Hope

Lamentations 3:19-23

November 29, 2026 HDBC

Holidays can be a tough time for some people. Those who struggle with depression can find it hard to find the light. Those who have lost loved ones to death often experience waves of grief that are difficult to overcome. The loneliness that many people feel during normal times is deepened during the holidays. These things are very real and should never be dismissed or ignored by those who have never experienced these things. And as long as we live in this broken and hurtful world, they will be around.

But there is hope I the Lord. So, if you find the shadow of despair or depression creeping over you during this season, (or any season) I hope you will camp out in the Word of God and allow it to bring light and hope.

Jim Stockdale was captured during the Vietnam War. He was the highest-ranking United States military officer in the 'Hanoi Hilton' prisoner-of-war camp. Tortured over 20 times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 to 1973, Stockdale lived out the war with no set release date, and no certainty as to whether he would even survive to see his family again.

He shouldered the burden of command, doing everything he could to create conditions that would increase the number of prisoners who would survive unbroken, while fighting an internal war against his captors and their attempts to use the prisoners for propaganda.

At one point, he beat himself with a stool and cut himself with a razor, deliberately disfiguring himself, so he could not be put on videotape as an example of a **well-treated prisoner**. **He exchanged secret intelligence** information with his wife through their letters, knowing that discovery would mean more torture and perhaps death.

Stockdale was asked how he could deal with the uncertainty of his fate & the brutality of his captors when he did not know how it would all turn out.

I never lost faith in the end of the story,' he said. ***'I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade.***

Chuck Swindoll has written:

We can live a number of weeks without food.
We can live a number of days without water.
We can live a number of minutes without air.
We can live only a few seconds without hope.

Without hope you may as well drain the life blood from the veins. It is the one ingredient necessary for real living. When hope dies, real living becomes mere existence. **Mortality rate** for men rises by 40% during the six months following the death of their wives. Solomon knew this a long time ago. He wrote . . . *Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life."* (Prv 13:12*)*

Hope energizes, restores and motivates. **Watch a ball team**. They can be down and out, just dragging. Then there is a big play that gives them new hope and they suddenly have energy. **Hope is a powerful stimulant**. It keeps us moving forward rather than dropping back. But there are times when hope seems to be lost forever.

That was the condition of Israel following the Babylonian conquest in 587 BC. They were a devastated people. Homes destroyed, lives uprooted, and future bleak. Jeremiah was a prophet of God at that time and he wrote a book of the Bible that chronicles some of the emotions felt during that era. **Lamentations**. Book of five poems, each one reads like a funeral dirge. Read Lamentations 3:19-23 and notice two primary conditions.

1. **Lost Hope** (19-20)

This is what happens when we focus only on our own condition.

Let's do some word studies.

Affliction - To labor, suffer, to be depressed or oppressed. Describes a person who has worked with all his strength, only to see his efforts fail. He is wrung out. No desire to go on.

Wandering - Condition of a person who has been driven from home. Run out of town, destitute. Security of home, job, land have been taken.

Wormwood - Bitter but non-poisonous plant.

Gall - Poisonous plant, often associated with wormwood.

Here's a guy who has lost hope. When he wakes up in the morning and remembers the situation, it depresses him. Jeremiah looked at the situation, and it was bleak. Their country has been invaded, capital city sacked, key citizens carried off to Babylon. Others have run to Egypt to escape. It was a really bad time and the future looked bleak. It was hopeless.

Pastor Bryan Wilkerson shared this story.
Years ago when our kid were young we were out at a themed restaurant with TVs all over the walls, playing cartoons with no sound. Our youngest son, who was about four at the time, had his eyes glued to the TV screen which was showing Road Runner cartoons. Watched Wile E. Coyote strap on a rocket-propelled roller skates, then he watch him shoot himself out of a cannon, and then launch himself after the road runner with a slingshot.

After watching intently for a long time he had an epiphany. Without taking his eyes off the screen he quietly announced to our family, ***No***

matter what he does, he's never going to get that chicken.

If you are familiar with the Road Runner cartoon, you know that for Wile E. Coyote it was indeed a hopeless situation. Why? Because that is the way the creatures of the cartoon designed it.

This is not the case with real life. God has not created a reality where there is no hope. Jeremiah understood this, even if those around him did not.

Keep in mind that Jeremiah had been preaching for many years. Long before the Babylonians came, he was calling for repentance among the people and prophesying that judgment would come if they did not. He had tried with all his might to warn the people. But they would not listen. They even persecuted him, convicting him of treason.

