

**Title: Look What God Has Done 2023****Text: Lamentations 3:19-24****Introduction**

As we face a New Year, people usually like to complain about the previous one...

- 2023 has gone to the dogs: Good riddance to a bad year
- Americans say 'good riddance' to bad memories of 2023
- Goodbye, 2023. We Couldn't Take It Anymore
- Goodbye 2023, I never liked you anyway.
- Goodbye, 2023—You Were a Real Jerk

My friend, Steve Busch back in 2016, had a good reminder on his FaceBook wall - *Happy New Year! To those that are part of the "I hated last year..." group, did you have air to breathe, friends, family, money for food, shelter, car to get you to work, church, a God who never left you or abandoned you any step of the way of 2016. Hmmm...guess 2016 wasn't as awful as you might think. I've had some pretty epic bad moments over the years....but through it all Jesus has been completely faithful. Thankful for that.*

No question 2023 was a challenging year, but every year has its challenges in large part because we live in a sin-cursed world. THIS AIN'T HEAVEN!!! So what are we to do as we face the prospects of a New Year? I think it is wise to reflect on the prior year through the lens of the Scriptures. When we reflect we must discipline ourselves to see what God has accomplished. By doing so, you won't be able to help but give Him the glory He so richly deserves...You won't be able to help the inevitable HOPE that will well-up in your soul.

***Main Idea: Remember God and Hope will Overflow!***

Angie and I have had the privilege of being part of this congregation for 10 years. We started attending in January of 2014. I became the pastor in March of the same year. So, saying we are blessed is a tremendous understatement. For us, to be here is a blessing beyond words.

Every year since we started here with you, I have made it a tradition to move away from my regular practice of expository preaching and deliver two messages. The first one, called "Look What God Has Done," recaps what our Lord has accomplished in this body over the past year.

The second (next few weeks) does a bit of prognosticating by predicting what God might be up to do in the year ahead.

This vision sermon will be on January 14<sup>th</sup>!

Oftentimes in the Scriptures, God admonishes His people to "remember".

**Joshua 4:1–7** (NASB95) <sup>1</sup> Now when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, <sup>3</sup> and command them, saying, ‘Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.’” <sup>4</sup> So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe; <sup>5</sup> and Joshua said to them, “Cross again to the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. <sup>6</sup> “Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ <sup>7</sup> then you shall say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.”

Why does God want His people to remember? It is a healthy practice...

- Remembering helps us to learn from our mistakes
- Remembering comforts and warms our hearts when we think of good times from the past.
- Remembering gives us hope for the future - especially for followers of Christ because remembering helps us see that God has been with us all along!

There was a man in the Old Testament...a man who had the unique distinction of filling two roles. He was a priest as well as a prophet. His name? Jeremiah. You can read about him in the book with His name.

He had a rough ministry, not very popular with the people he was sent to minister to. For over four decades, they rejected him, in large part because he spoke truths that they didn't care to hear.

He warned them and warned them that if they didn't repent and turn from their wicked ways, God would judge them. And the very long story short is they refused to listen, and so judgment came through the uprising of the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah and his assistant, Baruch, were hauled off to Egypt (against Jeremiah's counsel) with a remnant trying to escape Nebuchadnezzar's wrath...

Judgment always comes...eventually!

John MacArthur describes the moral decay of God's people - *The spiritual condition of Judah was one of flagrant idol worship (cf. chap. 2). King Ahaz, preceding his son Hezekiah long before Jeremiah in Isaiah's day, had set up a system of sacrificing children to the god Molech in the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem (735–715 b.c.). Hezekiah led in reforms and clean-up (Is. 36:7), but his son Manasseh continued to foster child sacrifice along with gross idolatry, which continued into Jeremiah's time (7:31; 19:5; 32:35). Many also worshiped the “queen of heaven” (7:18; 44:19). Josiah's reforms, reaching their apex in 622 b.c., forced a repressing of the worst practices outwardly, but the deadly cancer of sin was deep and flourished quickly*

*again after a shallow revival. Religious insincerity, dishonesty, adultery, injustice, tyranny against the helpless, and slander prevailed as the norm not the exception.*<sup>1</sup>

Which leads us to the second book he wrote. I encourage you to read both Jeremiah and Lamentations. In fact, spend time studying them, you will not regret the time you invest.

