

Lamentations (Part Five; 1989)

Lamentations 2:17 - 3:24

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 23-May-89; Sermon #BS-LA05

Let us go back to the book of Lamentations.

You might recall when we started in the second chapter of the book of Lamentations that I mentioned to you that the emphasis in chapter 1 was on Jerusalem's desertion, its desolation, and its shame.

In chapter 2, it begins to take a turn, and the emphasis in the poem here is on its destruction. I also mentioned to you that it appears likely that chapter 2 was among the first of the chapters that was composed. Chapter 1 appears to have been composed sometime later, after someone had the time to reflect more fully on the things that had occurred.

Chapter 2 gives indication that it was written probably within a month after the city fell because, unless we are supposed to take some of these things as metaphorical, which hardly seems likely, but rather they are intended to be taken as literal, we find indications that there are still bodies laying on the ground as a result of the warfare that had taken place. So that indicates that Lamentations 2 was written shortly after the city fell and is much more concerned with the destruction of the city. We find things like the gates are sunk into the mire, the walls were knocked down, the destruction of the Temple, the destruction and complete disintegration of life, let us say, administered life. There was no formal administering of government in the city or religion in the city. No services were being held at the Temple. There were no festivals that these people could go to.

A great deal of emphasis was also given on the mockery and the scoffing and the shame that the city felt at being the object of scorn, which gives an indication that this was written by a person who was accustomed to riding, as the Bible would say, on the high places of the earth, and being highly respected and having a great reputation, I guess you might say, at least feeling very proud about oneself. And now here they are degraded, and the

thing that they seem to be most worried about is the way other people are looking at them and mocking them and deriding them because they have been brought down so very low. A lot of psychological pain because of the neighbors adding insult to injury, bragging and scoffing and gloating and claiming all the credit for themselves for what has occurred to Jerusalem.

Because after all, it was the day that they had been waiting for, for Jerusalem to be knocked from their high pillar and position of honor. So Jerusalem then was now a laughing stock.

We began to see that the author was realizing that God was the one who purposed it. Because bits and pieces of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, you know, the thoughts that are contained in those chapters begin to show through, and the poet was beginning to make the connections between what had occurred, why they were in the condition that they were in, and the fact that sin had brought this to pass.

We will pick it up in verse 18. But let us go back to verse 17.

Lamentations 2:17 The Lord has done what He purposed; He fulfilled His word which He commanded in days of old. [Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28] He has thrown down and has not pitied, He has caused your enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries.

The horn to the ancient Hebrew was a symbol of strength, like the tusk of an elephant, the horn of a rhinoceros, the horns of a bull, and so they symbolize strength. So here He is showing that God's purpose was carried out, and that God actually made the enemies of Jerusalem stronger so that they could overthrow Jerusalem.

Lamentations 2:18 Their heart [that has to be the heart of the city of Jerusalem, the people that are there, all combined into one] cried out to the Lord [I hardly think that the enemy is going to cry out to the Lord, but the people of Jerusalem, their hearts cried out to the Lord.], O wall of the daughter of Zion, . . .

Remember what I told you the last time that the wall in the Bible is a symbol of fortification, the first line of defense. Now the wall of the daughter of Zion; the daughter of Zion I think in this context would have to be the religious aspect, and the wall here would be Jerusalem, you see, which would be the protection. The city would be protecting the religious aspect that would be symbolized by the Temple, so the city should have risen (or they did) rise to the defense of the Temple.

Lamentations 2:18 . . . O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no relief; give your eyes no rest.

So now the poet is encouraging Jerusalem to cry out in prayer to God. And he is saying weep without relief to God because why? Because there is no hope anywhere else.

Even though they are recognizing that God has been the "cause" of their devastation and destruction and the kind of condition that they are in, He is still their only hope because He is the only one that can overcome their enemies. He is the only one that can grant them repentance and bring them out of their real problem.

Lamentations 2:19 "Arise, cry out in the night, . . .

That is a phrase that indicates go to the utmost because during the day we normally work and expend energy. But when you work overtime, you see, you work over into the night, into the dark period when you would normally be maybe fellowshiping with your family and then of course going to bed to get yourself rest for the next day. But now he is saying to cry out in the night. In other words, do not give yourself any rest at all. Just keep on working at prayer.

Lamentations 2:19 . . . at the beginning of the watches; . . .

He is saying intermittently. That would be the beginning of the day actually, not the day part of the day, the light part of the day, but actually the

beginning of the day because the day begins at sunset. That is when these watches begin.