His was not a happy life. Called to live without marriage, avoid the feasts and parties of his day, and to be at odds with the leadership his whole ministry. Even Jeremiah, who understood the heart and grace of God was struggling. What he needed was a good dose of hope. **And suddenly, without warning it came.**

2. **Restored Hope** (21-23)

This is what happens when we focus on God's covenant.

Radical change in these verses. What made the difference? The situation? No! The situation remained the same. What changed was his focus. He remembered the Lord. It was his memory of the situation that caused despair. His memory of God's covenant led to his hope.

Suddenly Jeremiah has a confident expectation. Belief that there will be a better day. Life will not always be this way.

<u>Based upon Four Great Statements of Faith</u>

1) ***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases***

Steadfast Love - Translates a word that means ***loyal love*** or ***covenant love***. Basic meaning of faithfulness or loyalty.

Do you realize how much God loves you? He has proven His great love for us by the depth of sacrifice which He has made for us.

William Dixon lived in England. Widower who had lost his only son. One day house of neighbor caught fire. Aged owner escaped, but orphaned grandson inside. Dixon climbed an iron pipe on outside and saved boy. Hands were badly burned and scarred from the hot pipe.

Shortly after that the grandmother died. Townspeople had to decide who would get the boy. Two volunteers. First was a man who had lost his son and was willing to adopt the boy. Second man was Dixon. Without saying a word, he simply showed them the scars on his hands. He got the boy. Those scars were proof of his love.

2) ***His mercies never come to an end***

Mercies - Word related to the womb. It describes the tender, caring love of a mother for her child. What better way to illustrate undying love than by pointing to the love of a mother for her children.

Come to an end - To be spent, used up, exhausted. Like a battery that has run out of power. The storehouse of the Lord never runs dry. They will never be exhausted or used up.

3) ***They are new every morning***

Reference back to *steadfast love* and *mercies*. Fresh dose each day. Each day brings new challenges, new problems. Each day bring a new load of the things we need to give us hope.

Think of a mother. At the end of the day she is worn out. She has given all that she can. Spent! Bone tired. Drops into bed wondering how she will make it through. Child has been so difficult.

But after a good night's sleep she awakens to the sound of cooing. Slips into the nursery and sees her little one playing with his feet. She smiles and scoops him up with a fresh supply for the day.

4) ***Great is Your faithfulness***

Faithfulness - comes from root word that means to be firm, supportive, able to bear the load. In this form it means steadfast, dependable, trustworthy.

God's dependability is great. He never wavers in his support for His children. He is an awesome God who is loyal and committed.

Old Faithful, the geyser at Yellowstone park gets its name from the fact that it is predictable. Every 65 minutes it does its thing. But it is not as trustworthy, or as faithful as our Lord.

Dying saint was disturbed. Said to the pastor he had lived by the promises of God all his life, but now on his deathbed he could remember none of them. It upset him.

The pastor said, ***Do you think God has forgotten them, too***? Smile came to the man's face. Peace flooded his soul. He realized he did not have to remember them as long as God did.

I want to tell you one more story that comes from James Stockdale's experiences in the Hanoi Hilton.

Keep in mind that Stockdale saw many American POWs come into the camp. Not all lived through the experience. Years later, author

Jim Collins asked Stockdale an interesting question.

Who didn't survive the camp?
His answer was surprising but came without hesitation.

Oh, that's easy—the optimists.
He explained that the optimists were the ones who kept saying, "*We're going to be out by Christmas." Christmas would come and go. Then they'd say, "We're going to be out by Easter*." Easter would come and go, and eventually, they died of a broken heart.

Stockdale survived because he held two seemingly contradictory truths at once: he never lost faith that he would prevail in the end, while simultaneously confronting the brutal facts of his current reality.

In other words he refused to set arbitrary deadlines when it came to his suffering. He never stopped believing he would be victorious but refused to set an artificial time-table on when that victory would come.

Biblical hope acknowledges the darkness and despair of the current situation, while maintaining an unshakeable confidence that God is in charge and will, in His time, bring us out of it.

Hope often begins as a faint shift in the dark long before full daylight arrives. If you have stayed awake until early morning you know that the sky doesn't just jump straight from deep dark to bright sun. First comes a subtle shift in color from deep dark to gray and then ultimately light.

Nothing looks dramatically different yet, and the air can even feel chilly, yet you know the night has lost its hold. Hope often starts small, with a quiet promise of grace, bringing with it a growing conviction that all is going to be well even before the full reality is visible.