

What Do You Need Tomorrow Morning?

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

- [0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us to turn back together to Lamentations chapter 3 and tonight we're going to focus especially on the words of verse 22 to 24.
- The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.
- The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I will hope in him. And our title tonight is, What do you need tomorrow morning?
- There's no doubt that for us, particularly living in the West and in a well-developed nation, we wake up every morning to a lot of blessings. We wake up warm and dry.
- We're sheltered and protected from the weather. We wake up to food, able to open our cupboards and have plenty to eat. We've got clothes to put on.
- [0 : 5 9] We have freedoms that we're so used to that we can easily forget that many other parts of the world don't have them. We've got security. We live in a nation of law and order, of provision.
- We live in a nation of opportunity where we're able to work, we're able to be educated, we're able to travel, we're able to go out and about in safety.
- And for many of us, not all of us, but for many of us, we wake up every morning in reasonably good health. But I don't need to tell you that there are so many people who don't wake up to these things.
- People for whom every day is a huge struggle and even basics like food and warmth and shelter are not there.
- And even in this country and even in this community, there are people who wake up with huge burdens to carry in terms of their health.
- [2 : 0 1] But even saying all that, having said all that, even though we live in a prosperous nation and even though we do have many, many blessings that we wake up to every day, it's still also true that for all of us, we wake up tomorrow morning with burdens.
- And those burdens can take many, many forms. Some of us are going on holiday tomorrow morning. But not all of us are.
- And some of you might wake up tomorrow morning and the first thing you think about is the pressure of work. Everything that you've got to do, everything that you didn't get done last week.
- Some of you might wake up tomorrow morning and you're just aware of this fear of failure. And that might be in your job, but it might be in your relationships, it might be in your role, in your family.
- It might be in no particular way, but just in a general sense of anxiety that you just don't want to muck things up. You don't want to make a big mistake.
- [3 : 0 9] Some of you will wake up tomorrow morning and so conscious of the pain of grief, a gap in your lives that leaves a huge sense of sorrow.

All of us tomorrow morning wake up with insecurities and anxieties. We tire very best to hide them. We don't want anyone else to know about them, but we've all got them. Things that we worry about and things that we are fearful of in terms of what we're going to do, what might happen, what might not happen, what might go well, what might go wrong and things that we never want other people to find out about us.

We wake up tomorrow morning with regrets about what we have or haven't done either last week or maybe much, much further back in our lives.

We wake up with bruises because of things that have happened to us and we wake up with fear about what might happen in the days, weeks and months ahead.

All of that means that often we can wake up in a new morning, but everything still feels dark.

[4 : 26] That is definitely the situation that gave rise to the five poems that we have recorded for us in the Book of Lamentations.

As I said at the reading, they were written at a crucial time in the history of the Old Testament. In fact, they were written at one of the worst, if not the worst moments in the history of Israel at the Old Testament.

It's right near the end of Old Testament history. It's important to remember that, although with lamentations you're kind of in the middle of the Old Testament in terms of how it's set out in the books, in the order of the books, you're actually near the very end in terms of chronology.

At that time, Jerusalem had been conquered by the Babylonian army. During this period, just around 600 BC, just before 600, the Babylonians began to emerge as the dominant power in the ancient Near East, and they went on an expansion conquering the nations before them.

One of the nations that eventually got conquered was the Israelites, the nation of Judah as it was known then, and their capital city, Jerusalem.

[5 : 48] It's good to remember that when you're thinking about Old Testament history, particularly in the era where the kingdom of Israel was operating, Old Testament history looks a bit like a backwards tick.

At 1000 BC, it's quite easy to remember because the main thing in terms of the kingdom starts in 1000 BC. It was around 1000 BC when David was the king.

I find that easy to remember, it has to be a round number for me to remember it. David was king, that was the high point. David and Solomon, Jerusalem became established as a capital city.

In Solomon's lifetime, the palace and the temple were built. Everything was looking very, very positive, but from there, the direction is always downward.