Lamentations 2:19 . . . Pour out your heart like water [sincere and heartfelt] before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him [now here is why] for the life of your young children.

Now that can have two meanings. Children are the most defenseless of all in the city. They cannot run fast. They do not have the strength physically to fight off an oppressor. They do not have the intelligence or the experience to deal with anything like that. So he could mean that. Ask God to arise to defend the weak.

Or it could mean literally children in the sense that they represent the hope of the future. We are the ones—we adults—who sinned and brought this on the city, and if the city is going to have any future at all, if Judah is going to recover, if there is going to be any future for Judah and for Jerusalem, it is going to have to be because God rescues the youth. He gets them turned around despite the damage that has been done by the adults.

Lamentations 2:19 Lift your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street."

If you have any imaginations at all, you can almost hear the kids plaintively crying out, "Mommy, mommy, give me something to eat!" There is nothing to eat.

Lamentations 2:20 "See, O Lord, and consider! [he continues the prayer] To whom You have done this?

I once read something regarding prayer. That because it obviously says in the Bible that God already knows what we have need of, then prayer is really nothing more an indication to God that we are aware of what we have need of. We recognize our needs, and that is what He is looking for. Because He already knows the need.

It is interesting what he is asking the people to tell God that they are aware of, and that is, look who You have done this to. You have done this, God. You are afflicting this on Your chosen people.

I do not think that there is really too much of a note of, let us say, recrimination in this. I think we could certainly read that in, but I really do not feel from what I can see in the bulk of this prayer that this man is encouraging these people to do that, that is really not what he has in mind. But more he seems to have in mind what Moses had in mind when God said to Moses, "Stand aside, I'm going to blast them all out of here and I'm going to start all over again with you." And Moses, "No, no, God, don't do that! Because what are the other nations going to say when they find out that You didn't have the strength and the power and the honor to carry through with what You said that You were going to do?"

And I think that that is what this person has in mind. Actually, in a sense you might say, reminding God of His promise to carry through what He says that He will do.

Lamentations 2:20-21 Should the women eat their offspring [Well, they were doing it.], the children they have cuddled? Should the priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord? [right in the Temple, right in the Holy Place] Young and old lie on the ground in the streets; . . .

One of those places that gives the indication it was written right after it happened. They were lying there dead. They had not been buried. Nobody had the strength to do it. There was no organization to do it. Apparently, at least at this time, the enemy had not taken any move to do it.

Lamentations 2:21 . . . my virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword; You have slain them in the day of Your anger, . . .

Well, it was actually the Babylonians who did it, but they were merely instruments, and the poet recognizes that what He is witnessing here is the

fulfillment of what they heard through Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and others, who were sent by God to warn them that if they did not change their ways, that there was going to be a price to be paid.

Lamentations 2:22 You have invited as to a feast day the terrors that surround me.

You know, God's people were invited—we might say commanded—to come to the holy days. It says in Leviticus 23 they were commanded assemblies. They were invited there to have fellowship with God. Only this time God invited, not the Israelites to come to keep a feast, but the invitation was out to the enemies to inflict terror on Jerusalem.

Lamentations 2:22 In the day of the Lord's anger there was no refugee or survivor. Those whom I have borne and brought up [his own children] my enemies have destroyed."

This is really sad. I mean it is almost unrelieved horror from beginning to end. I just hope that none of us ever have to go through anything like this. But it is coming, just as sure as we are sitting here, it is coming. It is going to occur and we do not know when. But it cannot be very far now. By very far, you know, 5, 10, 15 years or whatever. Things are taking shape.

And that just makes me think of China again. I do not know whether you realize it, but boy, I will tell you, you are witnessing history in the making. The students and the others who are rising up there in China, they may not succeed this time. But I believe that they have started something that is not going to be stopped.

And I think that God has willed it, that it is going to occur because a more open form of government that will permit a greater amount of liberty and prosperity, and material prosperity is going to be necessary to bring those nations together to form a third block of such awesome proportions that they will be a challenge to the beast. The formation of the beast is well underway. But the 200 million man army that represents the multitudes, the billions of people—in India and China, in Japan, in the islands of the South Pacific,

maybe some of central Russia as well—those people have to be allied together in some kind of a, at the very least, loose union in which they will commit themselves to supporting an armed conflict against the beast.

