ministry of reconciliation, where the entire nation would have been saved. But God did not give him a ministry of reconciliation; He gave him a ministry of condemnation.

Every true preacher wants a ministry of reconciliation. Every true preacher wants to have a harvest of souls. Every true preacher wants to see people converted and saved by the grace of God. But once again, it is God who gives each man his ministry. One sows, one waters, but it is God who gives the increase.

The Cost of Faithfulness: Rejection and Persecution

God was honest with Jeremiah when He called him. God did not deceive Jeremiah. He let him know up front what kind of ministry he was going to have. Jeremiah 1:10 says, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.”

Notice that there is three times as much destruction as building and planting. The majority of Jeremiah's ministry was rooting out, pulling down, destroying, and throwing down. There was very little building and very little planting.

God told him exactly what was going to take place: "Then the Lord said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah." Everything was going to be destroyed. God said, "And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee."

In other words, God was saying that they were going to be destroyed. From the time Jeremiah was a young man, his entire ministry consisted of being mocked, ridiculed, hated, despised, lied against, threatened, and imprisoned; people attempted to murder him as well. How long do you think a pastor would stay in a local church with people like this?

Jeremiah said, "But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living. Let his name be no more remembered." They were planning to murder him: "Let us devise devices against him. Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof. We will kill him. We will blot him out of our memory." That would not be encouraging to most pastors.

Then Jeremiah said, "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah. For the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words." They were saying, "We're not going to listen to you, Jeremiah. We're not going to hear you. In fact, we will slander you. We will lie about you."

We will seek to destroy you any way we can. Now, folks, let's be honest. It does not build confidence in a man when he knows that people are lying about him, slandering him, trying to take his life, and refusing to even listen to him. It certainly does not work confidence and hope when he understands that the people literally want him dead. So here's my question. Could you endure 40 years of rejection, ridicule, mocking, hatred, despisement, slandering, lies, imprisonment, and attempted murder? Could you—listen to this now—could you continue to want to pray for a people like that? Could you continue to want to weep for a people like that?

I mean, they were not interested in anything that you had to say. Now, God had sent Jeremiah, and Jeremiah did care for his people, he loved his people, and he did not want to see them destroyed. However, he was weeping because of these people. If you would turn back over in your Bibles to Lamentations chapter 3, look if you would please at verse 48. You see, Jeremiah knew that the judgment

was imminent, he knew that it was going to appear suddenly and he knew that the people were going to be destroyed so in verse 48 of Lamentations 3 he says, "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people."

Wow. Now, you will see next week where God had already determined to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah finally gets to the point in his ministry where he comes to see from God's perspective, from God's point of view. So, I want you to turn back to Jeremiah chapter 17, if you would please, and think about this after 40 years of enduring everything, being cast into a dungeon. I'll show you some of it. But look in Jeremiah chapter 17, and let's begin reading there in verse 13.

Look at what he says, "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." Now watch what he said, "and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." You have to remember something.

To reject the preacher or the prophet that God sends is to reject God Himself. You remember what our Lord said in the New Testament? He told His disciples that He sent them out. He said, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." So He said, those people that receive you, they receive me. Those people that received me, received the Father that sent me.

The opposite is also true. Those who refuse those whom Jesus Christ sends out refuse Jesus Christ; and those who refuse Jesus Christ refuse the Father who sent Him.

Jeremiah said, “O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise. Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now.”

"As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day;" that is, the judgment that is coming. "Thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee. Be not a terror unto me: thou art my hope in the day of evil. Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded: let them be dismayed, but let not me be dismayed: bring upon them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction."

Finally, Jeremiah understood that God had ordained destruction for this people. He had not desired that destruction, but now he said, "Lord, let it come. It needs to be here." Remember Jeremiah 1:10: "I have set thee this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." You cannot build a new barn over an old barn until you tear down the old barn.

The ground has to be prepared. You cannot have a garden until you put out all the weeds and poisonous plants. If the ground is not prepared, you will not have a garden. It is clear from the Word of God that Jeremiah had an awful lot of destroying, pulling up, and rooting out to do before anything could be planted. Jeremiah was one of those unique individuals to whom God gave this ministry.

The Parable of the Sower and Hard Hearts

There is a passage in the New Testament, in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8: the parable of the sower. Our Lord says, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." Some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds arrived and devoured them. Some fell upon stony ground and had not much earth.

Some seed sprung up immediately; when the sun arose in its heat, it died. Some fell upon thorny ground, and the thorns grew up and choked it. The thorns were already there; they were simply not visible at that particular time. Some fell upon good ground and brought forth fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some an hundredfold.

When our Lord said in the parable of the sower that some seed fell upon the wayside, He was speaking of hard-packed ground where

seed cannot penetrate the soil and therefore cannot germinate. If you go to any farm in this area or in South Georgia, you will find fields that are plowed, but always going into that field, and sometimes around it, you will find hard-packed ground where all the equipment travels. Seed falling on that ground will never germinate because it lies on the surface, and the birds come down and take the seed.

I had a friend one time who planted three or four or five acres of watermelon seed. He did not get the seed that had been coated, and the crows came and dug up the seeds and ate them. Out of a whole huge field, he probably had only fifteen or twenty watermelon plants come up. Those seeds were buried, but the crows dug them up because they were not coated. So our Lord is saying that some fell by the wayside, and immediately the fowls came and devoured them.

When He talks about the stony ground, it was a solid layer of rock under two or three inches of soil. When the seed hit that first couple of inches, it began to germinate and develop roots, but it could not develop roots deeply enough to draw forth moisture and water. Therefore, when the sun arose in all its heat, the plant withered and died.

The same thing happened with the thorns. Those thorns were already there, though they were not visible. Then they sprang up and choked it out. Scripture tells us that those thorns are the cares of this world and the lust for other things. That is what chokes it out.

Then He said there was the good ground. Some brought forth thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred. Do you realize the implication of this parable? In light of what Jeremiah said, its implication is very significant. Three quarters of the seed that was planted never produced anything. Someone has said this innumerable times: one of the greatest evangelistic fields happens to be in our churches, because probably about three quarters of the people are lost.

That wayside hearer represents a hard-hearted hearer. That stony ground hearer represents a half-hearted hearer. That thorny ground hearer represents a double-hearted hearer. So if you have a hard

heart, a half heart, or a double heart, you have no heart for God. You have nothing. You only have that one little quarter that is good.

Our Lord says, “But that on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” Only the Holy Spirit can make an honest and good heart. When you look at this parable, we are talking about people. Although He is talking about soils, we are still talking about people. “Those by the wayside are they that hear.” We are talking about people.

“Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.” We are talking about people. “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”

The only one that brought forth any fruit was the good ground hearer. Jeremiah had an awful lot of people in the land, but there was not one whose heart was true to God. In fact, he tells you that in his book. Stop and think about all of the churches in our land. Especially if you go to some of the larger cities, it seems as if there is a church on every corner. But there is very little teaching, very little preaching from the Word of God.

Application to Modern America

I know I told you this years ago because this happened years ago. Alice and I were down in Tampa, Florida, visiting one of our daughters and her family. Our son-in-law was going to take us out to supper that night, and we went by a Baptist church. On the billboard, marquee, or whatever you want to call it, they had this: “Come to our early morning service, in by 8, out by 8:30.” I thought to myself, now you know a Baptist church is going to sing at least one or two songs. They are going to have an opening prayer, and you know for a fact they are going to take an offering. Then they are going to have one song at the end and one benediction.

You are talking about ten to twelve minutes for a little sermonette. What they were doing was salving everyone's conscience as they were going to spend the day at the beach. "Come to our service, in by 8, out by 8:30." I usually tell people it takes me at least thirty minutes just to clear my throat. It just boggles my mind.

What I want you to think about right now is this: think about the implications of this for America. Look at Judah and Jerusalem. God was going to destroy them, to wipe them out, because of their sin, wickedness, and rebellion. Look at exactly what we are doing. We have turned from the Scripture to entertainment, fellowship, and social club. We have turned to anything and everything except the teaching of the Word of God.

I am astounded at the people who have gone to church all their lives and still know nothing about the Bible. They cannot even find certain books of the Bible. I have done this innumerable times just as a joke. I have asked people, "Turn in your Bibles to Hezekiah chapter 3 and verse 18." Everybody starts looking for the book of Hezekiah. I let them look for a few minutes, then say, "Look, stop. Hezekiah was a king; it is not a book in the Bible." I am pointing out the fact that we have been in church all our lives and know so little about it.

Here is basically where we are today. Look at 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 3 and 4. Look what the Word of God says: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine."

"But after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." They just want someone to scratch it. "And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Here are two very important points. Number one, he said the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. No one wants doctrinal teaching and preaching any longer. They want entertainment. They want feel-good messages. And then he said, verse 4, "They shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

This is what we do not understand: when we reject the truth, the only thing left is a lie. When we refuse the truth, the only thing that we have left is a fable or delusion or deceit. Once you turn from God,

once you turn from His Word, you have nothing but a lie and deceit and a fable.

We are at the place in our country where America loves falsehood. America loves lies. America loves deceit. America does not desire, neither does she want biblical truth. There are very few Christians who really read their Bibles, and even fewer who really study their Bibles. We are ignorant and unconcerned. Here is why America does not want truth: we do not wish to repent. We do not want to change things. We want things to continue exactly as they are.

The only thing that will happen is judgment. Before making some applications, turn to the book of Zephaniah in the Old Testament, right before Haggai. We have Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and then Zephaniah. Look in Zephaniah chapter 2, beginning with verse 1. Look what God tells the people: "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired." Why? Because of the sins, wickedness, and rebellion.

He says, “Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord’s anger come upon you.” What should we do? “Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness.” And look at this last part: “It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.”

Conclusion: The Need for Broken Hearts

This is counsel, advice for avoiding the judgment of God. What are we to do when we know God’s anger and judgment are upon a nation? “Seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments. Seek righteousness. Seek meekness.” That is, be submissive and obedient. “It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.”

Let me make some applications. Suppose you wanted to hurt someone—not physically, but to insult them, deceive them, lead them astray, or get back at them. You planned, schemed, and did whatever you could to hurt a group, an individual, or a society. Then everything you planned failed. Nobody was insulted or hurt; no one was upset. You might be disappointed if you had really worked at it,

but you would not be broken or grieved. You would not have a humble and contrite spirit.

But suppose you know the truth, see the judgment of God coming, know it is imminent, and know it will come suddenly, like a bolt of lightning. You warn your family, your children, your friends, and your neighbor, but they will not listen. They laugh at you, mock you, call you all kind of names, and say you are crazy, that you have gone off the deep end. That would hurt and break you because you know the truth, and they refused to listen and hear.

This is Jeremiah. No one would listen to him or hear him. He knew judgment was around the corner, but no one would bow to him—not the king, not the queen, not the people. Absolutely no one. And the truth of the matter is, they tried to kill him.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 26:9-12 (KJV)

Turn back in your Bibles to Jeremiah, chapter 26. I want to show you how he was hated and despised. Look at verse 9. Look what is asked:

"Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house into the house of the Lord, and sat at the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house. Then spake the priests and the prophets and the princes unto all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and all the people, saying, The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard."

"Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. Then he said, As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as it seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and

upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." God sent me, but you would not listen.

When Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, who was preaching the same as Jeremiah, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt. The king himself was threatening to kill him.

The princes said unto the king, "We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt."

What? Jeremiah was telling the truth. They were lying. They did not understand. Jeremiah told the king and the queen, "Humble yourself. Go out and submit yourself to Nebuchadnezzar, and your lives will be spared and the city will be spared." He told everyone, "Go submit to Nebuchadnezzar, your life will be spared." What did they say? "This man is trying to hurt us."

No, he was not trying to hurt them. He was trying to help. I want you to see why Jeremiah was broken. They misinterpreted everything that he said. They refused to hear. They refused to listen.

Here is the point: When you are telling the truth, and you know it is the truth, and no one will listen, that is when you get broken. You do not get broken over lies. You get broken over the truth.

We need to come back and have a heart that is broken like Jeremiah. We need to learn to shed tears for our lost family members, our friends, and our nation. God is always close to those who are broken, and to a contrite heart and a humble spirit. If we want God to be close to us, we must be what He designs for each of us to be. We need a broken heart. God uses broken vessels.

Once broken, He can put us back together and use us. But Jeremiah's service and ministry were rejected by all the people. He had not one convert. He had no family, no one to support or help him. Yet he was faithful to the end. I do not believe any preacher alive today, including myself, could endure a ministry like

Jeremiah's. I do not believe any Christian alive today could put up with the ministry God gave Jeremiah. We need to understand: folks do not want truth, and folks do not love truth. But we must proclaim it. We must teach it.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for Thy Word and Thy mercy. Lord, we pray that Thou wouldst give us a broken heart, a broken and contrite spirit. Lord, Thou wilt not despise. Help us, Lord, to see where we are today and live in obedience and faithfulness. We ask again for those on prayer list, that Thy hand would be upon them. I pray for Brother Steve this week, Lord, that Thou wouldst help him and give us Thy mercy. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

The Cry of a Broken Heart

Part Two

Introduction and Review

In Lamentations 3, beginning with verse 8, he said, “Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways and pulled me in pieces. He hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins.

“I was a derision to all my people and their song all the day. He hath filled me with bitterness. He hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes, and thou hast removed my soul far off from peace. I forgot prosperity, and I said my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord. Remembering my affliction, my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul hath them still in remembrance and is humbled within me.”

May I remind you that the book of Lamentations is actually five poems, and each poem is on the fall and destruction of Jerusalem from a different aspect. The title of this message, “The Cry of a Broken Heart,” has nothing to do with romantic losses, neither does it have anything to do with the loss of a family friend in death. Obviously, everyone has experienced that in times past. But it does refer to being broken and contrite, not only over our personal sins, but over our societal sins, our national sins. It also refers to being broken, not just simply over those things, but over all the false prophets and all the false preachers and teachers, and all the lies and deceits that are being enunciated in this land today. Jeremiah was concerned and wept because of the false prophets that were causing his people to err and to walk contrary to God as well.

God's Nearness to the Brokenhearted

When you consider that we have sinned against a God who is so holy, loving, kind, gracious, and merciful, all He really deserves is our love, praise, honor, and worship. Yet we continually transgress and trespass against Him. We also understand that He is a just and righteous God as well.

I gave you some verses last week, and I want to reiterate three or four of them. God is especially close to those individuals who have a broken and contrite heart. For instance, the Bible says in Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is nigh unto them of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

Then, in Isaiah 57:15, we read, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of contrite heart, and to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Notice the humble spirit. God says, "I dwell in the high and holy place, but I also dwell with that individual who has a contrite and a humble heart as well."

I also quoted Isaiah 66:2, which, Lord willing, I will be preaching on in a not too distant future: "For all of those things have mine hand made, and all those things hath been, saith the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is of poor and contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

Jeremiah, of course, is known as the weeping prophet. He wept not only over the sins that he had committed, but also over the sins of his people. He wept over the fact that the people would not hear or listen; they refused to return to God.

First Reason for Jeremiah's Broken Heart: Rejection of His Service

The first reason why Jeremiah had a broken heart was the rejection of his service, or the rejection of his ministry. None of the people would hear. None were willing to listen. None were willing to repent. If you look back to Jeremiah chapter 5, while holding Lamentations chapter 3, you can see exactly how corrupt the entire society and nation were in Jeremiah's day. In Jeremiah 5:1, God instructs Jeremiah: "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that execute"

God said, “I will pardon it.” That is the city. “And though they say, The Lord liveth; surely they swear falsely.” He says, “O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.”

Concerning the average individual, he said, “Therefore I said, Surely these are poor, they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.” In other words, they were ignorant of the truth. Then he said, “I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God.” But these had “altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.” It did not matter which stratum of society he approached: no one was willing to listen, and no one was willing to repent. God said that if he could find just one man in the entire city who executed truth and justice, He would pardon the whole city.

To show the corruption of the entire society, Jeremiah says, “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” It should not, therefore, cause us to wonder why Jeremiah

was the weeping prophet. None of his people would listen to his words—the words of warning and truth. They were all full of deceits and lies.

A quote is attributed to George Orwell, whether he originated it or not, I know not, but it is true: “In a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” That was true not only in Jeremiah’s day; it is also true in our day.

Stop and think about where we are in America, because we are just like these people in Judah and Jerusalem. No one wants to upset the status quo or rock the boat. The status quo may be wicked, wrong, rebellious, or humanistic, but it is our status quo, and we like it just the way it is. We do not want anyone coming in, upsetting us, trying to change everything, or bringing us to a place where we certainly do not want to be.

Second Reason: Refusal of His Supplications

The first reason that Jeremiah is known as a weeping prophet was simply because of the rejection of his service. Now, it is extremely heart-wrenching when you know the truth and you see the judgment of God on the horizon and you're trying to instruct your family and your friends and no one will listen. And that's exactly where he was. Now, if you look in your Bibles to the book of Lamentations chapter 3, we're coming to the second reason as to why Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Not only was there a rejection of his service, there was secondly a refusal of his supplications. So, if you look in Lamentations 3 in verse 8, he says concerning God, "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer." So God then shut the door to the prayers of Jeremiah so that they could not enter. He could pray, he could cry, he could shout, but God was not listening and God would not entertain his prayers. So if you look in Lamentations 3 and verse 44, he says it just a little differently.

He says, "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." Think about this. We now have a problem. And the problem is this. Jeremiah is saying that God is refusing to hear his prayer. He's not refusing for Jeremiah to pray. Jeremiah is welcome to pray, but God is not listening to Jeremiah and therefore

God is not going to answer his prayer. Now, I'm going to show you another verse.

I want you to understand this. It is possible, and it is scriptural, for God even to be angry with the prayers of his people. If you look in your Bible to Lamentations 3, but turn back in your Bible to Psalm 80, and look if you would please at verse 4, Psalm 80 and verse 4, and note if you would what the psalmist says very plainly. Psalm 80 and verse 4. Look at this. He asks this question, "O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?" So it is possible for God to be angry with the prayer of his people.

Now, when we stop and think about this, Jeremiah said, “He shutteth out my prayer.” He said that God had made a cloud through which his prayers could not go. When we consider this, we have a problem, because there are so many verses in Scripture where God not only encourages prayer, but commands prayer and tells us that our prayers are His delight. So let me give you some verses.

First of all, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” We are to pray without ceasing. That is God’s command; that is not stopping. And then, in Luke 18:1, our Lord said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” There should never be a time when, in one sense of the word, we are not praying.

Biblical Encouragement to Pray vs. Jeremiah's Experience

Then Philippians 4:6 says, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Again, we are told to pray about everything. And then, in Colossians 4:2, he gives this command: “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.”

Now I want to read to you part of Nehemiah’s prayer. Listen carefully; you will find this in Nehemiah 1:6. Nehemiah prayed, and he said to God, “Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.”

Nehemiah said, “Lord, let your ears be open to my prayer. Let your eyes see, Lord; this is a prayer that I am praying day and night.” He was praying it constantly and continually, asking God to hear and see. David said in Psalm 6:9, “The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.” Now here is another verse that I think would be appropriate, and that is Psalm 65:2.

The psalmist said, “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.” Proverbs 15:8 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.” It delights God when His people pray. Proverbs 15:29 says, “The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.” Based upon these Scriptures, and many more that could be quoted, we know that God's ears are open unto His people.

He has told us that if we knock, the door will be open; if we seek, we will find; and if we ask, we shall receive. Yet at times, when we pray, it seems that God does not hear our prayers. This is what Jeremiah is complaining about: “When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.” This was not unique to Jeremiah. Job also had this problem, for in Job 13:20 he said, “I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not.” Job was saying, “I'm crying, and I'm praying, and Lord, you're not listening.”

Psalm 22 was written by David, but Psalms 22, 23, and 24 are a trilogy; they go together, and each is a messianic psalm concerning Jesus Christ the Messiah. In Psalm 22, Jesus Christ is the good shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. In Psalm 23, He is the great shepherd who guides and protects His sheep. In Psalm 24, He is the chief shepherd who promotes His own to glory.

Yet Psalm 22:2 says, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." He says, "I'm crying, I'm praying, but thou hearest not." This is also a Messianic Psalm. How would that apply to Jesus Christ?

Matthew 26:39 says concerning Jesus Christ, "He went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Did God the Father allow the cup to pass from Jesus Christ? No. He drank that cup, and I do not think it was necessarily

the physical sufferings from which He was crying and praying to be delivered.

Certainly, it would not be a delight to be crucified, mocked, and ridiculed. But think of the spiritual implications: He was suffering in our stead; He is the propitiation for our sins; and all the wickedness, filth, and ungodliness of our sins were dumped upon Him so that He would suffer in our stead. In one sense, He was delivered, because God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand. In another sense, He was not delivered, because He had to suffer and pay the price for our sins.

So here we have Jeremiah saying, "I'm crying and I'm shouting, and he's shutting out my prayer." How do we explain this? Before going any further, I want to give you a quote by John Calvin. Listen to what he said and think about this in light of what I have just said.

Calvin says, "It is no wonder then that God did not hear the prayers of his servant, that is, according to the judgment of the flesh, from Jeremiah's standpoint. For God never rejects his own, nor is he deaf to their prayers and their sighs, but the faithful often speak according to what the flesh judges. As then the prophet found that he obtained nothing by prayer, he says that his prayer was shut out, or that the door was closed against him, so that his prayer did not come to God.

"Now, this passage is worthy of special notice, for except God immediately meets us, if God does not answer us right away, we become languid; that is, we become indifferent, discouraged, and disheartened. Unless God immediately meets us, not only is our ardor in prayers cooled, but it is almost extinguished. Let us then bear in mind that though God may help us soon, yet our prayers are never repudiated by Him.

"And since we see that the Holy Fathers experienced the same thing, let us not wonder if the Lord at this day were to try our faith in the same manner. Let us therefore persevere in calling on Him, and should there be a longer delay, and our complaint be that we are not heard, yet let us proceed in the same course as we shall see the prophet then." In other words, we have to keep praying.