In 932 BC, when David's grandson was king, the kingdom split in two. This is a beautiful drawing of Israel, not to scale.

[6 : 49] You've got Jerusalem is about there. It split in two. The northern kingdom was called Israel with 10 tribes.

The southern kingdom was called Judah. It split in the reign of Rehoboim in 932 BC. Not long, only 70 years after David, the kingdom was divided.

Things began to deteriorate more and more. At various points along the way, these two halves of the nation were actually at war with each other. 722 BC, the northern kingdom gets destroyed by the Assyrian army and the nation is scattered.

Judah survives for another 140 years or so, but in 586 BC, they were attacked and conquered by the Babylonians.

Well, that's not completely right. It's a little bit more detailed. 597, the Babylonians come. There's a bit of back and forth for a few years.

[7 : 51] I think around 589 or so, they came and laid siege to Jerusalem and 586, the city fell. It's important to remember that in those days, a city like Jerusalem would have been a walled city.

This is Jerusalem with a wall around it. That wall was to protect them. What would happen was when an army like the Babylonians came, they would surround the city and just wait and wait and wait and wait.

Because inside that city, nobody could get in. Nobody could get out. Eventually, they would run out of food and they would be starved. That's what they did.

They laid siege to the city. After, I think, three years, the wall was broken down. They invaded the city and it was conquered. Here's the narrative of events from 2 Kings 25.

I'll read verses 1-12. In the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it.

[9 : 01] They built siege works all around it. The city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. There you go. That's the three years there. The ninth year to the eleventh year.

Two to three years. On the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine was so severe. The reason it was famine was because they were surrounded. So severe that there was no food for the people of the land.

Then a breach was made in the city and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls by the king's garden. The Chaldeans, that's another word for the Babylonians, were around the city.

They fled in the direction of the Arab, but the army of the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, pursued the king, overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army scattered from him.

Then they captured the king, that's the king of Judah, and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah and passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah, that's the king Zedekiah.

[9 : 56] They slaughtered the sons of the king before his eyes and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, that was the 19th year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebusaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and he burned the house of the Lord, that's the temple, and the king's house, that's the palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem, every great house he burnt down.

And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted the king of Babylon together, deserted to the king of Babylon together with the rest of the multitude, Nebusaradan, the captain of the guard, carried into exile.

The captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vine-dressers and ploughmen. And among those who were left behind is a poet who wrote Lamentations.

And the key thing we need to recognize is that first kings, second kings, rather, records what happens. That's just historical narrative recording what happened. The book of Lamentations records how it felt.

And this is where we notice something that's very important in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, the fact that the Bible recognizes how powerful poetry and song is for expressing human emotions.

[11 : 32] And this resonates right through to the present day where you see people, when they want to express their emotions most powerfully, they do it in a song. And that's whether you're writing about people who emigrated from Scotland to Canada 100 years ago, or whether it's someone writing about a girl they like who broke their heart, or whether it's writing about loneliness or suffering or sorrow.

When we want to express our deepest emotions, still today we go to songs. We write it down whether our own poetry or reading the poetry of others, it's exactly the same in Scripture.

Poetry is used to record how it felt. And the truth is Lamentations is actually a very hard book to read.

And when you read some of the other poems in it, the descriptions of the suffering are very vivid and very, very distressing.

And there's this constant contrast between the prosperity of what Jerusalem once was. If we go back to my, I rubbed it out, sorry, but my picture of the city, when the city was high, everything was so good.

[12 : 50] Jerusalem was a beautiful city, magnificent. And yet now it lies in ruins. And you've got the description of all the devastation of being invaded, sieged, and eventually conquered.

And that's why the name of the book so fitting, it's called Lamentations, each of the poems is a lament, a powerful expression of distress and sorrow at everything that's happened.

And that's something you see several times in Scripture, not just in Lamentations in the Psalms as well. You see this genre of lament being used to express sorrow.