It is very interesting that the Bible shows that they are not going to attack first. They are not going to attack until they are first attacked. But there is something about them that the beast constitutes as a threat to its authority because the beast's [sound cuts out] warfare of such awesome proportions. You know, it says that after that war is over that there are going to be so few trees left standing in Assyria, in Germany, that a child can count them. That is warfare that is mind boggling.

You are beginning to see China awaken in a way that it has not been awakened in a long time. And what is so interesting, at least to this point, is they have been able to maintain a measure of stability despite the fact that there are millions of people on the move or resisting for a change of government.

On to chapter 3. Now there is a change here, and that is that the sufferings that are described in chapter 3 are more personal. We began to see a little bit of that in chapter 2, verse 22 where he said that "those whom I have borne and brought up my enemies have destroyed." He inserts there a personal thing about his own family. Maybe he was the only one left.

Chapter 3 continues that theme, and it largely focuses on the personal sufferings, not necessarily just of this person, but they are personal things nonetheless. Not the totality of the chapter is on that, but it is more personal than those of the city personified.

And again, chapter 3 is an acrostic. But in this case, the acrostic has a twist to it. An acrostic poem is one in which the beginning a word in each verse follows the pattern of the alphabet. On this one, the beginning of the first three verses, the first word begins with the same letter, and then the second three verses begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And then the third three verses begins with the third letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and then the fourth three verses begins with the fourth letter.

Now there is one more interesting thing that nobody has ever figured out. When you get to the 16th and 17th series, instead of following the normal pattern and 16 following 15, he suddenly follows 15 with 17 and then goes to 16 and then goes back to 18 and continues on through the alphabet. Nobody knows why. But he reverses the letters there.

Lamentations 3:1 I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.

You know, that sets it off right away as a personal thing. Now he does not mean seen in the sense of just looked upon. He means seen in the sense of experienced. That is shown there in verse 22 of chapter 2. He had experienced that his family had been apparently wiped away.

Affliction here means calamities. "I am the man who has experienced calamities by the rod of His wrath."

Lamentations 3:2-3 He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day.

There is another interesting thing that I want to inject right here. You see, the word *rod* has a very interesting background. Now every time you see a picture of a shepherd, especially a shepherd that was supposed to have been from this period of time, he is standing there probably with a fairly long robe on and he is pictured having a staff in his hand. And the staff would be an instrument of wood, it would be roughly about five or six feet long, and on one end there is a hook. Now we are all familiar with that. But I wonder how many of you know that a shepherd also had a rod and the rod and the staff were not the same thing. Remember reading in Psalm 23, "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

Well, what did he use the rod for? The staff with the hook on the end is fairly clear. The shepherd could be walking alongside of a sheep, and if there was a sheep that was stepping out of line, he had an extra six feet there that he could reach out with his staff and catch the thing by the leg maybe or by a horn and jerk it back into line. Or he could use the other thing, the other side,

the other end of it, hang on to the hook, and if he wanted a sheep to move out a little bit, poke the thing in the ribs, and the sheep would be moved to the side.

What did he use a rod for? And what was a rod? Well, the rod was what you and I would call today a billy club. What a policeman carries, about 18 inches long, about 1 inch and a quarter, inch and a half thick. A nice solid piece of ash or maple, something good and strong, solid. And whenever a sheep was not really behaving, whack! right down across the eyes, the back of the head or whatever, he hit him with that thing with all of his might.

What did he use the rod for? For discipline. Now that word came right into the English language in its usage. Where have you heard the term rod? [audience participation] I am talking about in the English language, let us say, in American life. [audience participation] You see, in the wild west, he is packing a rod.

They lifted that usage right out of the Bible and they applied it. What did they call the six shooter? The peacemaker. That is a funny name for a gun, the peacemaker. Maybe not so funny.

But at any rate, you see what God did here. "I am the man who has experienced [calamities] by the rod of His wrath." God was whacking them over the head but good, hitting them in the ribs because the gentle prods of the staff had not worked.

The gentle prods of the staff had come through Jeremiah. They had come through Ezekiel. They had come through Isaiah and Hosea and all of the other prophets that came before here, and they kept prodding them in the ribs and grabbing them by the horns. I am talking metaphorically here, but the people did not come back in line, so now God is whacking them good with His rod.

Lamentations 3:2 He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.

Now you know what happens in darkness. If you are walking along the road and you cannot see very well, you are liable to step in potholes, or to trip

over a log that might be laying across the path, or turn your ankle on a rock that you hit at an angle with your foot and you end up with a sprained ankle. You cannot see where you are going because you do not have the guidance of light.