But think about this. He said, “Unless God meets us right away, we become languid, the ardor of our prayer cools, and sometimes we even quit praying about something. We’ll say, ‘Well, God’s not listening to me,’ or ‘God’s not answering me. Why in the world should I continue to pray?’” We basically stop praying, and that is exactly what Jeremiah was saying: God’s not listening, God’s not hearing, so why should I keep praying?

Look back at Lamentations chapter 3, verse 8, and understand how Jeremiah describes his situation when he believes that God is refusing his supplications: “Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.” The next verses, through verse 20, describe what Jeremiah was going through. Remember, there was a rejection of his service; now there was a refusal of his supplications. What was he going through? What was he experiencing? What was he thinking?

Jeremiah's Description of His Suffering

Look at verse 9. He said, “He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.” If you are stoned in, if somebody lays block around you and cements it together, there is no way you are getting out. Then he says, “He hath made my paths crooked.” I thought about those corn mazes that usually pop up in the fall, where some people get lost. Jeremiah said, “I don’t understand what’s going on. I can’t get out of this predicament.”

Then, in verse 10, he said, “He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places.” Those are devastating animals; they will take your life. He was saying, “I’m waiting any moment for God to pounce upon me.” Then, in verse 11: “He hath turned aside my ways and pulled me in pieces. He hath made me desolate.” That is exactly what a bear or lion would do—pull you in pieces.

I thought about something I had not considered in a long, long time. When I was a boy, I had two dogs, and they hated snakes. I had seen those dogs many times when they came upon a snake. I did not care what kind of snake it was. One dog would bite behind the snake’s head, and the second dog would get the snake’s tail. They would back up and pull the snake apart. That is how they killed the snake. This is exactly what Jeremiah said: “He’s pulled me to pieces. He made me desolate.”

In other words, there is no help for me. Look in verse 12: “He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow.” In other words, God is shooting at me. That is why he says in verse 13, “He caused the arrows” — that is plural — “of his quiver to enter into my reins.” He shot me many times; he shot me down. Then he says in verse 14, “I was a derision to all my people and their song all the day.”

They mocked him, ridiculed him, and would not listen to him. It reminds me of Psalm 69, a messianic psalm concerning Jesus Christ, when he said, “I was the song of the drunkards.” The drunk folks were mocking Jesus Christ, and here probably some were mocking Jeremiah in that sense as well. Then, in verse 15, he says, “He hath filled me with bitterness.”

“He hath made me drunken with wormwood.” Wormwood is a bitter herb, and it is in just about all parasitic cleanses. If you take a parasite cleanse, you will usually take wormwood, clove, and black walnut hulls, but the wormwood is bitter. So he said, “He’s filled me with bitterness and made me drunken with wormwood.” Look at verse 16: “He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes.”

Let me ask you a question. Suppose you are crying and shouting out, truly wanting help and answers, and I come along with a cloth bag full of gravel and smite you in the mouth with it—break your teeth and burst your gums. That will stop your crying and shouting for a little while, anyhow. Jeremiah says this is what it is like: he has hit me in the mouth with gravel stones and covered me in ashes.

Look in verse 17: "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace." Of course, he has no peace. The people rejected him. Nobody is going to listen, and God is refusing his supplication. So he said, "I forgot prosperity."

Now look in verse 18: "And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." I am not getting any help or any answers. Then he said in verse 19, "Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall," all the bitterness he is going through from the people and from God not listening to his prayers. In verse 20, he said, "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me."

When God shut out his prayer, Jeremiah was not angry or upset. The ultimate result was that he was humbled: "When I remember all of this, my soul was humbled within me."

Think of Genesis chapter 32 and verse 10, where Jacob had been wrestling with the angel. He makes this statement: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." "I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies." When you stop and think about this, it is a miracle that God even blesses us, that God even allows us to live, much less listen to our prayers and answer them. We have sinned against Him so grievously. Thankfully, he has not dealt with us according to our sins, neither has he rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Jeremiah said, "Look, all of this I am going through, my soul is humbled within me." May I remind you that God said he is especially near to those who are of a humble heart and of a contrite spirit as well? Jeremiah was God's prophet, but it is equally true that he represented the nation, because Jeremiah is being identified with his people. He is suffering with the people.

It is like the high priest in the book of Exodus. He had all these special garments, including a shoulder harness; on each shoulder he had an onyx stone, a jewel, and the names of the twelve tribes were engraved on those twelve stones. Thus he bore the iniquity of those people on his shoulders. Here Jeremiah is also identified with the people, bearing their iniquity and suffering with them.

There is a special verse that explains this: Deuteronomy chapter 28, verse 23. Deuteronomy 28 contains the blessings and the curses. The first fourteen verses deal with the blessings, and from verse 15 to the end of the chapter deal with the curses. Here is one of those curses: “And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.” If the heaven over our head is brass, our prayers are not getting through.

Why God Refused to Hear: National Sin and Decreed Judgment

If the earth under our feet is iron, nothing is producing, nothing is growing, and everything is going wrong in our lives. We cannot get

through to God, and we cannot take care of ourselves. So we have to ask this question: Why would heaven be brass? Why would the earth be iron beneath our feet?

Look back in your Bible to Isaiah chapter 59, right before the book of Jeremiah, and begin with verse 1. Here is why heaven is oftentimes brass and the land under our feet is iron: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." God can save, and God can hear.

Why is He not saving? Why is He not hearing? "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity."

God says, "Look, the problem is not with me; the problem is with you. It is your sins that have separated us. My hand is just as able to save as always, and my ear is able to hear, but your sins have cut us off. Your sins have alienated me from you. It's just that simple."

God shut out Jeremiah's prayer, but He also shut out the prayers of the people in Judah and Jerusalem. I will show you that momentarily. He would not listen to any of them. Proverbs 28:13 is very, very important. I want you to think about this: "Whoso turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." "Whosoever turneth his ear away from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination." So what God is saying is this: if we're not going to listen to Him, He's not going to listen to us. If we turn our ear away from Him, even our prayer is a stench in His nostrils. God is not going to listen to us. I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the little book of Micah. You're going to find Micah after the book of Jonah and right before Nahum, but I want you to look in Micah chapter 6.

Part of the curse for disobedience was that the heavens would be brass and the earth under our feet would be iron. God has already said that His hand is not short, that it cannot save, and His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear. It is our sins. Keep in mind Proverbs 28:9

as well: "Whosoever turneth his ear away from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination."

Look at Micah chapter 6, beginning with verse 14. Here is what God tells the people: "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine."

Why? "For the statutes of Omri are kept." Omri was the father of King Ahab, and he was a wicked tyrant as well. The statutes are the laws, rules, and ordinances of Omri: "and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels;" that is, they were obeying humanistic, paganistic, idolatrous, wicked men. They walked in their counsels, "that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people."

Notice, then, that part of the curse is that the earth would be iron, just as the heavens would be brass. Judah and Jerusalem had totally and completely forsaken and rejected God and His law. They were following the statutes of men, disobeying God, and honoring men.

Now let me get to the point as to why God shut out the supplications of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. His heart was broken for his people, and they rejected his ministry. When they rejected his ministry, they rejected him; and when they rejected him, they rejected the God who sent him.

I could give you plenty of reasons why God does not answer prayer. In fact, I will remind you of a message I preached many years ago. You will find it, I am sure, on sermonaudio.com. The title is "Why God Does Not Answer Most Prayers." In that message, I give specific reasons and teach that very clearly.

Turn to 1 John, chapter 5, beginning with verse 13. 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Look at what he says: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” Let me repeat this: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” You are a believer, so he is writing to

you “that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Now watch verse 14: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.” Verse 15 says, “And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” Now let us go back to verse 14 again: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”

He says that if we ask anything according to God's will, he hears us. Here is a good question: How do you know what is according to his will? The answer is that his will is revealed in his Word. You remember that passage in Deuteronomy 29:29? “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Let me point out the fact that the key is our asking according to his will. If we ask according to his will, we know that he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, we know that we are going to have those petitions that we desire of him.

Now you have to determine what was God's will for Judah and Jerusalem. I just told you that God's will is revealed in his Word, so let me give you a good illustration. I can tell you assuredly that it is God's will to heal most of the time, but it is not God's will to heal all of the time. I can prove that it is God's will to heal most of the time because everybody in this room has been sick and gotten well multiple times over the years. But it is not God's will to heal every time, because if he did, no one would ever die. You see? So the truth of the matter is, we know God's love.

I tell people that I have prayed over some who looked as though they were on their deathbed. The next week they were up and about, going back to work and doing whatever they had always done. I have prayed for others who looked as though they might be pretending to be sick; they looked healthy enough to me. I prayed for them, and they died. It is God's will to heal most of the time, but not all the time, because the wages of sin is death, and we are going to die.

Do you realize that nations die? Societies die. Governments die. Families die. Individuals die. Look at the nations you read about in the Old Testament. They are no longer around; they are dead. What about the languages known as dead languages? Nobody speaks them anymore because the people who spoke them are dead.

So, what was God's will concerning Judah and Jerusalem? Jeremiah chapter 13, verse 13, shows that Judah and Jerusalem were involved: "Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness. And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the Lord: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them."

What was God's will concerning Judah and Jerusalem? They would be destroyed. In Jeremiah 15:3, God says, "And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy." God said, "I'm going to destroy them. I'm going to appoint four ways of destruction."

Here is why He was willing to destroy them. Jeremiah 15:6–7 says, "Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee. I am weary with repenting. And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways."

God says, “Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land,” that is Judah and Jerusalem, “and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.”

So it was God’s will that Judah and Jerusalem, as well as the surrounding nations, be destroyed because of their sin and rebellion against Him. It is impossible to change the will of God. It is impossible to change the decree of God. Prayer does not change

things. Prayer changes people. Prayer is not an instrument to get God to change His mind. Prayer is an instrument to accomplish the will of God, to bring the will of God into fruition. I hope you are beginning to see the heart of Jeremiah in the fact that he wanted and longed for the salvation of his people and the salvation of his nation, and yet God said they were beyond salvation.

"I am going to destroy them. It is my will that they be destroyed. I'm going to bring Nebuchadnezzar. He's going to accomplish that which I please." Was Jeremiah left in the dark concerning this? The answer is no. God spoke plainly to Jeremiah concerning this destruction. In Jeremiah 7:14, God told him, "Therefore will I do unto this house," that is, the temple, "which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim." Assyria got them.

Look at verse 16 and see what God tells Jeremiah: "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee." Is that not plain enough? God said, "Jeremiah, do not pray for this people. I'm not going to hear you." When Jeremiah said, "I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer," God was saying, "I'm not going to listen to you. You're wasting your breath."

Now look in Jeremiah chapter 11, verse 14: "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble." God said, "Jeremiah, I'm not going to hear you, and I'm not going to hear this people when they pray. I am going to destroy them." God would not hear Jeremiah's prayers on behalf of these people because He had already decreed to destroy them.

Look in Jeremiah chapter 15 to see how serious God was. Jeremiah 15:1 says, "Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me," those were the two greatest prayer warriors in the Old Testament, "yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord; Such as are for death,

to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy." He said, "I wouldn't listen to them if Moses and Samuel stood before me. I would not hear them. I would not listen to them whatsoever."

The Limits of Prayer and the Urgency of Repentance

Jeremiah really wanted to pray for the people. God said, "I am going to allow you to pray, but you have to pray what I tell you to pray." Jeremiah 14:10 says, "Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the Lord doth not accept them."

