

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, April 20, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: When Our World Falls Apart (The Invisible War Series Part 4)

What do we do when our world falls apart? What do we do when our businesses, investments, or pensions is suddenly affected by global economic shifts or tariffs? What do we do when we receive difficult medical test results—for ourselves or for someone we love. What do we do when unexpected challenges hit us, or when our loved ones face unthinkable hardships? These are the kinds of questions many people have asked over the years. One person in the Bible who deeply wrestled with similar questions was the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was an Israeli prophet during the Old Testament era. Throughout his life, he witnessed his nation went into crisis. Israel was threatened by foreign enemies, and eventually, many of its were taken into captivity. Jeremiah personally witnessed the devastation that that struck his homeland and the suffering of his fellow citizens. Out of this pain, Jeremiah wrote two biblical books: the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Lamentations. Now, I believe most of us may not be very familiar with Lamentations, even though it is a relatively short book.

The word lamentation is not one we use often today. It is an old English word that simply means “to lament” or “to express sorrow.” In a sense, this book could also be called the Book of Complaints. When we admit our wrongdoings before God, we call that confession. When we express our sorrows and struggles to God, that is lamenting. So, Lamentations is, quite literally, Jeremiah’s heartfelt cry to God. It is not a real positive book, but in the middle of all this lament, there is a beautiful message on how Jeremiah began to rebuild his life when his world had completely fallen apart. This is the passage Kate read to us this morning.

So today, on Easter Sunday, as we reflect on the resurrection of Christ, I want us to turn to Lamentations chapter 3 and explore five lessons on how to restore our broken world.

Before we jump into this text, I want to say this: Whether we like it or not, we need these lessons at some point in our lives. Why? Because we live in an imperfect world. I often compare life to a voyage across the sea. Sometimes, everything goes smoothly. The skies are clear, the waters are calm, and everything seems to be going according to plan. But then, the weather suddenly changes. Storms hit and the waves rise. We work hard to stay afloat. We may feel helpless and completely out of control during those times. This is what our life often feels like. Whether you are in a storm right now or not, we all need to learn how to overcome these obstructions and know what to do when things do not go based on our plans.

The first lesson we need to learn when our world falls apart is this: we need to be honest with God and unload all our frustrations on Him. In Lamentations 3:1, Jeremiah begins by saying, “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord’s wrath” (Jeremiah 3:1). This is the first step, just telling God exactly how we feel. When life gets hard, we can bring our grief, our anger, and our struggle to God. We don’t have to act like

everything is fine when it is not. Jeremiah in his book was incredibly honest and was bold in this matter. We can imagine him crying out something like, “Lord, I don’t like what’s going on. I’m tired of this. I need something to change.” He complained. Throughout the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah revealed his frustrations before God multiple times. I want to read a few verses from chapter 3: “He [God] has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, He has turned His hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones... Even when I call out or cry for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; He has made my paths crooked” (Lamentations 3:2-9). These are some of the most intense complaints in the Bible. Can we believe this? All of Jeremiah’s emotions, his pain, his confusion, his hopelessness, were included in this sacred book. In many ways, the entire book of Lamentations is one long complaint directed at God.

Do you know why God chose to preserve this in the Holy Bible? Because all the emotions Jeremiah revealed are real and we all do complain to God while expressing our frustration. I believe another reason is God wants us to know that He can handle our pain, anger, grief. I want to read to you one more verse from Jeremiah’s lament: “I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, ‘My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord’” (Lamentations 3:17-18). In other words, Jeremiah was saying, “Lord, I am done. I have nothing left to hope for. I don’t even know if I can count on You anymore.” Have we ever felt that way? ...Friends, we need to remember this: God does not owe us an explanation for everything that happens in our lives. He is God—we are not. And there will be things we simply will not understand until we are with Him in heaven. We also need to remember this: God is the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end. He knows what we don’t. He sees what we cannot. And He can handle any thing we bring to Him—no matter how big, no matter how painful.

The second lesson we need to learn when our world falls apart is this: Not only should we express our frustrations to God, but we must also turn our focus from our difficulties to God’s unchanging love. In Lamentations 3:19-20, Jeremiah says: “I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me” (Lamentations 3:19-20). Did you notice what happens here? Jeremiah’s thoughts—his memories of pain and failure—were dragging him deeper into despair. Dwelling on his past and the bitterness of his experiences was poisoning his spirit. And the same is true for us. When we focus too much on our own shortcomings—whether they result from our personal spiritual battles, the pressures of the world around us, or even the influence of Satan, our spiritual enemy—we can fall into a kind of emotional and spiritual bitterness. And bitterness is like poison. It does not harm anyone else. It harms us.