And so this man was saying that everywhere he turned, why, his road, his way was strewn with something that was going to bring upon him some sort of pain and fear, and he wished that he was in the light once again.

Lamentations 3:3 Surely He has turned His hand against me. . . .

You know, instead of holding out a hand that is giving, He is giving them the back of His hand. He has turned it against or maybe He has clutched it and now it is in the form of a fist.

Lamentations 3:3 . . . time and time again [it is as though he cannot escape them] throughout the day.

One more thing that I happened to think of here. See, there is a picture of a shepherd and a shepherd normally leads his flock. He either walks alongside of it or he walks ahead of it, and the sheep follow along after him. Well, what he is showing here is that the shepherd is no longer leading, He is driving.

Of course the shepherd is God, and so he has the feeling that he is being driven along from behind by the shepherd—God—and he does not have any light and the road is very rough and he is suffering as a result of that. So what we are seeing here is the beginning of a complaint of exceptional suffering, and "time and time again" gives the indication that it seems as though it is going to go on without end.

Lamentations 3:4 He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones.

Now "aged my flesh" does not mean to make old, but to produce the effects of old age, that is, to become worn out even though one is still young. You have heard of people who have burned the candle at both ends and they are

only 23 years old, but they look like they have been through the wringer three or four times, frontwards and backwards, and they are way older than their actual age would be. So again, it is an indication of what the suffering is bringing upon them.

"Broken my bones" does not necessarily mean literally broken, but rather metaphorically it means that he was aching all over as though they were broken. If you ever suffered a broken bone, it is very similar to an abscessed tooth. It aches, and it is not an ache that you can get rid of by scratching. You just cannot get at it, and that is what he is describing here, that his body felt as though the bones were broken because they were aching.

Lamentations 3:5-6 He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe [or poverty and hardship]. He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago.

That is interesting. It is a very picturesque metaphor. It is as though he had been put in a grave and everybody had forgotten about him—but he was alive. That would be scary, would it not? To be inside of a coffin and you were alive and you knew that you were covered up. That is how hopeless he was beginning to feel. Well, that would be the ultimate in terror.

I can remember one time visiting an elderly woman. And she asked me if the church believed in embalming. And I said, well, as far as I know, I had never heard any kind of a policy statement from anybody in the church regarding it either way, for or against, and as far as I knew, why, it would be all right to do such a thing. Because it certainly says about Joseph that he was embalmed and God at least gives some sort of an indication there that He was not against it anyway.

And I said, "Why are you interested in being embalmed, making sure that you're embalmed?" And she said the greatest fear in her life was that she would somehow or another get in her coffin, everybody thought she was dead and she would be put in the ground, she would be buried, and then she would wake up inside the coffin.

Well, that is kind of the picture that this guy has about the way things were in Jerusalem. That they looked so bad it seemed as if he was in a tomb and he was alive inside of his coffin, and there was no way out.

Lamentations 3:7-8 He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.

Maybe there are some reflections here of being in a dungeon, as though he was in there and he could not be heard. At any rate, it is a further ramification of the previous verse there where he was in a place where he felt that there was no escape.

Lamentations 3:9 He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.

It is like he was in a maze. Have you ever gone into one of those mirror mazes in an amusement park and you start in and there is glass and mirrors all around you and you see yourself in every direction. No matter where you turn, if you are not careful and you move too fast, you just run into yourself running into a mirror. And you know, you have to kind of feel yourself along and grope for an opening. Well, that is what this guy was saying, that life was like for him. He was in a hall of mirrors. There was no escape from what he was in.

Lamentations 3:10-11 He has been to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush [like God had become a beast of prey]. He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate.

Let us get a picture there of a man going along a path. He is traveling from one city to another and he is attacked by a bear or by a lion and the thing knocks him to the ground and he is kind of bashed in and beaten up and bleeding badly.

And then the lion or the bear pulls him off the road and into the bush, then leaves him there, torn in pieces, not enough strength to pick himself up and get back on the road, and afraid that if anybody does come along, they are going to pass him right by because he is too far off the road to get any help. You can see how he just felt every way he turned the path was blocked.

Please remember what we are seeing here. It is a description of what our people are going to feel like when these things happen to us. We have never had to endure anything like this.

I do not know whether anybody can say that they are experienced at war and they feel like they could go through it without any kind of psychological damage. But we are inexperienced almost totally. And most of the people who have gone through World War II, though they are not dead, they are certainly in no condition to render a great deal of encouragement to those who are going to go through this, and it is very unlikely that they are going to survive.