"He will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins." Then said the Lord unto me, "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence."

Look in verse 11: "Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good." Jeremiah, you want to pray for this people. I will allow you to pray for them, but you must pray that I will destroy them, because that is exactly what I am going to do. Pray not for their good. Now, listen to this application and think with me.

There is a time when God's mercies are no longer available. There is a time when prayer will not work. God raises up nations and God brings them down. If you read through the book of Jeremiah, God said to the king, the queen, and the princes, "Humble yourselves, obey my voice," and they would not. It is not just nations that God destroys; it is governments, societies, families, and churches. Read Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the letters to the seven churches. We normally take this passage and apply it to individuals, but it can be applied to families, societies, and nations as well.

In Isaiah 55:6–7, God says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto

the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Notice what He said: "Let us seek the Lord while he may be found"; there is a time when He will not be found. "Let us call upon him while he is near"; there is a time when He will not be near.

As I said last week, if you were trying to deceive someone or really hurt someone, and you had a plan that would deceive and hurt them, and your plan failed, you would be disappointed. But you would not be brokenhearted, grieved, or crying your eyeballs out. What gives you a broken heart? When you know the truth and people will not listen; when you know judgment is coming, yet people are unafraid of a sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, majestic, eternal God of heaven and earth. They will not listen; they will not bow. That is heart-wrenching. That breaks your heart. When it is your family, friends, neighbors, loved ones, or even strangers, Jeremiah had his service rejected by the people and his supplications refused by God because he still wanted to pray for their salvation. God said, "It's too late."

"I'm going to destroy them. Do not pray for their good." We need to learn this nationally, governmentally, familially, societally, ecclesiastically, and individually. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Conclusion and Prayer

Salvation is in God alone, in God's time alone. When you pass a certain point, there is nothing left but judgment. Jeremiah was broken because he knew that judgment was imminent.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your word. We pray, Father, that you would indeed give us a broken and contrite spirit—first of all, over our sins, over our family sins, over our church sins, over our societal sins, over our governmental sins, and over our national sins. Lord, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra all confessed the sins of their nation, the sins of their people. Lord, give us a broken heart. We know your word is

truth, and we know that judgment is hanging over our heads like a Damocles sword. Unless we repent and turn back to Thee and submit and obey Thee, like Judah in Jerusalem, like Israel in the north, we'll be judged.

Because Thou art immutable and Thine does not change, neither do sound judgments. Give us, Lord, Your grace and Your mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

The Cry of a Broken Heart

Part Three

SCRIPTURE READING - Lamentations 3:21-41 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

"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. He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smited him. He is filled full with reproach, for the Lord will not cast off forever. But though he cause grief, yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, to crush under his feet all the

> prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, to subvert a man in his cause the Lord approveth not. Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good. Wherefore doth the living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord."

"Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet, and the Book of Lamentations gives us an absolutely wonderful picture of a broken heart in the life of Jeremiah. We know that God is particularly close to those who have a broken and contrite heart, for the Word of God says so repeatedly. Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is nigh unto them of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

Jeremiah's heart was broken not just because of the sins, rebellion, and wickedness of the people, but also because of the false prophets who were lying and causing the people to believe a deceit. He was also broken over the fact that God himself was rejected and his law was rejected. He was broken over the fact that his message was not being received.

Review of Jeremiah's Broken Heart

No one would listen to him. In fact, the truth of the matter is, when you look at the Book of Jeremiah, he was basically an intruder, a cast out, and a castaway. No one wanted him. No one wanted to listen to him. Jeremiah was broken because he was unable to help his people. He did not save them, and he certainly did not save the nation, because God destroyed them. Thus, the first reason Jeremiah had a broken heart was the rejection of his service.

The second reason was the refusal of his supplications. God would not hear his prayers for his people. The people had reached the point of no return. There is a point of no return. There is a time when God is not going to be merciful. There is a time when prayer is absolutely useless and God is not going to answer that prayer. These people had reached the point of no return. They had broken the covenant in every respect, and there was just no hope for them.

Jeremiah chapter 5 shows this. God told Jeremiah, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth,

“And I will pardon it. And though they say the Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely. O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth?”

Now look what he says concerning these people: “Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved. Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return. Therefore I said, surely these are poor, they are foolish, for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.”

He says, I am looking at all these common, everyday people. They are poor; they do not understand. Then, in verse 5, he says, “I will get me unto the great men and will speak unto them, these educated men, rulers, for they have known the way of the Lord and the judgment of their God.” But these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds.

So God told him in verse 1 to run to and fro. If he could find one man—just one in the entire city, in the entire country—who would execute judgment and seek the truth, God would pardon the entire city and country. But he could not, because every stratum of society was corrupted.

In Jeremiah 5:31, he says, “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: but what will ye do in the end thereof?” Nobody wanted to listen, and no one wanted to repent. They wanted to maintain the status quo, regardless of how evil and wicked it was. Yet God was willing to spare them if He found one righteous man—and He did not. Now, may I remind you that God told Jeremiah not to pray for these people.

Because he determined to destroy them. In Jeremiah chapter 7 and verse 16, God said, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee." God would not listen to Jeremiah if he prayed for this people.

Then, in Jeremiah 11 and verse 14, God again said, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them," and added, "for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble." God would not listen to Jeremiah, and God would not listen to the people. That is why, in Jeremiah chapter 15, even if Samuel and Moses stood before him, God would not be entreated for this people.

Finally, in Jeremiah chapter 14, verses 10 through 12, God said, all right, Jeremiah, I am going to let you pray. But here is what you pray: Do not pray for their good. In other words, pray that I am going to destroy them, because that is exactly what I am going to do. He said, "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence."

The Remembrance of the Sovereign

Jeremiah was thoroughly discouraged at this particular point. He was rejected by the people and refused by God as far as praying for those people was concerned. But when you look down in Lamentations 3 and verse 21, Jeremiah makes a wonderful and very astounding statement: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope."

How could Jeremiah have hope in a situation like this? What gave him hope in such a desperate and depressing situation? The answer is the remembrance of the Sovereign. This passage has real significance when understood in its context. Jeremiah was desolate, in despair, rejected by his countrymen, and God was refusing to hear his supplications. No one wanted to listen to him or help him. Everyone was against him. That is enough to drive anyone insane and make him truly want to quit.

Having been in the ministry now nearly sixty-one years—it will be sixty-one next month—I find it absolutely astounding that many pastors retain and remain in the ministry for a long, long time. Most people have no idea what a preacher goes through, especially what a pastor goes through. I laugh every time I think about this. I remember when I was a boy, I wanted to be a preacher. I really did.

But the reason I wanted to be a preacher was because they only worked on Sunday and Wednesday, and you could play the rest of the week.

I found out that certainly was not true, not by any stretch of the imagination whatsoever. Here is the real difference in men who are used of God. Those men who are really used of God may be discouraged, rejected, hated, despised, or ignored, but they cannot quit. They cannot give up. They cannot stop.

Even Jeremiah wanted to quit and tried to quit, but he could not. Jeremiah 20:7 says, "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed." He continued, "I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me." Nobody was listening; nobody wanted the truth. "For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily."

Then he said, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." He was going to quit. "But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones." "And I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." He heard the defaming of many: "Fear on every side." His familiars watched for his halting, expecting that he would be enticed so they could prevail against him and take revenge. "But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one."

"Therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten." Jeremiah said it was so bad that he wanted to quit and tried to quit, but God's word was as a burning fire in him. He was weary with forbearing, and he could not quit.

Jeremiah found nothing in his circumstances that would encourage him. He found nothing in his situation that would comfort him. Moreover, Jeremiah found nothing in himself that would comfort or encourage him. This is the problem that many pastors have, and it is also the problem many Christians have. When we get in trouble or affliction, we start looking around for help: Steve cannot help me, Dinah cannot help me, and Lorraine cannot help me.

Since we cannot find any outside help, we begin to look inside. And guess what? There is nothing inside us that will help us either. So here is what we do: when we get in trouble and affliction, we start looking around or looking within instead of looking up. David said it like this in Psalm 121, verses 1 and 2: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” He said, “I've got to look to the Lord. I cannot look to anyone else or anything else.”

Jeremiah then, in Lamentations chapter 3, had what you and I would call a wake-up moment. By faith, he saw the sovereign God and recognized His power, His grace, and His mercy. So he said in verse 21, “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.”

He was not calling his circumstances to mind. He was not calling his situation to mind. He was not recalling his rejection or his feelings of despair and desperation of mind. What he was recalling to mind was the greatness and power of God, and the mercies, compassions, and lovingkindness of God.

The problem is that we often forget God. Look what he said: “This I recall to my mind.” Why had he not thought about it earlier? Maybe his back had not been up against the wall sufficiently. But, “This I recall to my mind.” David refers to our forgetfulness and lack of trust in God as infirmity. He refers to this mentality of looking to God last and forgetting Him as an infirmity. In Psalm 77, David describes this infirmity.

The Infirmity of Forgetting God

David said, “I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.” He listened to me. “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled. I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.”

Now look at his questions: “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.” This is what most Christians and most pastors go through and experience. We get in such trouble that we think God has forsaken us and forgotten all about us.

But look what he says: “And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.” I am going to recall what God has done for me. “I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?” He said, This is my infirmity. I forgot the wonders of God, the works of God, and to meditate upon Him. This is my sickness and my infirmity.

The Hebrew word for infirmity is kalah. It refers to one who is wounded, sick, grieved, pained, weak, and full of sore travail. Whenever we forget the goodness and greatness, the majesty and compassions of God, we are in deep trouble.

Return to Lamentations chapter 3. This is what he recalls to mind, and this is what gave him hope: “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” What does he recall? “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 Multitude of God's Mercies

Our Heavenly Father is not simply the fountain of mercies; He is also the Father of mercies. In 2 Corinthians 1:3, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” In Lamentations 3:22, the word mercies is plural, just as it is in 2 Corinthians 1:3. The plurality of God’s mercies means not only an abundance, a multiplicity, but also varied and variegated mercies—mercies of different kinds.

The Apostles in the New Testament were much like Jeremiah in the Old Testament and those prophets as well. The Apostle Paul

wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” When you hear someone say that they are troubled, perplexed, in despair, and persecuted, you may think they are the lowest of the low. Paul said, No; we may have gone through those things, but those things were over, and God delivered us out of them. He was not saying that trouble, perplexity, despair, and persecution had destroyed him. He was saying that God had brought him through them.

Here is what he is saying in Lamentations 3:21-23: “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.”

As bad as things are, it is simply the mercies of God that they are not worse. We may be afflicted, but by His grace we are not consumed. Whatever state we find ourselves in, no matter how bad it is, except for God’s mercies, God’s compassions, and God’s lovingkindnesses, everything could be a thousand times worse. Therefore, our hope is in Him—in His mercies, His compassions, and His lovingkindness.

Psalm 103:8 says, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.”

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." I love verse 10: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

Listen to what Matthew Henry said on this passage: "We all owe it to the sparing mercy of God that we are not consumed." He goes on: "Others have been consumed around us. And ourselves have been in the consuming, and yet we are not consumed. We're out of the grave. We're out of hell. Had we been dealt with according to our sins, we should have been consumed a long time ago. But we have been dealt

with according to God's mercies, and we are bound to acknowledge his praise." We have been into consuming, and yet we're not consumed.

