



# Great is Your faithfulness

**Lamentations 3:1-42**

This sermon outline can be used at a Suffering Church service or meeting. It can be read out as it stands. You could add some illustrations of your own or take some from the information on **pp.8-14** of the **September/October 2023 Barnabas Aid magazine**. You might also find helpful material in the small group Bible study (**p.18** of the magazine) or the eight-day devotional booklet. Alternatively, the outline can be used as a framework for your own ideas and applications. A PowerPoint to accompany the sermon can be downloaded from **[barnabasaid.org/scaaw](http://barnabasaid.org/scaaw)**

## Introduction

In our Bible passage, the prophet Jeremiah pours out his heart – and we are shocked and shaken by the depth of his anguish. Jerusalem has fallen, the Temple has been destroyed and the people have been taken away into captivity. The disaster he warned against has happened. He is overwhelmed with a double sorrow: he grieves for the sins of his people which brought about their downfall at the hand of God, and he grieves for their current personal suffering.

Lamentations is a book rarely read or preached on in most churches today. Lament itself is seldom heard, at least in societies where “not giving way” is admired. Yet groaning, wailing and crying aloud to God can bring healing in times of sorrow.

## 1. The desolation of the people of God (vv.1-20)

### a. An afflicted people

Jeremiah speaks for his afflicted people, suffering God's punishment. In vivid language he describes their desolation and misery.

### b. God has left them

Worst of all, the One who had protected them, their covenant God, has turned against them (v.3) and will not hear their prayers (v.8).

### c. A people without hope

Jeremiah speaks for all the people of Jerusalem, those in exile in faraway Babylon and the pitiful remnant still in Jerusalem with him, when he says that all he had hoped from the LORD has gone (v.18).

### d. Jesus

The experience of God's people is rooted in the experience of their Saviour who suffered affliction for them (Isaiah 53:7). As He hung on the cross, punished for our sins, He endured not only physical pain but also the spiritual agony of feeling forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46).

## 2. The unending faithfulness of God (vv.21-25)

### a. The *hesed* love of God

Jeremiah, at this lowest of lows, manages to re-ignite hope in his heart (v.21). By a deliberate effort he calls to mind the character of the LORD – specifically His love. The Hebrew word used here is *hesed*, which

occurs about 200 times in the Old Testament. It has no exact English equivalent but means the unwavering, steadfast love of our covenant-keeping God. It is not just a feeling but very much a love shown in action.

### b. His mercy

Early English translations of the Bible render *hesed* as “mercy”. This remains a powerful word, laden with meaning. Its modern equivalent might be “compassion”, especially when kindness is shown to one who has offended although it is in one's power to do them harm instead. Thus it carries a nuance of forgiveness. The English word “mercy” comes from a medieval Latin word meaning “price” or “wages” or “rent”. For we who believe that we have been “bought at a price” as the Apostle Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 7:23), that price being the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, shed to take away our sins, the thought of God's mercy is a treasure-house of precious meaning.

### c. His faithfulness

The essence of *hesed* is that it is a love which never ends. This is God's love for us. He is utterly faithful, His love utterly dependable. Although He may allow us, for our own good, to endure suffering for a time, it will not last for ever (vv.31-33). He will bring us through it, whether our suffering ends in this life or in the next.

### d. Our hope

If God is faithful and His love never ends, if He is merciful and does not treat us as our sins deserve, then we have hope. What we must do is wait quietly for Him to deliver us in His perfect time (vv.25-26).

## 3. The judgment of God

### a. Justice (vv.34-36)

Let us move our thoughts from the LORD's love to His justice. The Bible repeatedly tells us that He is a God of truth, justice and righteousness. This is both comforting and sobering. We know that each of us must one day stand before God our Judge. Although our sins have been taken away by the atoning death of our Lord Jesus on the cross, so that we are assured of salvation if we trust in Him, still we must give an account of our lives.