And in fact, you also see it in the life of Jesus. When he wept over Jerusalem, when he grieved at the grave of Lazarus, when he was suffering agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

And just as I know, that's an amazing reminder that the Bible is not kind of, everything is always fine. Let's pretend everything is great kind of book.

[13 : 59] The Bible never ever ignores or masks or downplays the reality of suffering and loss. And that's of course what makes the Bible the most realistic book that has ever been written.

But what I want us to focus on tonight is that in the midst of all the lament in these poems, there is also hope.

And that hope is captured so beautifully in the words of verses 22 to 24. And what I want us to see is that these words are amazing, not just because of what they say, but because of everything that's come before them and of everything that comes after them.

These words are written in the midst of sorrow and grief. Lamentations is a book full of darkness. And in the darkness of that night, these words are a beautiful ray of light.

If you were one of these people who had been left behind in Jerusalem in 586 BC, every morning would have felt like you were waking up to a nightmare.

[15 : 13] Seeing your eyes and just seeing destruction and devastation around you, that you would not be able to believe if it wasn't right there in front of you.

And even though you and I are not waking up to the aftermath of a war zone, I am still sure that for many of you, even though that when you wake up in the morning, even though the sun has risen, I'm sure everything can still often feel very, very dark.

In those moments, what do you need? Well, what we all need is what these verses speak about. And we'll just go through them quickly together.

Verse 22 tells us first that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. That word, steadfast love, is an incredibly important word in the Bible.

It translates a Hebrew word, the word, Hezad, which is actually a very hard word to translate. It's a word that sometimes is translated steadfast love, sometimes translated loving kindness.

[16 : 26] It's a word that speaks of the deepest commitment, that speaks of tender mercy. It speaks of unfailing love.

And the great emphasis of the verse is that that Hezad, that unfailing love, never ceases. It does not get used up.

And the same thing is echoed in the next phase, God's mercies never come to an end. So speaking about God's mercy, about His compassion towards those who don't deserve it, of His tenderness towards those who have mucked up in their lives.

God's mercy does not come to an end. It doesn't get spent. It never runs dry. And both of these phrases are combining to teach us something incredibly important about God's love and mercy and goodness towards us.

They're teaching us that God's love and mercy are not held in an enormous bank account that is little by little getting used up. And it's so important to recognize that because it's so easy to think like that.

[17 : 41] It's so easy to think, well, yes, God has this amazing love and the Bible speaks about it and so I can come to God and receive His love. But then in the back of our minds that there's think we're thinking, well, the more God gets to know me and the more mistakes I keep on making, that love is just bit by bit going to diminish.

As we go on our journey with the Lord, we think he's going to find more and more reason to dislike us. We'll see more and more ways in which we let him down.

And it's so easy to think that our relationship with God is like so many relationships today that are just a few mistakes away from being ended. It's so easy to think that our relationship with God is only ever a few steps away from finishing in divorce where we stuff up one too many times and we just get that little bit too annoying for God and he wants to just draw a line and say, enough is enough.

It's so easy to think that God's patience with you, that his enthusiasm for you, that his warmth towards you is gradually running down.

And I think part of that comes from the fact that often we have a suspicion in our minds that God is counting, that he's counting our failures as Christians bit by bit, they're adding up and slowly but surely God's love is cooling as we let him down, as we go on from day to day and make mistakes.

[19 : 33] It's so easy to feel like that. And maybe you sit here thinking, you know, I can think of a time when I was doing so much better as a Christian and God's love felt so much more real.

And now it's just not like that. It's so easy to think that it's diminishing. These verses are telling you that that is completely untrue.

God's love and mercy is not held in a massive tank that is gradually being used up and they're not held in a huge bank account that is slowly reducing.

God's love and mercy are a fountain that keeps on being filled, that keeps on overflowing.

And there's two crucial things to learn from that. One is that your failures are not accumulating reasons for you to run away from God.

[20 : 33] It's so easy to think that they do that my failures mean that I should stay away from God, that I should keep my distance from him. I've mucked up this week, therefore I should keep back.