Alice and I were talking on the way to church this morning. She has a high school reunion coming up, and she told me that five of her classmates had died this year—and this is only the fourth month. We have been consuming, and yet we are not consumed ourselves.

Has the truth of God's tender mercies, lovingkindnesses, and compassions stirred your heart? They need to. We tend to think that God is far off or that we cannot discern him. Yet Scripture tells us that his compassions, tender mercies, and lovingkindnesses are new every morning. Each morning that you awake, each day that you have life, and each day that you are not in the grave is because of God's compassion, tender mercies, and lovingkindnesses. The very fact that you are alive right now, out of the grave and out of punishment, is a testimony to the mercies of God.

When our comforts fail, the compassions of God do not fail. The problem is that we do not discern His multitudinous mercies, acknowledge them, or give thanks for them. Yet Scripture tells us they are new every morning. Why are they new every morning even though we are unfaithful? The answer comes back because God is faithful. He is the faithful God. Deuteronomy chapter 7, verse 9, says, "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." When you get to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 9, the Scripture says that "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Even the reason you were called into fellowship with Jesus Christ was because of the faithfulness of God. God is faithful to His covenantal promises.

God's Faithfulness in Trials

You need to memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." The word temptation there refers to a trial, affliction, trouble, or travail. There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. Usually, when we get into trouble, heartache, or affliction, we begin whining

and complaining, saying, “Nobody is going through what I am going through. Nobody is suffering like I am suffering.” That is not true. Everything that happens to us is common to others.

God does not put any supernatural burdens upon us. Listen to what He said: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful." Think about this: "but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."

The faithfulness of God is not going to put more on you than you can handle. Whatever your affliction, soreness, trouble, or trial, if God allowed it to come upon you, you can handle it. God is faithful. He is never going to put more on us than we can handle.

"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." God always has a way of escape for us. Usually that way of escape is through submission and obedience, but it is still a way of escape.

We need to be cognizant of the fact that we are experiencing God's mercies and compassions every morning. Whatever hard things we suffer, we must never entertain hard thoughts against God. We must be ever ready to maintain that He is merciful, loving, gracious, kind, and faithful. He has not dealt with us according to that which we deserve. He has not given us justice.

We must see His mercies everywhere—in our lives and in the lives of others. The problem is that we simply do not recognize God's mercies. We take so much for granted, and yet His mercies are multitudinous every morning.

In Lamentations chapter 3, the writer says, “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” What did he recall? “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.” In verses 24 and 25 he says, “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.”

The Lord as Our Portion

Consider the truth in verse 24: “The Lord is my portion.” Do you remember what God said to Aaron, his sons, and the whole tribe of Levi? In Numbers chapter 18 and verse 20, God said, “And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.” The Levites were not receiving the portion of Judah, Naphtali, or Simeon. They were not receiving land. They were receiving God: “I am your inheritance. I am your part.”

David said in Psalm 16 and verse 5, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.” In Psalm 73 and verse 26, he said, “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” David also said in Psalm 119 verse 57, “Thou art my portion, O Lord.”

I have said that I would keep thy words. Stop and think about this. If the Lord is our portion, if he is our inheritance, and that’s what the Bible says, even in Romans 8, we should be satisfied with our portion. We should never want any more. A little child was supposed to quote Psalm 23:1: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

But she got it mixed up and said, “The Lord is my shepherd, and that’s all I want.” That’s true. If he is our portion, if he is our inheritance, that should be all that we want.

You have to grasp these truths, these principles that Jeremiah is here enunciating. Remember that this preacher, this prophet of God, was thoroughly discouraged, depressed, and desolate. His own countrymen hated and despised him. They imprisoned him, threw him in a dungeon, sunk up to his armpits in mud, and tried to murder him. Yet all he would do was pray for them. And God said, “No, no, no, I’m not going to listen to your supplications.”

Here is a man at the end of his rope, teaching us something that we must embrace and learn to apply. In verse 24, he said, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul. Therefore will I hope in him." The only one in whom we can have hope is God himself.

Notice that he said, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul," not my mouth, but my soul. The Hebrew word for soul is nephesh, referring to the soul, the whole life, the appetite, the activity of the mind, the activity of the will, and that which breathes. In other words, "The Lord is my portion" with everything that is in me. Any ability I have, any mind that I have, any will that I have, and any affection that I have—the Lord is my portion. Everything in him claims God as his portion, as his inheritance; therefore, he was willing to wait on him and hope in him.

David said it a little differently. We read in Psalm 42:1, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." What makes a hart—or, as we would say, a deer—pant after the water brooks? Men all over this country hunt deer with dogs. I do not particularly enjoy or like that type of hunting, but the dogs get on the trail of the deer and run it down, especially if they swap back and forth. Imagine a deer trying to outrun the dogs, being chased for forty-five minutes or perhaps an hour. He is thirsty and ready for the water brooks.

So David said, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." In other words, "Lord, I'm as thirsty for you as that chased hart is for the water brooks. I want you. I want all that is in me to want you."

If you do not wish to stumble, fall, or be defeated, you must be fully persuaded that God is your portion and that he is your portion in every area of life. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

SCRIPTURE READING - Romans 8:31-39 (KJV)

God is our portion in life and in death. Paul writes:

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

If God is on our side, it does not matter who is against us. We can also swap that around: if God be against us, it does not matter who is for us. If God is for us, who can be against us? It would not do any good for anyone to be against us because they would be against God at the same time.

> "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"
>
> "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."
>
> Now watch this argument. Look at the questions:
>
> "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."
>
> But look what he says now: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."
>
> "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
>
> If God is our portion, and He is for us, and none of these things can ever separate us from the love of Christ, what more could we want? I have thought about this many times.

I have no idea how much money George Soros has. Billions, I am sure. I would not trade the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, or even the truth that I know, for all of his billions. Stop and think about this: the Lord is our portion.

Years ago, I read about a young widow woman who was burying her young husband. After the funeral, one well-meaning lady came to her and said, trying to reassure her, "Well, we know God did not do this. God did not take his life. The devil did this." The young widow looked at her and said, "Please, please do not say that. If you take away from me the sovereignty of God, you destroy all of my hope and all of my peace."

The Bible says that our soul, our life, is in his hands; he holds our lives in his hand. Our times are in his hand. Everything is in his hand, and nothing is ever going to separate us from the love, mercy,

and compassion of God. It does not matter what our circumstances or situations are. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. He has given us his Son. He spared not his own Son. How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Now look, if you would, in verse 26, Lamentations chapter 3. He said in verse 25, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him." When we are in affliction, tests, and trials, we need to learn to wait and be patient. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." In other words, he is talking about waiting for deliverance. Whatever affliction, test, or trial you are in, it is good that you wait patiently and quietly before him.

Bearing the Yoke and Humbling Ourselves

There should be no murmuring, complaining, bellyaching, or self-pity sessions. None of that. We know that we are sinners and that we have sinned. Then, in verse 27, he says, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." What in the world is he talking about?

You really need to learn this when you are young. It will help you throughout your life. In Bible times, they plowed with oxen. To train a young ox, they took a full-grown ox and put the yoke on him. Then they took that same yoke, made it smaller, and put it around the neck of the young ox. The young ox walked beside the full-grown ox, while all the work was done by the full-grown ox. What was happening to the young ox? He was being broken to the yoke. He was being trained to be in submission. He was being trained to be obedient. Therefore, it is good that we bear the yoke in our youth. It is better if we learn to submit and obey when we are young. It will help us throughout all our lives.

Bearing our yoke may not be pleasant, but it certainly is profitable, honorable, and becoming. Moreover, it is our duty and responsibility to quietly and patiently bear whatever afflictions God is pleased to lay upon us, for it is for our good and for His glory.

In verses 28 through 30, he says, “He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.” Or, He has placed it upon him. “He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.” Think about this: “He putteth his mouth in the dust. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him.” “He is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever.” He said, “He is filled full with reproach.”

Matthew Henry, commenting on these verses, said, “When we are sedate and quiet under our afflictions, when we sit alone and keep silence, do not run to and fro into all companies with our complaints, aggravating our calamities, and quarreling with the disposals of Providence concerning us, but retire into privacy, that we may in a day of adversity consider, sit alone,”

That we may converse with God and commune with our hearts, silencing all discontented, distrustful thoughts, listen now, and lay our hand upon our mouth, as Aaron, who, under a very severe trial—the death of his sons—held his peace. We must keep silence under the yoke as those that have borne it upon us, not willfully pulled it upon our own necks, but patiently submitted to it when God has laid it upon us. When those who are afflicted in their youth accommodate themselves to their afflictions, fit their necks to the yoke, and study to answer God's end in afflicting them, they will find it good for them to bear it, for it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those that are exercised thereby.

When we are humble and patient under our affliction, he gets good by the yoke who puts his mouth in the dust. He not only lays his hand upon his mouth in token of submission to the will of God in his affliction, but puts it in the dust as a token of sorrow, shame, and self-loathing at the remembrance of sin, as one perfectly reduced and reclaimed and brought, as those that are vanquished, to lick the dust.

He quotes Psalm 72 and verse 9: “We must therefore humble ourselves, if so be there may be hope. If there be any way to acquire and secure good hope under our afflictions, it is this way. And yet we must be very modest in our expectations of it, must look for it with a ‘it may be,’ as those who own ourselves are utterly unworthy of it. Those who are truly humbled for sin will be glad to obtain a good

hope through grace upon any terms, though they put their mouth in the dust for it. And those who would have hope must do so and ascribe it to the free grace if they have any encouragements which may keep their hearts from sinking into the dust when they put their mouths there."

Just be humble. Be willing to put your mouth in the dust, because God has still not dealt with us according to our sins, neither has he rewarded us according to our iniquities. What good is it for us to quietly and patiently obey our yokes, yield to them, and submit to them without griping or complaining, while humbling ourselves before God? Look in Lamentations chapter 3, beginning in verse 31.

God Does Not Afflict Willingly

"For the Lord will not cast off for ever." Your affliction is not going to last forever. I remember reading years ago about an old black preacher whom someone asked for his favorite verse in the Bible. He said, "My favorite verse is actually part of a verse that occurs many times in the Bible." When asked what part, he replied, "Well, it only happens to be four words: 'And it came to pass.' It didn't come to stay. It came to pass."

Stop and think about that. It does not matter what our afflictions are; they are not going to stay with us forever. This is what he is saying: "For the Lord will not cast off for ever." Now watch verse 32: "But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." Here is why, and I am going to speak on this next week: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men, to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not."

"Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Then he says, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord."

"Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." Notice especially verse 33: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor

grieve the children of men." God delights in obedience, not in affliction; in submission, not in grief. He is more ready to forgive than to afflict. Therefore, we should be more ready to repent than to rebel. Here is our hope: we must remember the sovereign. "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."

Applications and Conclusion

Regardless of our circumstances and situations, we must learn to rejoice in the tender mercies, lovingkindnesses, and compassions of our Lord. It will make our lives more enjoyable as well as blessed as we look for every day and see His mercies and His compassions upon us. When we discern special mercies and special compassions, we should be able to give Him special praise and special glory.