We cannot overcome depression if we are constantly drinking from the cup of bitterness. And we cannot stop being bitter until we switch our focus—from our failure to God’s forgiveness, from our hurt to His healing.

Jeremiah made that change. Even while he was still in the middle of suffering, he chose to hope. He made his focus from his despair to God's faithfulness upon him. Despite everything going wrong, Jeremiah dared to believe that God's mercy never ran out-and that His compassion was new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). Friends, do we spend more time paying attention to our feelings—or focusing on God's compassion? Do we measure God's love by our performance—or do we trust in His grace? I know for myself—and maybe some of you can relate. When I sin or fall short, I sometimes start to doubt whether God still loves me. I ask, "How could God still care for me after I did that?" But in those moments, we need to hold on to what God said through Jeremiah: "For no one is cast off by the Lord forever" (Lamentations 3:31). That is a promise.

...Do you know what God is doing when we are in pain or suffering loss? He is not distant or angry. He is grieving with us. As Jeremiah described, God does not "enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow" (Lamentations 3:33 & New Living Translation). As a parent, I know this is true. My wife and I love our sons—whether they succeed or not. And when they are hurting, we don't pull away. We pay even closer attention to them. And that is exactly how our Heavenly Father treats us. He loves us forever as we are. He does not abandon us when we fail. In fact, when we feel like we have lost our grip on God, he is the one holding us even tighter. God's unfailing love and mercy is still here with us, no matter where we have been and what we have done. And this is amazing.

The third lesson we need to learn is this: Get alone with God and wait. In Lamentations 3:28, Jeremiah writes: "Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him." When our journey of faith becomes challenging—when we are not sure how to move forward—we need to wait on the Lord. Do you remember what Moses said to the people of Israel when they were in a crisis? In front of them was the Red Sea, with waves crashing back and forth. Behind them, Pharaoh's army was marching into them in a rush. There was no way out—no escape. In that moment of panic, Moses echoed a truth that Jeremiah would later declare: "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:14). Trusting God in silence is one of the most powerful things we can do—especially when our plans fall apart.

Waiting on God means we literally sit down and be still. It means we stop trying to fix everything ourselves and instead listen for what God wants to say to us in the quiet. Of course, this does not mean we do nothing. It means we focus on being present with God—through prayer, Scripture, and stillness. Jeremiah entered into that silence and waited for "hope to appear" (Lamentations 3:29). And just like Jeremiah, we need to do the same. Remember how the people of Israel acted during their 40 years in the wilderness? When they faced unexpected challenges, they often complained to Moses as well as to God. They grumbled about their situation and even wished to return to slavery in Egypt. Like lost sheep, they tried to find their own path—wandering without the guidance of their shepherd. That is why Moses commanded them to be still and look to the Lord, who was in control the entire time.

Friends, waiting on God is not passive—it is a spiritual discipline. And it is not easy, especially in today's world, where we are constantly distracted by noise, screens, and

notifications. But even Jesus, when He was surrounded by endless needs and demands, often withdrew to a quiet place to be alone with His Father... When we wait on God in silence, we begin to discover what really matters. Think about this: life always seems to slow down in a waiting room. When you are waiting at the doctor's office, or sitting in a hospital, or in a funeral home, time slows down. And in those slow moments, we often learn what is most important. That is why Jeremiah said, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lamentations 3:26). When we wait in the Lord, He saves us. He fights for us. He helps us in His way and in His time. But here is the key: God wants us to wait on Him before we run out and try to solve everything on our own. He does not want us to be driven by fear or panic. He wants us to come humbly—to present every concern with prayer and thanksgiving, to listen for His voice, and to follow His guidance with courage. And when we do that—I believe with all my heart—we will be amazed at how God fights for us and for our loved ones.