This morning, I want to focus on Lamentations. It, as the name suggests, is a lament.

"Lament" means a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. It means to mourn. Why was Jeremiah lamenting?

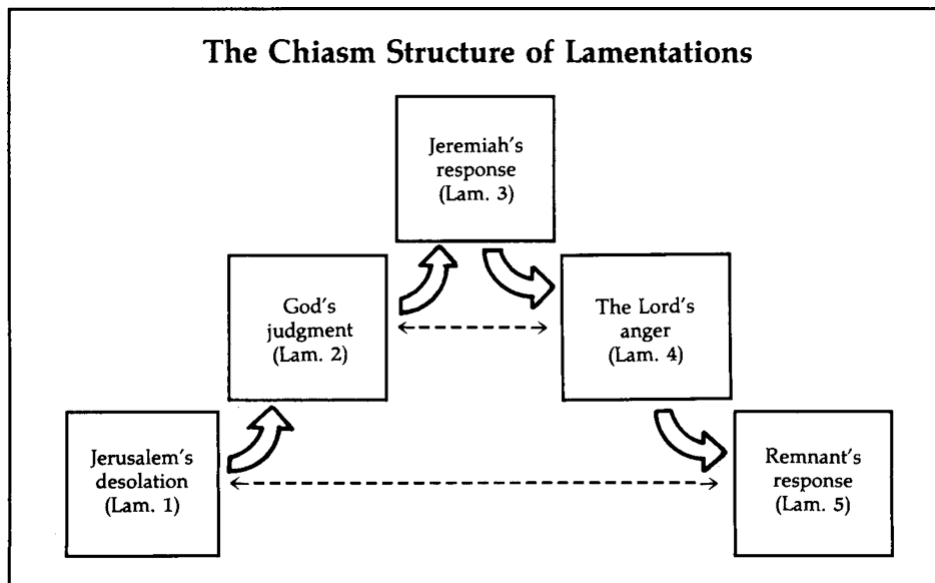
Why was he (aka the weeping prophet) experiencing such profound grief and sorrow? Because the Jews refused to listen to him...to God. And as a result, painful, seemingly unrelenting judgment came upon them from the hand of God.

And so Jeremiah penned this book, this Lament. 5 chapters long and the majority of it is chilling and awful. God's judgment is nothing to be trifled with...

While we cannot possibly study this book this morning, I would like you to at least understand its structure more clearly so you can leave here and better comprehend this letter.

As I said, there are 5 chapters. Please know these are not just random in their placement, they are structured in a very purposeful way...

I have, on the screen, a helpful and simple diagram of the structure of Lamentations...Take a look and let me explain...



<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1059–1060.

Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 have 22 verses each because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

Chapter 1-4 each verse begins with a letter from the alphabet in alphabetical order.

Chapter 3, the heart of the book, has 66 verses and every three verses begin with a letter from the alphabet in alphabetic order.

Chapter 5 doesn't follow the acrostic pattern although it does have 22 verses. Chapter five does begin and end with prayer.

Chapters 1 & 5 focus on the people

Chapters 2 & 4 focus on the Lord

Chapter 3 is the pivot point in the book and focuses on Jeremiah's response to all the affliction.

So what? Why is this book so purposefully structured?

One reason was for memorization purposes...Kind of a "*Stones of Remembrance*" in word form.

*Psalm 119:9 (ESV)*<sup>9</sup> *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.*

The Second reason?

It was to demonstrate to the readers that the complete alphabet demonstrated the completeness of their suffering due to their sin. In a sense, Jeremiah wanted to remind the Jews that, as promised, their suffering would be from "A to Z".

But is this all that God wanted to communicate to His covenant people? Was He letting them know that they had gone too far? That their wicked lives were beyond redemption? I believe this is where chapter three comes in.

Chapter three parallels the suffering of Judah with the suffering of Jeremiah.

By the way, Jeremiah didn't deserve the same suffering as the wicked people of Judah, yet he endured it with them. This pictures the incarnational aspect of redemption offered to us by Christ himself. Christ suffered with us as a man.