We should thank and praise Him for things we take for granted. Have you ever noticed that we take sleep and rest for granted? As I get older, I do not sleep like Steve does. Many times I am awake at three or four o'clock in the morning and cannot go back to sleep. I do not necessarily get up right away; I may simply lie there and pray. If I am awake at three or four o'clock in the morning, I may need a nap during the day. I have learned to really appreciate sleep, and especially rest as well. Think about our health. We take that for granted, too.

We take our family, spouses, finances, friends, love, and fellowship for granted. All these familiar mercies, we think we are going to have continually, all the time. We even take a hot bath for granted. As I have soaked in a hot bath, I have often thought about the millions of people who could not and do not have access to a hot bath. That is a mercy of God, and we take it for granted. We take it for granted that we can have a garden, that we can have a cow, or we can have Vincent. We take all that for granted. Instead of taking these things for granted, we should praise God for all His tender mercies, lovingkindnesses, and compassions.

Whenever you and I are discouraged, depressed, or think nobody loves us and nobody cares for us, we need to memorize and quote these verses: 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."

We also need to remember Genesis 32:10, where Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Stop and think about that. God has been so merciful, so kind, and so gracious to each one of us.

Our Lord has promised this. It does not matter if you are in surgery, if you are a widow or a widower, or what your circumstances and situation may be. He said in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We are never alone or forsaken. We should never consider ourselves desolate or desperate, because our Heavenly Father is always with us. Our Lord Jesus Christ is always with us. Our Holy Spirit is always with us. We are never, ever forsaken. It looks as if, in our day and time, the situation and circumstances in which Jeremiah found himself are going to be very prevalent in our day and time as well.

How desperately we need these truths: "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." Think about that hymn: "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!" Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee.

We thank you for your word. We pray, Lord, that you would help us, teach us to be thankful, grateful, and appreciative, and to recognize and acknowledge the multitudinous mercies, lovingkindnesses, and compassions that you bestow upon us. Forgive us, Lord, for taking thee, and all thy multitudinous mercies and compassions, for granted. We assume that we shall have tomorrow, yet thou didst say, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Lord, help us seek thy greatness, mercy, compassions, and love in our lives daily, that we may praise thee and give thee thanks. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

The Cry of a Broken Heart

Part Four

Introduction and Review

Lamentations 3:33 says, “For he, that is God, doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” This is the fourth and final part of this brief study in Lamentations 3. I used this verse last week, but I did not expound it, and I want to do so now. I trust that this brief series has been helpful and applicable to our lives as well.

One of our problems is that we become so involved in our lives, especially with our work, our sleep, our routines, and even our recreation, that oftentimes we do not take the time to think, meditate, contemplate, or consider what is happening unto us and why it is happening. Consequently, we do not readily become broken, contrite, and humbled before God. Neither do we desire to repent easily and quickly. We are quite unlike the prophet Jeremiah. He was cast into a ministry and into a situation where brokenness was not only necessary, but seemingly impossible to escape as well.

Let me remind you of the three main points we have covered so far. In the very first message of this series, “The Cry of a Broken Heart,” I pointed out the rejection of Jeremiah’s service. His entire ministry was basically one of rejection. The people did not want the truth. They did not desire the truth. They did not want repentance. They were happy and content exactly the way they were, in their idolatry and in their sins.

They did not want their status quo rocked. They may have been wicked, and they may have been wrong, but it was a wicked and wrong status quo that was theirs, and they did not want anyone to interfere with it. They rejected Jeremiah and rejected his ministry and would not listen to him at all. They hated him, ridiculed him, and mocked him. They not only imprisoned him, but put him in a dungeon, with mire and mud up to his elbows and, as one might say, up to his armpits. They even tried to murder him. Obviously, they rejected his service.

The second reason Jeremiah had a broken and contrite heart was the refusal of his supplications. God would not hear him as he prayed for these people. Scripture makes clear that it was God’s will that the nation be destroyed because of its sin and rebellion. They were completely rebellious against God.

This is why I quoted Jeremiah chapter 5, especially verse 1, when God told Jeremiah to run to and fro through the whole city. If he could find one man who would execute judgment and do that which was right, God would pardon the entire city. But Jeremiah did not find even one man. The entire society was completely corrupt.

Although God refused the supplications of Jeremiah, He did not leave Jeremiah in the dark. In Jeremiah chapters 7, 11, and 14, He said, "Pray not for this people, for I will not hear thee." He also said that He would not hear those people when they cried.

This is known as the lex talionis, Latin for the law of retribution, where God makes the punishment fit the crime. They refused to listen to God, and God then refused to listen to them. We do not like to hear it, but it is true: there is a time when prayer is useless. There is a time when mercy comes to an end, and the only thing left is judgment.

That is exactly what happened to the land of Judah and Jerusalem during the days of Jeremiah. In Micah chapter 3 and verse 4, God said, "Then shall they cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them. He will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doing." God says they shall cry unto Him, but He will not hear them. Why? Because they did not hear Him.

Then, in Zephaniah chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, God says, "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city." God was calling Jerusalem not only filthy and polluted, but also an oppressing city. She obeyed not the voice, received not correction, trusted not in the Lord, and drew not near to her God. She would not listen, turn, or repent.

You can see why Jeremiah was broken and cast down. Yet what gave Jeremiah hope? He could not hope in himself or in the people. Looking to Jeremiah chapter 3 and verse 21, he said, "This I recall to mind, therefore have I hope." What did he recall to mind?

Reflecting Upon the Solace of God

It is the Lord's mercies that were not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. So, as bad as things were in Judah and Jerusalem, things could have been worse. They were not worse, but only because of the grace, mercy, lovingkindness, compassions, and faithfulness of God. God is sovereign; He has absolutely everything under control.

Our fourth and final point is based upon verse 33: "For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Go back to verse 31 and look at this in its context: "For the Lord will not cast off forever, but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For," here is why, "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." This fourth point concerns reflecting upon the solace of God.

The Solace of God

The word solace refers to that which is comforting, consoling, and cordial. We do not use cordial as frequently as they did in the old

days, but it is a very good word. It refers to that which is grateful, gracious, delightful, heartfelt, and affectionate. When we greet each other, especially longtime friends, we greet them cordially. We not only shake their hand; we hug their neck. We smile, glad to see them and happy to have them in our presence. We invite them to dinner and do whatever we can to make them comfortable and happy. That is a very cordial greeting. Yet we have failed to understand that our Heavenly Father is also cordial and full of solace.

I remember reading years ago about one of the old Puritans. He preached a message called “The Divine Cordials,” speaking of divine comforts or divine consolations. Before we get started, consider this question: Have you ever entertained mean, vile, worthless, and even blasphemous thoughts against our Heavenly Father? Listen carefully. I did not ask whether you have ever cursed our Heavenly Father, openly denied Him, or ridiculed Him. I asked whether you have ever entertained thoughts against God that are unbiblical, humanistic, and ungodly. I can ask this another way.

Complaining Against Providence

Have you ever complained, whined, and bellyached about things in your life that you do not understand and are perplexed about? You may not have attacked the person of God, but you may attack God indirectly as well as directly. So many times, when we whine, grumble, and complain, we are doing so at the providence of God.

You cannot separate the person of God from the providence of God. There is no such thing as luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world ruled by God. The only things that come to pass in time and history are those God has ordained from eternity. Therefore, God is absolutely sovereign; He is in control, and nothing is outside His control. If you postulate that something exists outside God's control, then what you are saying is that there is another god, because God is not God if He is not sovereign. Whatever is outside His control would truly be God as well.

When we talk about God's providence, we are talking about those incidents, happenings, things, and issues that God allows and even brings to pass in our lives for our good and His glory. Each one in this room could probably quote Romans 8:28: "And we know that all

things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

Notice the words, "all things." That means what we would consider bad and distasteful, as well as what would be considered good, grand, and glorious. God is able to make all things work out for us. Even those things that are distasteful, distressful, and straining our lives, God can make work out for our good. There are no accidents in a world ruled by God.

One does not have to attack God personally; all he has to do is despise God's providence. You cannot separate God and His providence. When we begin moaning, complaining, griping, and bellyaching over what we find disagreeable in our lives, we are indeed complaining against God.

It is true that each of us has our own troubles, sorrows, afflictions, and trials. But you have to understand this: most of the troubles and problems that you and I have, we bring upon ourselves. We bring them upon ourselves by our disobedience, our lack of understanding and application of biblical truth. All God does is allow us to reap that which we have sown.

You remember Galatians chapter 6, verses 7 and 8: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.” If we sow in the flesh, we should not be surprised if we reap in the flesh. Most of our problems stem from our own disobedience, our own pride, and our own rebellion. It is merely the fact that we are reaping that which we have sown.

Have mean, vile, and blasphemous thoughts about God entered into your mind? When you find yourself in a very uncomfortable and disagreeable circumstance or situation, have you ever thought, “Why is this happening to me? I don’t deserve this. I haven’t done anything to bring this upon myself. Why is God allowing this to come to me?”

Whenever we get into circumstances and situations like that, we never think, “I deserve this and even much worse, but God has been merciful to me.” We think that we are totally and completely innocent, and we try to blame everything on God.

Consider Genesis chapter 42. Jacob had sent his sons down into Egypt to get grain. Those boys did not recognize Joseph, their brother, who was now second in command in the whole country of Egypt. When his brothers appeared before him, although he understood what they were saying, he spoke to them through an interpreter—Egyptian interpreted into Hebrew for those young men to hear. He told them that they were spies, and they replied, “No, no, we’re not spies.” So he let them get all the grain they wanted.

He instructed his steward to put their money back in the mouth of the sack. So they got down the road and began to undo one of the sacks to get grain to feed their animals, and found the sack of money. Genesis chapter 42 and verse 28 records what the boy said: “And he said to his brethren, ‘My money is restored, and lo, it is even in my sack.’ And their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, ‘What is this that God hath done unto us?’” What?

They never considered that they lied to their father, deceived him, and sold their brother into Egypt as a slave. I've thought about this so many times. Joseph was seventeen when they sold him. He was thirty when he appeared before Pharaoh. There were seven good years of gathering, and then there were seven bad years of famine. So you go from seventeen to thirty, plus seven, plus maybe one or two more. For all those years, they made their father think that Joseph was dead. I've often thought, I don't know how I could have forgiven my sons for doing something like that to me.

I mean, that is really low down. That's because they hated Joseph. They hated him that much. And so now they're asking, "What is this that God has done unto us?" When in reality, they're simply reaping that which they had sown.

Now, here's the truth. No matter our problems, no matter our troubles, no matter our trials, no matter our sins, we always wish to blame everything that happens to us that we do not like and that we disagree with. We either want to blame it upon God or upon others.

The hardest words for you and I to speak oftentimes are these: "I have sinned. I have done wrong. It is my fault. I brought this upon myself. I disobeyed God."

Jeremiah is preaching and warning the people, telling them all about their sins. Look at Jeremiah chapter 8, verse 4. God says, "Moreover, thou shalt say to them, Thus saith the Lord, Shall they fall and not arise? Shall he turn away and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return."