The fourth lesson we need to learn when our world falls apart is this: Change the things that we can change. In Lamentations 3:40, Jeremiah says: "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: 'We have sinned and rebelled...'" There are many things in life we simply cannot change—no matter how hard we try. We cannot change the past, because the past is past. We cannot change our family background or our genetic makeup. We cannot change the natural gifts or limitations we were born with. If we have a physical challenge or have lost a loved one, we cannot undo those realities. There is no going back. Some things are simply outside our control. And the only way to move forward is to accept those things—and deal with them by faith. If we keep denying reality—who we are, where we are, or what has happened—we end up miserable. But faith in God allows us to face the facts—not with despair, but with courage and hope.

At the same time, while there are many things we cannot change, there are also things we can. And the most important thing we can change is ourselves. We cannot change our spouse. We cannot change our kids. We cannot change our coworkers or friends—at least, not by our own strength. But by God's grace, we can change ourselves. That is what Jeremiah did. In the middle of a national crisis, when everything around him was falling apart, he turned inward. He examined his own heart. He called himself and others to return to the Lord. That is called repentance. Instead of running away from God, Jeremiah chose to run back to Him. And that is the call for us as well. Repentance is a kind of spiritual self-evaluation. It is like holding up a sacred mirror, the Word of God, and asking ourselves some important questions... Because of our sinful nature, we pursue something less or wrong instead of God's best. That is why we need to examine ourselves, repent of our sins, return to God, and rededicate ourselves toward Him through this ongoing godly activity. When we practice this kind of self-examination, we open the door for God to change us from the inside out.

The fifth and final lesson we need to learn when our world falls apart is this: Ask God to relieve our fears. In Lamentations 3:55, Jeremiah says: "I called on your name, Lord, from the depths of the pit." To understand why he cried out this way, we need to remember who Jeremiah was. He was a prophet during one of the darkest times in Israel's history.

His country was falling apart, and his message—calling the people back to God—was deeply unpopular. For telling the truth, Jeremiah faced intense persecution. Eventually, his enemies threw him into a cistern—a deep well—with water rising around him and rocks being poured down on top of him. That is terrifying.

Jeremiah was literally in the pit. He had every reason to be afraid. And in that fear, he cried out to God. What did God say in response? “Do not fear” (Lamentations 3:57). That was exactly what Jeremiah needed to hear—and maybe it is what you and I need to hear today, too. When our lives fall apart, all sorts of emotions rise to the surface—grief, anger, frustration, regret... These emotions are normal, but there is one emotion I believe we must confront directly—because it is the most damaging of all: Fear... It paralyzes us from moving forward—especially fear of the future, fear of the loss, fear of failure, fear of death, or fear of being alone. The Bible speaks to this so clearly. Over and over again, God says, “Do not be afraid.” In fact, that command—whether we realize it or not—is repeated about 365 times in the Bible. In other words, that is one for every day of the year! We are human, and fear is something we all face—no matter how powerful, successful, or faithful we may seem. But while God allows us to bring Him our complaints, our pain, and our struggles, on thing He consistently urges us to let go of is fear.

In our children’s scripture reading for today from Matthew 28. Two women named Mary went to visit Jesus’ tomb. What they found shocked them: the stone was rolled away, and the body of Jesus was gone. They were confused, heartbroken, and afraid. Then, the angel of the Lord appeared and said, “Do not be afraid... I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen!” (Matthew 28:5-6). What powerful words. Can any one of us relate to those women today? Have the circumstances of your life left you anxious, upset, or afraid? Fear is like a snowball... Someone once said, “Life is a series of battles.” We overcome one challenge, and another appears. When we look closely at our fears to the root, many of them are connected to death—the fear of loss, of endings, of brokenness we think cannot be restored. That was the fear Jeremiah had in the pit—that things would never change. That he was struck forever and his story was over. But I want to say this clearly and confidently: If you believe your life is beyond repair—you are wrong... Because Jesus is alive.

On this Easter Sunday morning, we must remember that Christ is in the business of restoration. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Jesus has the power to give us new life, right now—not just in eternity. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So why do we stop focusing on Him and fall back into fear and doubt? When life is heavy, when things are hard to take, we must wait on Christ. We must examine our ways. We must return to the Lord in repentance and belief. Like Jeremiah, we feel like we are at the bottom of the pit, we need to call the name of the Lord. When we fix our eyes on the Risen Christ, we can overcome fear. Jesus, the Master of our lives, is greater than any challenge—even greater than death itself. He is alive. He is risen. And He is with us. Amen!

**In preparing this sermon, I was inspired by Rick Warren’s “Invisible War” series, based on texts from Lamentations 3:16-42, 52-57 and Matthew 28:1-10.*