

Theme: In hard times we can easily give in to despair, but God uses times like this to call us to look to Him for mercy, salvation, and hope, knowing that He is the faithful God.

I. Intro - Living In Hard Times

- A. This is a very unusual time! Everything upside down!
- B. It seems like life has ground to a halt
- C. Jeremiah faced this - the destruction of Jerusalem
- D. How do we find hope in such times? Where is God and what is He doing?

II. Hard Times: A World In Turmoil

- A. Hard times for Jeremiah: Jerusalem destroyed
How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave....³ After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.
Lamentations 1:1, 3
 - 1. This is far more than 'social distancing'
 - 2. Jerusalem was besieged, captured, destroyed
 - 3. The people were literally carried away to Babylon
 - 4. Talk about hard times! This was the end of life as they had known it!
 - a. Many loved ones had died, others sick
 - b. Had lost everything: homes, possessions, freedom
 - c. They were carried away as slaves to Babylon

- B. This left Jeremiah feeling despair
I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. ¹⁸ So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord." ¹⁹ I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. ²⁰ I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Lamentations 3:17–20
 - 1. He felt deprived of peace (shalom)
 - 2. He had forgotten prosperity (his soul forgot good)
 - 3. All the good of life seems to have gone away and replaced with bitterness
 - 4. When he thought of this his soul became downcast
- C. We may feel the same thing right now
 - 1. It seems like the earth is shaking beneath our feet
 - 2. Schools, restaurants shut down; travel restricted
 - 3. Sports and many theaters shut down
 - 4. The economy seems to be staggering and in trouble
 - 5. When we look at all of this our soul can become downcast, and a cloud of depression can cover us
 - 6. It seems like a bad dream - but it is real life!

III. Why Do Times Like This Happen?

- A. Sometimes the things we love and trust can betray us
I called to my allies but they betrayed me.
Lamentations 1:19 NIV

I called to my lovers, but they deceived me.
Lamentations 1:19 ESV

1. Sometimes our allies and lovers - the things we love, rely on, and trust - betray us and cause trouble rather than helping.
2. Judah's false gods and her national allies did not help in her hour of need but betrayed her into calamity.
3. Technology is like that for us today. It can be beneficial and helpful, but we love it and can turn it into a false god, thinking it has the power to save.
4. Technology is helping in his crisis, but it also helped to create it since we can travel so far so fast - spreading the virus as we go.
5. Our false understanding of freedom has also worked this way. People in Italy refused to heed warnings at first and it caused the epidemic to spread. The same thing happened here with people going to bars when they were asked to not do so.
6. Sometimes God allows our false idols and loves to have their natural effect to prompt us to reevaluate where our trust and hope really lies.

B. Sometimes hard times are meant to expose our sin
 The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading. Lamentations 2:14

1. The prophets in Jeremiah's day did not warn against sin but rather encouraged the people that it was not really sin.
2. All suffering is ultimately rooted in the fall and its consequences, but there are also times when God allows such times to awaken us to areas of sin in our lives, and how destructive that is for us.

3. Sin is ALWAYS destructive and ALWAYS leads to some form of captivity (see Romans 1). But this idea was mocked in Jeremiah's day and our own.
4. God intends for us to respond to times like this by hearing His voice, recognizing, repenting, and rooting out sin.
 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. ⁴¹ Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: ⁴² "We have sinned and rebelled..." Lamentations 3:40-42
 - a. Judah's sin had led to very difficult times
 - b. This was meant to cause them to examine themselves and to repent of their sin.
 - c. Throughout Scripture, tough times are a call to examine our ways and to repent of sin and cry out to God for mercy and forgiveness.

IV. Finding Hope In Hard Times

- A. Turn to God - He Is Faithful and Compassionate
 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²²Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:21-23
 1. Don't give in to despair; we have reason to hope!
 2. Our hope is based on God's love, compassion, and faithfulness
 3. We will not find hope in technology, social media, or the government
 4. The firm foundation for hope is God Himself - the compassionate, forgiving, faithful God

5. Whatever the underlying reason for the hard times, God is unchanging and He is the one true source of hope.
6. Whoever you are, whatever your fears or despair, I can promise you that God is compassionate and faithful - look to Him!
7. If you have never had a personal relationship with God, look to Him today, for He is compassionate to forgive our sins and faithful to walk with us through every season of life!
8. Our God is not far off in our times of trouble; He has taken flesh to draw near to us! He bears our sorrows, takes our punishment upon Himself. He is God WITH us - no matter what we face!

B. We wait for God's salvation

I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." ²⁵ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Lament 3:24–26

1. Jeremiah reminded Himself that God is our treasure and that God is faithful
2. Circumstances tempt us to focus on the hard times rather than God, but like Jeremiah, we must remind ourselves that God is our treasure and foundation.
3. During hard times we are called to devote ourselves to seeking God, focusing on Him rather than the difficulties surrounding us.
4. Jeremiah learned to quiet his fears and to quietly look to God each day, waiting for God's salvation.

5. Throughout history Christians have actively turned to God during times of plague, famine, war, and calamity, finding their hope and peace in Him and His Presence regardless of the circumstances around them.
6. There will be a temptation as this wears on to become frustrated, to despair, to focus on the situation and what is lost rather than on God. We must not give in to this temptation! Wait on God!
7. Don't waste this situation - it is good for us if we learn to wait quietly upon God, looking to Him as our foundation, our hope, and our treasure.

V. Applying the Word

A. Looking to God in his troubled time

1. If you are watching this even though you never go to church because this time has rattled you - I urge you to look to Jesus!
2. This is a terrible time, but God wants to use it to draw you to Himself!
3. If you have never personally turned away from your sin and to Christ as Savior and Lord - do so today!
4. If you do, contact our church office and we will help you to start growing in your new faith
5. All of us need to look to God through this time
6. Don't waste it or Netflix it away - actively seek God during all of this
7. Confess sins and draw near to Him each day - even more than normal

8. Let this be our practice until our final day - as it will be in all of eternity!

B. Response song: 10,000 reasons

Finding Hope In Hard Times

Lamentations 3:17-26

March 22, 2020

Response song: 10,000 Reasons

Romans 15:13

Teaching keywords: Hope; anxiety and worry; idolatry and false gods; salvation and deliverance

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

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