Here it is: "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright. No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his course as the horse rushes into battle." In other words, "I haven't done anything to deserve this. What have I done?" Yes, they were idolaters. Yes, they were sinners. Yes, they were wicked. Yes, they were violating God's covenant. But here they're asking, "What have I done?"

And that's the attitude of most people: "What have I done?"

You cannot separate the person of God and the providence of God, because the providence of God happens to be the act of God. In Numbers 11:1, the Scripture says, “And when the people complained,” note the word complained, “and when the people complained, it displeased the Lord, and the Lord heard it.” He heard all their griping, bellyaching, and whining. “And his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.” Note that they were complaining and griping, and it displeased the Lord.

To give you a fuller understanding, look in your Bibles at Numbers 21, verse 5: “And the people spake against God and against Moses.” Note that they spake against God and against Moses. “Wherefore have you brought us out of Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water.” Moreover, “our soul loatheth this light bread,” manna. “And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.” Look at this: “and the people spake against God and against Moses.” Why were they speaking against God? Why were they speaking against Moses? Because they did not like the route that God had led them.

They did not consider that God had first led them the long way around, as the Bible tells you, lest they should see war and be

discouraged, because they were not sufficiently trained to fight at that particular time. Now they were in the wilderness because of their sin and rebellion. And so it was God's fault: they did not like His leading them in that direction.

Moreover, they complained about the manna that God supplied. The word manna literally means “what is it?” They did not know what it was when they saw it. They took that manna, ground it, and ate it. The Bible said it was white and round like the coriander seed, tasted like honey, and was kind of like a wafer of some type.

But notice, it was the perfect food. I mean, God was giving that food for them to sustain them. What do they say? You read the book of Numbers yourself: “We want those garlics and leeks that we left in Egypt.” They wanted the stinky stuff. They did not want the stuff that God had provided for them right there. And so they were bellyaching, whining, loathing the direction of God in their lives, and loathing the provision of God in their lives.

The truth of the matter is, I am afraid that all of us are guilty in this respect. Many times we just get fed up with what is going on. We do not like what is happening to us. We do not like what we have or what we do not have, and we gripe and complain.

In Acts chapter 13, Paul was preaching. The Bible says, “And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.” They wanted to come and hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, those who were coming to hear the preaching, “they were filled with envy and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.” Because of their envy, they were contradicting the truth of Paul’s preaching. They were saying the opposite. They were saying that Paul was wrong and that they were right.

Blaspheming God Through Contradiction

They spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. So they were blaspheming God. Take note of the fact that speaking against God and His Word, as well as His providence, is not only contradicting God, but it is also blaspheming Him. We have to understand that there are times in

our lives when we are chastised, when we are chastened, and when we are whipped.

The Bible says in Micah chapter 6 and verse 9, “Hear ye the rod and him who hath appointed it.” So when we refuse as God’s children to hear His Word, we get the rod. We get whipped. We get chastised.

The Word of God says very plainly in Hebrews chapter 12, beginning in verse 9, “Furthermore, we’ve had fathers of our flesh who corrected us.” We’ve had fathers of our flesh who corrected us. “And we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?”

“For they,” that is, our earthly fathers, “verily for a few days chasten us after their own pleasure. But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” Our earthly fathers chastened us for a few days after their own pleasure, but God chastens us for our profit. God is telling us that every time He chastens us, it is always for our profit, that we might be holy as He is holy. So there is a chastening when we sin.

Chastisement as a Necessity, Not Delight

Now let this verse in Lamentations chapter 3 sink into your hearts: “For he,” that is, God, “doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” Let me give you a very revealing truth. When you see the word “willingly” in Lamentations 3 and verse 33, the Hebrew word is “leb” or “lev,” and the word means “heart.” You remember that passage in Proverbs 4 and verse 23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.” It is exactly the same Hebrew word. So actually what He is saying in Lamentations 3:33 is that God does not afflict us from His heart.

He afflicts us out of necessity. He does not do it from delight. He does not do it necessarily to cause pain or misery. Like any loving father, like any intelligent mother, God uses the rod of correction not to gratify Himself, but to educate us, to profit us, and to make us holy.

Matthew Poole writes: “In the Hebrew, it is, he does not afflict from the heart, that is, with pleasure and delight, not from his own

mere motion without a cause given him from the persons afflicted. Hence, judgment is called God's strange work. Showing mercy is his proper and natural work which flows from himself without any cause in the creature. Judgment is a strange work to which he never proceeded but when provoked and as it were forced from the creature, which it followeth that he cannot delight in it."

Return now to Lamentations 3:33-36. Here is something that God does not delight in: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men, to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not."

God has absolutely all power; He is omnipotent. He could crush anyone, everyone, or all of us at any time He pleases. But God says that is not what He delights in. He is not interested in destroying any man. Our Father will not be unrighteous or unjust to any man, not even to the wicked.

In Ezekiel 33:11, God said, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" What did God just say? "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." God is not some old meanie up in heaven, just waiting to afflict someone or stomp someone into the ground.

Those of us who have children understand, especially fathers, that we have never delighted in having to chastise them. I have never told Alice, "Wow, isn't this wonderful, I get to whip my children today."

No, I have no delight in whipping them. I did chastise them, but only out of necessity to educate them and to teach them principles. Here is a principle we need to learn: if we sin, we are going to suffer. You are not going to escape suffering if you sin. So it is impossible to sin against God, if you are a Christian, and not be chastised.

It is impossible as a Christian to sin against God and not be chastened. Hebrews 12:5 says, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and

scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons."

"For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." Our Father only whips His children. This is why, if you can sin against God and not be chastised, you are not His child. Not His child. I have friends. Warren Luke has eight children. I have never whipped any of his children.

They have been at my house many times, but I have never whipped one of them. Why? They are not mine. I am not going to whip his child. I will go to him and say, "Your child deserves a whipping. He did this and this and that." But I am not going to whip him. It is not my responsibility; that is his responsibility. Just as I am not going to whip your children and you are not going to whip my children, God is not going to whip the devil's children. He will judge them, but He will not chastise them. So, if you can sin and escape chastisement, you are not His child.

It is the wickedness of man, the depravity of the heart, and the lack of biblical wisdom and understanding that make one think he is somehow the exception. Many Christians believe, "Well, maybe I can do this little sin and get by with it." No, you are not the exception. God scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then ye are bastards and not sons. Think about this: if you begin to believe that you can sin against God and escape His judgment and chastening, that you can be the exception, remember Romans chapter 8 and verse 32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?"

Jesus Christ was the sinless Son of God, the perfect man and the holy God. He was the God-man. When God imputed our sins upon Him, He did not spare His only begotten Son. If you believe that God will let you escape chastisement when He chastened His own Son, you are deceived. You cannot sin against God and get by with it.

God does not grieve and afflict the children of men from a malicious, unjust, or wicked action or desire. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. God does chasten us as His

children, but it is always for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. That is what He said in Hebrews 12 and verse 10. Our earthly fathers chastened us after their own pleasure, and we gave them reverence. I am sure some of you can remember when your father chastened you.

If I had to get a whipping at my house, I would much rather my mother do it, because I could simply cry, holler, and scream, and she would pretty well stop. But Dad would not. My father had a good principle: "If you do it right, you don't have to do it often." I can tell you, he did it right. Once he did, I would be ready to say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and go to work right then.

I am simply pointing out that God is known for His mercy and grace. He is not known necessarily just for His affliction and chastisement, although He does that.

Look in your Bibles at Psalm 104. I want you to see something about the nature of God and about His mercy and kindness. Beginning with verse 10, the Bible says, "He sendeth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills." We are talking about water. Why? "They give drink to every beast of the field. The wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers. The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart."

"The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted." Verse 17 says, "where the birds make their nests, as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the coneys. He appointed the moon for seasons, the sun knoweth his going down." The psalm speaks of the young lions roaring and seeking their prey from God, and of God feeding every animal and taking care of all these things.

God is known for His mercies, goodness, compassions, and kindnesses. God takes care of everything. Can you imagine if you had to feed all the birds in the world for one day?

What it would cost you? That's not all the other animals. I'm just going to say, God is known for his goodness. You remember that passage in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 45. He said that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, "for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and he sendeth rain upon the just and on the unjust."

You know, this boggles my mind. But once you consider this and think about this, the wicked hate God. They despise him. They curse him. They dishonor Him. They refuse to worship Him. And the only time they take His name is in vain, cursing. And yet God continues to allow them to live. He gives them life. He gives them help. He gives them food. He gives them family. He gives them finances. He gives them fellowship. Everything they have, He gave them and still gives them. And they hate Him and they despise Him. Wow.

I'm just simply pointing out the fact this is actually, actually astounding. Now, if you will turn in your Bible to the book of Isaiah chapter 28, you will see this reference in Scripture. And I hope you think about the quote that I gave you from Matthew Poole. So look in Isaiah chapter 28 and verse 21. I preached on this passage many, many years back. Isaiah 28 and verse 21, the Word of God says this, "For the Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act." So in the context he's talking about judgment and judgment is here referred to as his strange work and as his strange act. So God is so well known for his mercy, goodness and grace that when he judges and when he sends forth his holy judgment, it's called his strange work, his strange act.

God's Strange Work of Judgment

God's frowns are given reluctantly, but his favors are given graciously. I think his judgment is referred to as a strange work due to the fact that his normal place is his mercy seat. It's almost as if he has to arise from the mercy seat to give forth his strange work, his strange act, which is judgment.

Isaiah says, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he

hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie. So he was their Saviour."

"In all their affliction he was afflicted. And the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them and carried them all the days of old." Look at that: in all of their affliction, he was afflicted. He suffered with his people. He suffered with his children.

I remember when I was a boy and had done something wrong, my father getting a switch and preparing to whip me. He would always say, "This is going to hurt me worse than it does you." I thought, I do not believe that at all—until I became a father and had to discipline my children. It does hurt. I can remember being deeply hurt because my children lied to me. I did not think they would ever lie to me, but they did. I was absolutely broken over it. I disciplined them. I did not want to, but I did.

I am simply saying that in all of our affliction, he was afflicted. I never desired or delighted in whipping my children, and God the Father does not desire or delight in chastening his children, but he does so. We delight in doing good things for our children and grandchildren. Grandmothers are very difficult to control when it comes to spending money on their grandchildren, especially buying little dresses for the girls, toys for the boys, and things like that. Alice came home a few weeks ago and showed me an outfit she had gotten for Meredith and a little purse for Chloe. I understand that.

What does the Scripture say in Matthew 7:11? "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" God delights in giving good things, because he is our Father.

Calvin speaks about controlling our thoughts and minds, especially when we are suffering and in affliction: “That such thoughts then might not tempt us to unbelief, the prophet here puts a check on us and declares that God does not afflict from his heart, that is, willingly, as though he delighted in the evils of men, as a judge, who, when he ascends his throne and condemns the guilty to death, does not do this from his heart, because he wishes all to be

innocent, and thus to have a reason for acquitting them. But, yet he willingly condemns the guilty, because this is his duty. So also God, when he adopts severity toward men, He indeed does so willingly, because he is the judge of the world, but he does not do so from the heart, because he wishes all to be innocent, for far away from him is all fierceness and cruelty. And as he regards men with paternal love, so also he would have them to be saved, were they not, as it were, by force to drive him to rigor."