That's not true. Instead, your failures are just giving you another reason to run to him. And if you feel like this has been a not particularly good week in your experience as a Christian, that is not a reason to stay away from God.

It's a reason to run to him and to come to that fountain of his mercy and love again. And the other crucial lesson it emphasizes is that your circumstances, no matter how difficult they might be, your circumstances never ever mean that God has forgotten you.

They never ever mean that he's abandoned you. And that is true even if you feel terrible.

Even if you feel like your faith is at the weakest that it's ever been. And even if you feel so confused and perplexed about whatever life is facing, your circumstances do not mean that God has abandoned you because you have to ask one question.

[21 : 53] The person who wrote these words, how were they feeling when they wrote them? Absolutely terrible. Because they were right in the depths of Jerusalem's devastation.

Yet in that context, in that moment, these words were written. And these words speak so powerfully as we move on.

God's mercy, God said fast love never ceases. His mercy never comes to an end. They are new every morning. That steadfast love, that mercy, they are new every single morning.

That is such a wonderful thing to think about. Every morning when you wake up, what are you waking up to? You're waking up to another busy week.

You're waking up to the pressures of life. You're waking up to bruises of everything that's gone wrong. You're waking up to unanswered questions of the things that don't make sense. You're waking up to regrets and frustrations.

[23 : 02] But if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you are also waking up to the steadfast love of the Lord and to the reality of his incredible mercy.

You're waking up to that every single morning. You wake up feeling overwhelmed.

You wake up feeling alone. You wake up feeling like a failure. These words are telling you that the love and mercy of God towards you is never, ever running out.

Most mornings, this is probably a terrible habit. Most mornings, one of the first things they do is check the sports news, especially just now because football transfers are all happening, so I'm often looking to see who's done what, what's happening next.

And that's fine. It's a good thing to wake up to. I try to avoid looking at the national news because it's depressing. Sports news, though, I much prefer. But before I find out who's bought who in terms of football or whatever else might be going on in the world of sport, far better to remind myself that this morning, this new day, I wake up and you to the steadfast love of the Lord and to the reality of his mercy.

[24 : 29] And the reason it's new every morning is because his love and his mercy is never running out. It doesn't lessen. It doesn't flicker. It doesn't diminish.

And it also does not reciprocate your failures. God's love and mercy does not reciprocate your failures.

And that's incredibly important for us to recognize and to think about because so often we think that there is a line of symmetry between us and God.

And so if you think back to your maths classes in primary five or six when you do lines of symmetry, it's so often easy for us to think, okay, well, my love for God today feels positive.

And so God's love for me is also positive. But this day, it's maybe not so strong. It's down here. And yet God probably feels the same way.

[25 : 27] And things are going worse. I'm actually struggled to pray. I've struggled to read. I've mucked up and I've just drifted from God and he's done the same.

But as I make a mistake, as I wander away, he slowly but surely steps back into the shadows and keeps his distance.

It is so incredibly easy to think like that. And it is absolute theological rubbish.

Because the reality is that there is no line of symmetry between us and God. There is a line of constant asymmetry whereby God's love and mercy and goodness towards us is in no way dependent or corresponding necessarily to how we might be feeling.

So we feel good. God is pouring his love onto us. We feel medium. God is pouring his love onto us and meeting us there. We feel terrible. God is pouring and pouring and pouring and pouring and pouring his love onto us to meet us wherever we are.

[26 : 45] Because this mercy and love is new every morning. You wake up tomorrow morning and you're there in terms of your spiritual life. That's where he meets you. You wake up tomorrow morning and you're down here.

That is where he meets you. That renewed love and mercy is poured out every single morning. And that's the incredible reality of what we wake up to.

As you open your eyes each day, God doesn't say, oh yeah, I remember. I said long ago that I would love this person. No, he says, I love you and you today.

I love you afresh. I love you again and again and again. My mercy is here for you. It's enough for you and I have got more and more and more for you.