And so you can understand those prophecies later on, later on chronologically, when Israel is brought back from their captivity. How God describes the kind of attitude that they come back in, you know, weeping, and their spirit is broken. There is no more of that haughty approach we have to life, about how great we are.

There are going to be people that are going to have an awful lot of psychological damage that is going to have to be dealt with. And we are going to have to deal with it. We are going to have to bring these people back from the brink of madness or insanity from the horror that they have had to experience. Boy, if you do not thank God for being merciful to you and revealing these things to us so that we can get ourselves ready.

Lamentations 3:12-15 He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow. [God is the enemy here.] He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins [just transfixed or stabbed with accurate shots]. I have become the ridicule of all my people—their taunting song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood.

So again, a reference to being a laughingstock, a derision. Apparently the only food that is left is, in verse 15, wormwood.

Lamentations 3:16 He has also broken my teeth with gravel.

Very interesting. There are two thoughts regarding this. One is that people were scraping the grain from the granary floors, trying to get every little last kernel of wheat or corn or whatever it might be to give themselves a little bit of sustenance. However, they also swept up rocks—I should not say rocks—little stones, gritty sand, you know, that kind of thing that would also be on the floors with the grain that they were trying to sweep up.

The other thought on this is that they might have had a small amount of grain left but they had nothing to bake it in. So they baked it in holes dug out in the ground. Of course the dough, the bread would be put into the hole, soft, and in the course of sitting there baking, it would also pick up grains of sand, bits of little stones, and so forth. And then when they would go to eat it, here they were eating bread that had little pebbles and stones and gritty sand within it. So they had bread, then, mixed with grit.

So one or the other, that seems to be the approach here anyway, so that they were really scraping the gleanings of everything in order to get even a little bit to eat.

Lamentations 3:17 You have moved my soul far from peace [We were in a constant state of anxiety.]; I have forgotten prosperity.

We are going to find out later that he had not forgotten everything. Certainly from time to time there would be feelings of hopelessness and almost total sorrow and discouragement so that it would just wipe out the remembrances of former days of prosperity and well-being and happiness with the family around, holy days, singing and laughing and having good times, remembering things and telling stories.

But now life was a constant state of anxiety and a constant looking for something to eat. You cannot think much of prosperity when your stomach is empty and everybody is rummaging around in the city hoping that they can find something to eat.

Lamentations 3:18 And I said, "My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord."

Strength is probably not quite the right word. The Hebrew word here indicates or includes strength. But the word is more closely synonymous with glory or splendor than it is with strength. It could mean something like good looks. It could mean vitality.

Now if it is applied personally to a human being, that is what that word tends to mean. It means good looks or vitality, a state of health and energy, which would of course include strength, but it could also include, and it does include in other places in the Bible, the Temple. Because the Temple was the glory of Israel. That was the resource, you might say the chief resource and foundation of their spiritual strength, of their vitality in terms of confidence and a sense of well-being. Something that gave them a measure of peace and a sense of prosperity and happiness because here, you see, was the dwelling place of God, the Creator of all of the earth. That is the way they looked at it.

Now look at that verse in that way. "And I said, 'My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord.'" He is saying, in the one sense, that his physical vitality and his glory are gone. In the other sense, he was saying, if we are talking about the city speaking, which is included here, it kind of weaves in and out. Remember how in chapter 1 the city of Jerusalem was shown as a widow lamenting what had happened to her. And some of that is woven through chapter 3 as well. Sometimes the man is speaking, sometimes he speaks for the city, or we might say for the people of the city.

So on the one hand he is saying its physical strength and vitality and glory and good looks is gone. On the other hand, he is saying that because the Temple is destroyed, destroyed from God—He was the instrument of its

destruction through the Babylonians—now we have lost our spiritual strength and our glory and our confidence, and we have no reason to hope. It is as though the banner that gave them the hope to go on was gone.

Let us go on to verse 19:

Lamentations 3:19 Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall.

He is saying to God, remember that my misery is bitter.

Lamentations 3:20 My soul still remembers and sinks within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.

You see what I mean when I said that he had not forgotten everything. Here the poet makes a turn. It is an important juncture because he begins to reflect on things in his meditation, things that are of course contained in the Word of God, things that we might read today where it says that I will never leave you nor forsake you.