Turn to chapter 3:19-24. Here, in the middle of seemingly endless suffering and trial because of Judah's sin and hardness of heart, Jeremiah does something crucial to the survival and health of ALL believers.

He REMEMBERS! Jeremiah, the weeping prophet - the one who suffered alongside those that had, for five decades refused to listen to his preaching and warnings - God's representative, REMEMBERS! He remembers key truths about His God. We are wise to learn from him.

Look at the text...

*Lamentations 3:19-24 (NASB95)*<sup>19</sup> *Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.* <sup>20</sup> *Surely my soul remembers And is bowed down within me.* <sup>21</sup> *This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.* <sup>22</sup> *The Lord's loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, For His*

*compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup> "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."*

**Main Idea from this text? Remember God, and Hope will Overflow!**

I cannot emphasize enough the power of REMEMBERING. Remembering what God has done will inevitably bring hope! Jeremiah's memory brings him hope (in the midst of terrible circumstances) because He remembers who God is and what He has done since the beginning!

If we can learn one thing from this "Weeping Prophet" learn this...Our circumstances cannot dictate our level of hope; however, God's truth must!

Some observations we can learn from in these few verses...

**Verse 19** – *"Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness."*

Jeremiah prays and reminds God of the bitter suffering and homelessness he personally is enduring. The servants of God will not get a pass from suffering in this life. In fact, righteous living often brings the righteous more suffering.

**Verse 20** – *"Surely my soul remembers And is bowed down within me."* In fact, it is such a heavy burden to him that it is causing him to be depressed. The NET Bible says, *"I continually think about this and I am depressed."*

Folks, you do realize that if we constantly focus on the difficult circumstances around us we will inevitably become discouraged and depressed. Jeremiah knew this and so, as a remedy, look at what he says in the next verse...

**Verse 21** – *"This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope."* - Jeremiah is depressed because of the horrific circumstances he faces, and yet he has the intellectual wherewithal to implement the remedy to his depression. Do you see what he says? *"This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope."* Recall what to mind"? The fact that he is suffering alongside his fellow countrymen?

No! The ESV says it best... *"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:"* His hope comes from the words he is **about** to speak. These are the truths that buoy his spirits...that help him to face seemingly unbearable circumstances.

**Verse 22** - The first truth Jeremiah holds on to? *"The LORD'S loving kindness indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail."*

- Lovingkindness = Steadfast love, loyal love. *"In general, one may identify three basic meanings of the word, which always interact: "strength," "steadfastness," and "love." Any understanding of the word that fails to suggest all three inevitably loses some of its richness. "Love" by itself easily becomes sentimentalized or universalized apart from the covenant. Yet "strength" or "steadfastness" suggests only the fulfillment of a legal or*

*other obligation...This word implies personal involvement and commitment in a relationship beyond the rule of law.*"<sup>2</sup>

- Compassions = mercies. *"This Heb. word, used about 250 times in the OT, refers to God's gracious love. It is a comprehensive term that encompasses love, grace, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, truth, compassion, and faithfulness."*<sup>3</sup>
- The truth of both of these characteristics of God? They NEVER cease, they NEVER fail!

**Verse 23** – *"They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."* Not only do they not CEASE or FAIL, but if they need to be renewed, if they happen to run out by the end of the night, they would be replenished by morning.

Now think about this for a minute; of course, we cannot deplete any aspect or characteristic of God. He is inexhaustible!

And so we must see the poetic aspect of Jeremiah's statement here. This statement is hypothetical nonsense because renewal is not necessary!

But just in case Jeremiah, the Jews of his day, or even **you** need some reassurance, REMEMBER, God's steadfast love, His mercies are new **EVERY** morning! IF you are His child, not only does He love you, but He is obliged to care for you - His faithfulness is GREAT!!!

Now, I am not sure what you are facing today.

Maybe your marriage is not doing so well.

Maybe your parents just don't understand you.

Maybe your work environment is intolerable.

I don't know.