Every time you open your eyes on a new day, you don't need to try and think, oh, when was I doing Beth and my Christian life? You can open your eyes and know the renewed, relentless, unflinching, unchanging love of God.

[27 : 51] And that is true. No matter how dark that morning might feel. And the reason that can happen is because God's faithfulness is great.

God's faithfulness is great. Now, that's so crucial for us to recognize in this passage because why did Jerusalem fall?

Why did the nation of Israel fall apart? Why did Judah ultimately get conquered? It was because the people's unfaithfulness was non-existent.

They were unfaithful in who they worshiped, going after all the gods of the nations around them. They were unfaithful in terms of how they lived, repeatedly disobeying God's command, repeatedly exploiting the weak and the needy in society.

They were an immensely and frustratingly and stubbornly unfaithful nation. Yet God's faithfulness is great.

[29 : 02] And that word great, it can also mean chief. And I love that word. I love that emphasis there that it highlights the fact that, you know, in all the difficulty of our circumstances and all the struggles that our new day might bring, in all the darkness that can overshadow us, God's faithfulness is chief.

In other words, his faithfulness is the boss. Your failures are always subordinated to his faithfulness.

In other words, in the battle between your mistakes and God's faithfulness, there is only ever one winner and it's never you. It's always him.

And the key thing that we need to recognize is that this steadfast love that's highlighted in that verse, that steadfast love is not a test of your faithfulness.

Now, that's such an easy thing to think. It's so easy to think that God's love behind that lies a test of our faithfulness.

[30 : 08] But it's not because our faithfulness crumbled on day one. As a humanity, we rejected God. We pushed him away. We were unfaithful from Genesis 3 all the way through human history.

And yet so many religions and so many false gospels try to offer a solution that basically boils down to a test of our faithfulness. The idea, well, if we do certain things, if we can achieve this, if we can better ourselves in this way, that way, and the next way, if we do certain things, we can make ourselves good enough for God, we can redemonstrate our faithfulness and that will restore things.

And that's pointless because we already know the answer to a test of our faithfulness. We're not going to pass it. And any idea that we can work our way up to God is not going to work.

The gospel does not test your faithfulness. God's covenant steadfast love is not testing your faithfulness.

It is testing His faithfulness. The gospel is testing His faithfulness.

[31 : 27] Will He stick with you? Will He hold on to you? Will He always stay with you?

Will He never ever let you go? Will He pay the price needed to put right everything that we have done wrong?

The gospel is testing His faithfulness. And that is a test that God never, ever fails.

Because that's how great His faithfulness is. And if you want the proof of that, you just need to go to the cross.

Because the cross was the ultimate test of God's faithfulness. Would He send His Son? Would He hand over His Son? Would He pour out His wrath upon His Son so that we could be saved?

[32 : 35] That's the ultimate test of God's faithfulness. Did He do it? Yes. Why did He do it?

For you. And that's why, like this poet here, we can say, the Lord is my portion, and therefore I will hope in Him.

That's the great reality of the gospel, that even somebody who has lost everything, the person there has lost everything, and yet he knows that the thing that matters most is still there.

All the splendour and wealth and glory of Jerusalem has gone, but he's still got the thing that matters most. He still has the Lord.

And the reality is, is that even though this was the lowest point of the Old Testament, even though everything was absolutely awful, the reality is everything that they were experiencing was actually temporary.

[33 : 39] So the power of the Babylonians, temporary, they're not there now. The rubble in Jerusalem, temporary, it did actually get rebuilt.

The devastation of famine, temporary. They were able to get going again. The separation from fellow believers, temporary, for them and for us.

And all of that gives us reason to hope. Hope on a dark, dark morning. And ultimately, that's what Jesus gives us through His death and resurrection.

He gives us hope in the midst of a broken and dark world. But these words of the words of this poem are so wise that hope has got to be in Him.

A hope directed to Jesus, to the reality of what He's done for us. So what do you need tomorrow morning?

[35 : 00] What do you really need tomorrow morning? Well, everything that we need is in these verses.

Everything that we need is in the Lord. Amen.