

SERMON FOR JULY 1, 2018
TEXT: LAMENTATIONS 3:22-33
THEME: GOD'S LOVE NEVER ENDS

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." ²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. ²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; ²⁹ let him put his mouth in the dust there may yet be hope; ³⁰ let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults. ³¹ For the Lord will not cast off forever, ³² but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; ³³ for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.

In the name of Jesus:

In northern Chile, between the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, lies a narrow strip of land where the sun shines every day! Clouds gather so seldom over the valley that one can say, "It almost never rains here!" Morning after morning the sun rises brilliantly over the tall mountains to the east. Each noon it shines brightly overhead, and every evening it brings a picturesque sunset. Although storms are often seen rising high in the mountains, and heavy fog banks hand their gray curtains far over the sea, Old Sol continues to shed his warming rays upon this "favored" and protected strip of territory. One might imagine this area to be an earthly paradise, but is far from that! It is a sterile and desolate wilderness! There are no streams of water, and nothing grows there.

We often long for total sunshine and continuous joy in life, and we desire to avoid the heartaches that bring tears to our eyes. It reminds me of what one of my kids said about the season of Lent: "Dad, I don't like Lent, because Lent is so sad." In reality, life

is not a bed of roses, it isn't all peaches and cream it isn't filled with happiness and laughter. Oh, certainly there are times in life when we feel blessed, on top of the world, that everything is going our way. But in reality, life isn't like that, it is filled with challenges, sorrows, things we wish did not happen, life offers up plenty of opportunity for sorrow, for tears, for a lament.

The Book of Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah and it is actually a book containing five laments. Each lament is different. Our text focuses on the third lament of Jeremiah.

So why in the world is Jeremiah lamenting? Because he is physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted. He has experienced God's judgment and Jeremiah has reached his limit of endurance. Jeremiah knew God to be a gracious God, after all, the Lord God, Yahweh, called the people of Israel out of the slave pit called Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. God gave to His people Israel godly leaders such as Moses and Joshua in leading them to the Promised Land. Once there, God provided Judges to rule the land. When the people wanted a king, God blessed them with one of the greatest kings to have ever lived, King David. David's son, Solomon was the wisest person and king to ever have lived.

But all of these good times came to an end. The people of God forgot what it meant to be the people of God. The Israelites were more interested in being like every other nation instead of being different. God called them to be holy, as He is holy, to be different, to be set apart from the rest of the world. But living under the grace and love of God wasn't enough for God's people. They wanted to be like all the other nations.

So their religious practices began to incorporate things forbidden by God. Their lives revolved around their own interests rather than the love of God and the welfare of their neighbor. And so, God's judgment was upon His people and the nation. The nation was overtaken by hostile powers. The people of God were uprooted to the nation of Babylon, their homeland destroyed. God was like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding. God's people were judged by God and their love and faith in Him were found wanting. God punishes sin and Jeremiah as well as the nation feel the weight of God's judgment.

Was there any hope? It certainly looked hopeless. That is why this book is called Lamentations. There is ongoing sorrow, like a veil of darkness that can't be lifted. The grief is never ending. It is like a bad dream, a nightmare, only it doesn't get better in the morning. When you have grief such as this, when your life is filled with laments, who can you turn to?

Jeremiah laments, but in his lament he turns to God. He remembers God and God's faithfulness. The Lord God is a God of love. Jeremiah remembered: the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." That is why Jeremiah is able to exclaim: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³they are new every morning great is your faithfulness. "

Great is God's faithfulness, to YOU! He was faithful to His people of old in that He did not cast them off forever. Oh, He certainly had every reason and right to do away with them, but God did not. The steadfast love endured forever for His people of old, in

that God kept His promise to His people. After the appointed time in exile, the people of God returned to their homeland, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and to rebuild their lives. They dedicated themselves, sacrificing their own self-interests so that God's will would be done. And all this took place, so that God would demonstrate to His people and to all people that the steadfast love of the Lord lasts forever.

For at the right time in history, God became a Man, born of a virgin, born under the Law to keep the Law of God for all sinners. In love God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, who came down from heaven to live His life in your place, suffering for your sins and dying on the cross so that you would be forgiven. God sent Jesus, the true God-Man, to bear the yoke of the cross.

The God-Man Jesus, when asked by the chief priest if He was the Son of God kept silent. Why won't you answer, the chief priest inquired of Jesus? But Jesus kept His peace. One of the officers struck Jesus in the face with the palm of His hand, but Jesus didn't flinch in His love for you and for all.

He who knew no sin became sin for you. The Bible says that anyone who hangs on a tree is to be considered cursed by God. God the Father cursed His One and only Son, damning Him for the sins of the whole world. Jesus did so willingly, in silence, like a lamb being led to the slaughter. Jesus was cast off from the Father. Listen again to Jesus' words: "My God My God why have you forsaken Me? Why have You cast Me off forever? Why are you damning Me?"

Why? God damned His Son, punished His Son Jesus on the cross unleashing the fury of Hell upon His Son all in keeping with God the Father's heart toward you.

Because God damned His Son in your place, you can be confident that God will never cast you off forever. You can say with confidence that the love of the Lord lasts forever!

And it does! God comes to you today forgiving you all of your sins in the name of the Father, Son+ and Holy Spirit. God reminds you that you belong to Him in your Baptism, He has called you by name, you are His prized possession, purchased not with money, stocks or bonds, but with the holy precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross. And that love is shared with you and for you in this Supper, where Jesus gives to you His very body broken and very blood shed for the forgiveness of all of your sins.

So now you can, really and truly, depart in peace and serve the Lord with joy! For God will never cast you off forever! His love for you will never end. No matter what takes place in the future you can be certain that neither height nor depth, nor angels or rulers, no anything in heaven or on earth will ever separate you from God's love for you in Jesus. Both now and forever, you can be certain that God's mercies to you are never ending. Great is God's love for you. Great is His faithfulness! All because of His Son Jesus!

Amen