The other side of the coin of God's justice is the comfort of knowing that the Judge of the Earth will finally put right all the wrongs of our broken world. We may live in a society where injustice abounds, where people imagine that “The LORD does not see”

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their evil and oppressive, even murderous, deeds (Psalm 94:7). But the Lord does see.

*To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land,  
to deny people their rights before the Most High,  
to deprive them of justice – would not the  
Lord see such things?  
(Lamentations 3:34-36)*

What a comfort it is to know that one day “judgment will again be founded on righteousness” (Psalm 94:15) when the God of justice acts.

What’s more, if we have personally suffered injustice, violence or abuse, this truth can bring peace to our seething hearts. We strive to forgive our enemies, to pray for them, to help them in practical ways as opportunity arises and not to seek revenge (Romans 12:20; Matthew 5:43-44). The Word of God tells us to do this. And the same Word also tells us that God Himself will avenge and repay (Romans 12:19).

### **a. The chastising hand of God (v.37-39)**

As we have already seen, although the Lord “does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone”, He may, in His love, discipline us to help us grow more like Him. He loves us too much to abandon us to our sins and their dreadful consequences. Let us praise Him that

*the LORD disciplines those he loves,  
as a father the son he delights in  
(Proverbs 3:12)*

So let us learn to recognise and even be thankful for God’s discipline, which shows that we are His children and, despite our failures and sinfulness, He still loves us every moment of every day.

## **1. Return and repentance (vv.40-42)**

These are serious matters. It is clear that we must return to God. But how?

### **a. Examine ourselves (v.40a)**

True repentance requires a knowledge of our sinfulness. How can we discover our sinfulness, especially if we live in a society where “anything goes” and many proudly affirm that they have no need for guilt or remorse? “Let us examine our ways and test them,” says verse 40. Let us look at our own lives, earnestly and often, confessing our sins to God and asking His forgiveness.

Asking our heavenly Father for forgiveness is part of what the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, in words that perhaps we repeat daily (Matthew 6:12). But we must say them thoughtfully. That is Jeremiah’s meaning in verse 41, which talks of praying with the heart, not simply adopting a traditional prayer posture, such as the upturned hands of Jewish prayer.

Likewise Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth about examining themselves to see if they are in the

faith (2 Corinthians 13:5) and especially before taking communion (1 Corinthians 11:28). Many churches include a prayer of confession in their communion services. In centuries past some of these were rigorous and robust, for example, confessing that we have sinned against God and against our fellow humans “in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault”.

Another confession includes the words, “We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.”

Comprehensive confessions like this, prayed from the heart, will keep us humbly dependent on God’s mercy. It is a tragic indicator of the spiritual state of some churches that confessions like this have been replaced by all-but-meaningless prayers which fail to recognise the serious nature of sin and the kind of holiness that God wants us to attain.

We do not have to wait until we go to church to examine ourselves and confess our sins. We should make it a regular habit in our private prayers.

“Keep short accounts with God,” it has been said.

### **b. Return to the LORD (v.40b)**

An honest, serious examination of our personal conduct will lead us to return to the Lord, from whom we have departed. Although we may come “trembling”, as Hosea describes (Hosea 3:5; 11:10-11), we can come confidently, knowing that our Father is “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6).

### **c. Recognise our sinfulness and transgressions (v.42)**

The appalling scenario that Jeremiah describes of not being forgiven (v.42) and of our prayers not being heard (vv.43-44) applies only to those who have not returned humbly to God, acknowledging their sins.

We can imagine Him, in human terms, like the father of the prodigal son in Jesus’s parable (Luke 15:20). The father, so sinned against by his greedy, arrogant, wayward son, was nevertheless watching eagerly for him to return; we know that because he saw his son “when he was still a long way off” and was “filled with compassion for him”. Dare we even say that, when He sees us in the distance, making our faltering way to Him, our heavenly Father runs to meet and embrace us, as did the father in the parable?

When we are walking closely with Him, confessing our sins regularly, our heavenly Father delights to forgive us and to hear our prayers. As Jeremiah tells us,

*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him  
(Lamentations 3:25)*