In other words, they force Him to punish and condemn them. Obviously, God does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. It is not in the heart of God to do that maliciously or wickedly. The only time He grieves us, afflicts us, or chastens us is for our profit, that we might have His holiness in our lives. He does so out of necessity.

Applications and Illustrations

Consider this application carefully. Years ago, a black comedian named Flip Wilson popularized the saying, "The devil made me do it." The devil, Satan, does not need to tempt most of us. He does not even need to bother with us. When you read the Bible, He only really dealt with several men: Adam and Eve, Job, and our Lord. Our Lord said that he desired to have Peter, that he might sift him as wheat, but that is it. Do you know why he does not trouble most of us? He does not need to, because of our flesh.

Look in your Bible to Galatians chapter 5, beginning with verse 19. I want you to see something.

So many people say the devil made them do these things. No, he did not. Remember, our Lord said that whatever you sow in the flesh, you are going to reap in the flesh. Galatians chapter 5, verse 19, says, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest." These are the works of the flesh; this is something your flesh does: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." Of these things, Paul says, "I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." All of that is the work of the flesh. It does not matter whether it is adultery,

murder, revellings, drunkenness, or strife—fussing, fighting, and feuding. That is flesh. The flesh of our fallen nature, our sin nature, is sufficient to tempt us and make us sin. Nothing else is needed or required. It is our pure depravity, our lust for the flesh.

God does not necessarily need to afflict us directly from His hand. All He needs to do is leave us to ourselves and allow us to reap that which we have sown. We will reap the consequences of our sins. Most of our problems, heartaches, and afflictions stem from our own sins, disobedience, and rebellion.

Here is the second application: God never afflicts us unless we give Him cause to do it. He shows us kindness when it seems good to Him to do so, but He sends bitter things against us because we both deserve them and need them. Think about that: we both deserve them and need them. Here is a quote from Calvin: "Jesus Christ, who are evil, know how to give good to your children."

"What then are we to expect from the very fountain of goodness? As parents are not willingly angry with their children nor handle them abruptly, there is no doubt but that God never punishes men except when He is constrained"—that is, out of necessity, when He must do it.

Here is my next application: chastisement is a divine cordial. A cordial is that which is affectionate, loving, gracious, and kind. We may not like being chastened, but chastisement is a demonstration that we are indeed the child of God. If you can sin and get by with it, you are not His child.

The Bible says in Hebrews 12:6, "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." None of us can get by without chastening in one form or another. Revelation 3:19 says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." As many as I love, I rebuke. God prefers to bestow His love upon us and be gracious and kind to us.

Let me close with one illustration. On the fifteenth of May, I will have been preaching and teaching for sixty-one years. I have taught not only preaching, but also in Christian schools and Christian colleges, from the fourth grade through the college level. I have taught many college students, but the one who really tried me was in

the fourth grade. In my fourth-grade class, I had one young man who was much bigger than the other students. Every day, like clockwork, he did something that caused me to spank him. The young man was from a broken home.

We had a form that the parents had to sign giving us permission to use corporal punishment. I usually ended up doing it, though one other man occasionally did as well. Before I would ever whip a child, I would call the parents, preferably speaking to the father. I would tell him, "Your son has done such and such, and I'm going to chastise him. I'm going to give him three licks with this paddle. If you would like to come down and observe, you're more than welcome. Just come on down."

Usually the father would say, "Preacher, just do what you need to do, and I'll take care of it when he gets home." That's the way it was when I was a child. If I got a whipping somewhere else, when I got home, I got another one.

I would have the child sitting in front of my desk and ask, "What did you do?" I wanted to hear him verbalize his sin or disobedience. When he told me what he had done, I would say, "Now I'm going to chastise you. I'm going to whip you. I'm going to give you three licks."

Then I would ask, "Am I angry with you?" "No, sir." "Do I hate you?" "No, sir." "Do I love you?" "Yes, sir." "Well, if I love you, son, why am I going to chastise you?" The answer would come, "Because you love me." I would say, "Yes, that is correct. Now bend over, and I want to give you these three licks." Afterward, I would put my arm around the child, tell him that I loved him, and we would have prayer, asking the Lord to bless that chastisement and teach him.

I had to do this to one child just about every day for I don't know how long. Then one day it dawned on me. I waited for him to come in the door at school, and when he did, I put my arm around him and said, "Ronnie, I just want to tell you, I love you today. And I want to ask the Lord to give you a good day and bless you in your studies."

I pray with him. Guess what? I never had to whip that child again because every day I just put my arm around him and told him I loved him. Think about this: here was a fourth-grade student from a

broken home who probably got away with I do not know what all. But he realized that chastisement was an act of love. He would do whatever was necessary to get chastised just so I could put my arm around him and tell him I loved him.

He realized that when God chastens us, it is because He loves us. He is just putting His arm around us, saying, “Son, I love you. Do not do this anymore. Do not make me pick up that paddle again.” Chastisement is a divine cordial because it demonstrates that we are His children. God does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.

Closing Prayer

Father, again, we thank You for Your love, grace and mercy, goodness and kindness. We thank You, Father, even for Your chastisement. We thank You for the afflictions. We may not like them, Lord, but they are good for us because we are to profit from them and to become more holy, more godly, and more obedient. Lord, we do pray for these on the prayer list and ask that You would undertake for them. We pray for Steve this week as he faces tests or whatever, Lord; just give him grace and mercy, and each of these others. And Lord, we pray for the Safis again, that You would help them and bless them. Give us Your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

Chapter 1: The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part 1
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Chapter 4: The Cry of a Broken Heart Part 4
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Topical Index

Chapter titles and section headings are listed with the pages on which they begin.

A

Application to Modern America p. 17

Applications and Conclusion p. 57

Applications and Illustrations p. 75

B

Bearing the Yoke and Humbling Ourselves p. 54

Biblical Encouragement to Pray vs. Jeremiah's Experience p. 27

Blaspheming God Through Contradiction p. 68

C

Chastisement as a Necessity, Not Delight p. 69

Closing Prayer p. 78

Complaining Against Providence p. 64

Conclusion and Prayer p. 39

Conclusion: The Need for Broken Hearts p. 19

D

Defining a Broken Heart p. 5

F

First Reason for Jeremiah's Broken Heart: Rejection of His Service p. 25

G

God Does Not Afflict Willingly p. 56

God's Faithfulness in Trials p. 49

God's Nearness to the Broken p. 6

God's Nearness to the Brokenhearted p. 24

God's Strange Work of Judgment p. 73

I

Introduction and Review p. 23, p. 61

Introduction and Scripture Reading p. 41

Introduction to the Series and Text p. 5

J

Jeremiah's Description of His Suffering p. 30
Jeremiah's Unique Calling and Ministry of Condemnation p. 10
Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet p. 7

R

Reasons for Jeremiah's Brokenness: Rejection of His Ministry p. 8
Reflecting Upon the Solace of God p. 63
Review of Jeremiah's Broken Heart p. 42

S

Second Reason: Refusal of His Supplications p. 26

T

The Cost of Faithfulness: Rejection and Persecution p. 12
The Cry of a Broken Heart p. 5
The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part 1 p. 5
The Cry of a Broken Heart - Part 2 p. 23
The Cry of a Broken Heart Part 3 p. 41
The Cry of a Broken Heart Part 4 p. 61
The Infirmity of Forgetting God p. 46
The Limits of Prayer and the Urgency of Repentance p. 38
The Lord as Our Portion p. 51
The Multitude of God's Mercies p. 47
The Parable of the Sower and Hard Hearts p. 15
The Rejection of Jeremiah’s Ministry p. 8
The Remembrance of the Sovereign p. 44
The Solace of God p. 63

W

Why God Refused to Hear: National Sin and Decreed Judgment p. 32

Scripture Index

Scripture references identified in chapter readings, headings, and manuscript text are listed with their page locations.

Genesis

Genesis 32:10 p. 58

Numbers

Numbers 11:1 p. 67

Numbers 21 p. 67

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 28 p. 32

Deuteronomy 29:29 p. 35

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:6 p. 27

Job

Job 13:20 p. 28

Psalm

Psalm 6:9 p. 28

Psalm 16 p. 51

Psalm 22 p. 28

Psalm 22:2 p. 28

Psalm 23 p. 28

Psalm 23:1 p. 51

Psalm 24 p. 28

Psalm 34 p. 6

Psalm 34:18 p. 24, p. 42

Psalm 42:1 p. 52

Psalm 51 p. 6

Psalm 65:2 p. 28

Psalm 69 p. 31

Psalm 72 p. 55, p. 56

Psalm 73 p. 51

Psalm 77 p. 46
Psalm 80 p. 27
Psalm 103:8 p. 48
Psalm 104 p. 72
Psalm 119 p. 51
Psalm 121 p. 46
Psalm 147:3 p. 7

Proverbs

Proverbs 4 p. 69
Proverbs 15:29 p. 28
Proverbs 15:8 p. 28
Proverbs 28:13 p. 33
Proverbs 28:9 p. 33, p. 34

Isaiah

Isaiah 28 p. 73
Isaiah 55:11 p. 11
Isaiah 55:6-7 p. 38, p. 39
Isaiah 57:15 p. 24
Isaiah 66:2 p. 7, p. 24

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:10 p. 12, p. 15
Jeremiah 1:6-7 p. 10
Jeremiah 5:1 p. 25
Jeremiah 5:31 p. 43
Jeremiah 7:14 p. 37
Jeremiah 11 p. 44
Jeremiah 14:10 p. 38
Jeremiah 14:17 p. 7, p. 8
Jeremiah 15:1 p. 37, p. 38
Jeremiah 15:3 p. 36
Jeremiah 15:6-7 p. 36
Jeremiah 16:1-4 p. 8
Jeremiah 20:7 p. 45

Jeremiah 23:9 p. 6
Jeremiah 26:9-12 p. 20

Lamentations

Lamentations 3 p. 5, p. 13, p. 14, p. 23, p. 26, p. 27, p. 44, p. 61, p. 69
Lamentations 3:21-23 p. 48
Lamentations 3:21-41 p. 41
Lamentations 3:22 p. 47
Lamentations 3:22-23 p. 57, p. 58
Lamentations 3:33 p. 61, p. 69
Lamentations 3:33-36 p. 70

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 33:11 p. 70

Matthew

Matthew 7:11 p. 74
Matthew 13 p. 15
Matthew 26:39 p. 28, p. 29

Mark

Mark 4 p. 15

Luke

Luke 8 p. 15
Luke 18:1 p. 27

Romans

Romans 8 p. 51
Romans 8:28 p. 64, p. 65
Romans 8:31-39 p. 52

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 10:13 p. 49, p. 50

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1:3 p. 47
2 Corinthians 2:14 p. 11
2 Corinthians 4:8-9 p. 47, p. 48

Philippians

Philippians 4:6 p. 27

Colossians

Colossians 4:2 p. 27

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 5:17 p. 27

Hebrews

Hebrews 12 p. 71, p. 72

Hebrews 12:5 p. 70, p. 71

Hebrews 12:6 p. 76

Hebrews 13:5 p. 58

Revelation

Revelation 3:19 p. 76

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