But I do know that *"The LORD'S loving kindnesses indeed NEVER cease, For His compassions NEVER fail. They are new EVERY morning; GREAT is YOUR faithfulness."* Jeremiah knew it was wise to remember these truths about his God. I think it would be wise for you to REMEMBER as well!

**Verse 24** - *"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him." My three children are in for a rude awakening when their mother and I pass on to the next life. If they think they are going to get a huge inheritance, they will be sorely disappointed.* And I am not sure of Jeremiah's financial situation either. But verse 24 indicates something about his wealth. *"The LORD is my portion..."* The NLT says, *"The LORD is my inheritance..."*

Do you hear this? He isn't saying my inheritance is coming from the Lord.

Jeremiah says that his portion or, his inheritance **IS THE LORD!**

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 142.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1145.

Ladies and gentlemen, the LORD is ALL POWERFUL, ALL KNOWING, EVERYWHERE Present.

He owns the cattle on one thousand hills!

He is the INFINNATE God of the UNIVERSE.

HE created and owns all that is. And HE is our inheritance!!!

This truth, for the believer should be the language of our soul.

This is where our hope dwells. Not in the circumstances you face. But in the God who is above your circumstances, feelings, situations, your whatever!

“Therefore I have HOPE in HIM!”

Remember God and HOPE will OVERFLOW!

Jeremiah, in the midst of great suffering both personally and nationally, counteracts his despair by remembering who God is and what he Has done.

This is a practice we, as a church, must regularly participate in. It is good for us to review our *“Stones of Remembrance”* not so we can boast about how wonderful we are but rather so we can boast about how great our God is. And so we can trust Him with our future!

So, let’s remember and praise Him...(I’ll ask you at the end for other “stones”)

## **Look What God Has Done List**

### **1. Spiritual Growth and Teaching**

- We finished the Book of Romans
- Brad Winkler – Sustaining Church Workshop on Missions
- Thad Bergmeier – My Circle Training
- Grow Conference – Sam Polson
- Equipped for Life – How to raise kids that love Jesus
- Tuesday Women's Bible Study/community outreach
- Elder in Training Process
- Children’s Equipping Classes
- Many Seeking God and Finding Him studies.

### **2. Church Leadership and Structure**

- Lori Sides – Bookkeeper
- Autumn Searles – Tech Director

- Glenn Chinavare – New Treasurer
- Trudy Veltman – New Financial Secretary
- Security Team – Dave Johnston
- Mandie Grifhorst – Digital Children’s Check-in System
- Policies and procedures – Bill Amstutz and the Elders, Deacons and Glenn Chinavare
- Structure within the Elder Board and Deacon Team
- Connector Ministry
- Front Desk Help
- Called Reverend Larry Salisbury as Associate Pastor
- Two new missionaries

### **3. Regular Church Life**

- Weekly Services
- Connection Groups
- Weddings and Funerals
- Grand Celebration – Open House
- Fall and Spring Clean-ups
- On Goal Soccer Ministry
- “Be Encouraged” Blog

### **4. Facilities and Technology**

- First full year in new building
- Drive Faith Home – Physical and New Website
- Security System installed and operational.
- New Sound System Up and Running
- Sound Panels up
- Hearing loop operational

### **5. Financial Health**

- Moving to a P.O. System for better tracking – Blue forms



- Financial surplus and mortgage reduction
- Paid \$82,500 on our mortgage leaving \$265,000

## 6. Membership and Baptism

- 28 Baptisms
- 25 New Members
- Baby Dedication
- Grown over 60% from the previous year

## 7. Prayer and Worship

- Vision 2023 - "A Prayerful Church is a Powerful Church"
- Prayer – 24 hours and Wednesday prayer

## 8. Miscellaneous/Milestones

- Kitchen Ministry – Jill Vansulkema's leadership
- New Values focus

## 9. Other Considerations

- Other "Stones" to remember?

## Conclusion (Last 5 Minutes)

2023 is in the books! And we can do one of two things. We can lament or we can praise God. Let's follow Jeremiah's example and remember our God...

*<sup>21</sup> This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. <sup>22</sup> The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*

**Sing** – Great is thy Faithfulness...

*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 will 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*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine with 10, 000 beside*

*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*

**Dismissal**

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!