He might have been recalling (if indeed this was Jeremiah) some of the things that he himself had been inspired to say. I do not say that it is Jeremiah, it may have been. But whoever the author was, he was recalling some of those things and he knew that God intended to recover His people from that.

Remember what it says in the book of Jeremiah. God gave Jeremiah that 70-years prophecy too. He told him to go buy a piece of land because the Jews were going to come back from their captivity. And so he knew, then, when he began to reflect on those things, that everything was not lost. That this was a punishment. It was a very severe punishment. They had a lesson to learn. They had to repent. They had to get their act in gear and begin to do things right, but there was hope. God was still alive. God was on His throne. God was going to carry through His purpose. God would remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God would remember His promises to those men. And "therefore I have hope."

He knew that God's affliction of these calamities would not last forever and that there was a better day coming.

Lamentations 3:22-24 Through the Lord's love [your Bible might say mercy. I will show you why I said love in just a little bit] through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I hope in Him!"

Now his hope is not aroused either by denying or minimizing the suffering but beginning to recall the things about God's character and about His purpose. Now the key word here is the word that is translated mercies, Hebrew *chesed*.

Turn with me to Hosea 6.

Hosea 6:6 I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But like men they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me.

The word *chesed* appears there. It is again translated in the King James, mercy.

Now my Bible has a marginal reference and it says in the margin for my verse that that word means faithfulness or loyalty. You know, God is faithful to His promises. God is loyal to His people, even though He may punish. He is still loyal to what He is. He is loyal to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We even just read that at the beginning of this Bible study in Romans 11, that God will be faithful to Israel because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were men who were worth being loyal to.

The real bottom line is here that God is loyal and faithful and merciful because of His love. It is His love which generates all of the other things. It is His love which is the primary attribute of His character. It is the only attribute of His character by which He describes Himself. God is love. Nowhere does it say that God is loyalty; God is faithfulness; God is honesty,

God is integrity. Yes, He is all of those things, but love is the only attribute of character by which He chooses to describe Himself because it is the one that permeates all of His actions. It not only permeates the actions, it motivates them from the beginning.

And now back in Lamentations 3 again. It was God's covenant that created Israel. God was the one that proposed it. And He did it, again, because of His loyalty, His promises, His love for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So His love then motivated Him to carry through on the promise that He made to them to make a covenant with His people.

Now you see, this is what the author here is reflecting upon. And because God is love, He is then going to be motivated to carry through, even as He did when He got so angry with the children of Israel that He was going to—He told Moses to start anew with him—He still would have been loyal to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because Moses was a descendant of those men. But when Moses reminded Him of His promise, and God's love and mercy carried through, and He spared the children of Israel there.

In like manner, God in His love warned Judah through Jeremiah, through Ezekiel, and others as well. And now the author here is remembering the former kindnesses of God and knows that God would be motivated to carry through and he therefore had hope.

You need to remember these things because God will not go back on His promises because He loves us. And because He loves us, He is going to be motivated to do everything in His power, even in the midst of our punishment or correction or whatever that He is working in our life, He is going to work circumstances, work on our mind. He will do everything to give us every opportunity to succeed in His purpose.

So God's corrections of us will not last forever because He will carry through and He will be done with what He is doing. And so in verse 23, that is why he says that they are new every morning. Morning is the equivalent of being renewed. The day is renewed. There is hope.

Night, on the other hand, metaphorically, is a foreshadowing of death. Awakening each day is a remembrance of God's faithfulness, that God is dependable.

Lamentations 3:24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul.

Soul is a little bit misleading because soul makes us think, erroneously, of a portion of the body. But soul means self, everything. It would be better translated into the English word myself. Says myself, all of me. "The Lord is my portion," says myself, therefore I hope in Him."

He had reached the point in his meditations where he fully realized that he had everything to gain and nothing to lose with the future. That he had hit bottom. Oh, we are all going to do that sooner or later. In fact, we might do it quite a number of times. We may hit bottom and bounce around three or four times before we start back up again.

But you have to remember that in all of these cases God is faithful. If a person can be restored in spirit in the midst of such horror, surely we can be restored in spirit when we are going through our trials—trials which are in type just as hard for us as this trial was for this fellow. Because I think that in most of our trials, God takes us to the wall anyway. By the wall I mean as far as we can go at that time.

But there is always hope because God is faithful. All we have to do is continue to hope in Him, respond, keep yielding in obedience to Him, keep in touch with Him, keep praying, keep studying, keep going on. And He will keep saving us, delivering us from our private destructions and discouragement.