

SOARING

Lamentations 3:19-26

A few years ago Ian Usher, who lived in Australia, went through the heartache of a divorce. He loved his wife and after the marriage dissolved he missed her terribly. He was saddened and depressed, unhappy with his life. He was lonely and not all that thrilled with his job and the whole direction of his life. To say the least he was disappointed with how things were turning out. In fact he was so disappointed in it he decided to just chuck it all and start over. He set up an auction on eBay, offering his entire life. Included would be his house and all of its contents, his car, his motorcycle and his jet ski. He arranged with his boss to let whoever bought his life have his job, at least for two weeks to see if they would work out in his position. He promised the buyer would be introduced to all of his friends. So he was auctioning off his possessions, his job and his friends. He didn't get as much as he had hoped. He sold it all for \$399,000 in Australian dollars, which is about \$375,000 in US dollars. Today he lives on an island in the Caribbean. Essentially he did what many have dreamed of. He walked away from it all and moved to a tropical island.

We were talking with some friends from out of town recently about their son who has pretty much struggled to find his way in this world. In the conversation they said, "He's disappointed. His life hasn't gone the way he envisioned it." I know that is true, but my reaction to that thought has been, "get in line." Whose life has gone the way they imagined? Disappointment is familiar to us all. Few of us would say our lives have gone the way we hoped. Lots of young people dream of being famous athletes or entertainers, precious few actually live out that dream.

Have you ever felt disappointed? I don't even need to ask do I? Today we are starting a series of sermons I am calling "Downside." We will look at some of the downsides of life, the hard things we all have to deal with and we'll start today with disappointment. For insight on dealing with disappointment we will look at Lamentations 3:19-26.

DISAPPOINTMENT IS ALL TOO REAL

Jeremiah has to be the poster child for disappointment. In Jeremiah 1 the Lord tells Jeremiah that he had set him apart since before he was born to be a prophet. Jeremiah balks, saying, "I do not know how to speak. I am only a child" (1:4). But God says he will go with him and will give him the words to say. Unfortunately he warns him that his message was going to be one of destruction. He was going to be that weird guy standing out on the street corner holding a sign that said, "The end

of the world is near.” In other words, he had the dubious privilege of bringing a message that would upset people and make them mad at him. They didn’t want to hear it. He faced a life of rejection and opposition.

God’s people had consistently and persistently disobeyed God’s Word. He had warned them over and over through prophets that he would bring judgment on them. Jeremiah’s message was now, “this is going to happen. Babylon is going to walk all over you. This can’t be stopped, so don’t resist. Just accept God’s judgment.” They didn’t listen. The Babylonians gained control of Judah around 597 B. C. but the Judeans kept trying to rebel. They set up an alliance with Egypt, but the Babylonians beat the stuffing out of the Egyptians and decided to put an end to the Judeans’ rebellious spirit. In 586 they captured the city of Jerusalem and totally leveled it. They decimated the population of the city. Lamentations was written as Jeremiah reflected on the fate of his beloved people and city.

In 3:19-20 you see what Jeremiah was feeling. “I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.” He endured rejection, ridicule and opposition throughout his life and ministry because he wanted to spare his people. He loved them, but in the end they were totally crushed by Babylon. We see how awful that devastation was in 2:11-12. “My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, ‘Where is bread and wine?’ as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers’ arms.”

Do you remember what you felt on September 11, 2001? There was grief, anger and indignation over what was done, even some fear about the future. I think Jeremiah felt even worse, because he knew in his soul that Judah was all that was left of the people of God. They were supposed to be God’s holy people, the ones who would bring blessing to the entire world. They were supposed to reflect God’s glory, to display his greatness. And now it was all trampled into the dirt. In 3:18 he said, “My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.”

Jeremiah knew what it means to suffer loss and to experience the full measure of disappointment despite being a truly godly man. I would not want any part of walking in his footsteps. He was mistreated, opposed, abused, his ministry utterly rejected, and then he saw the nation that he loved utterly ruined. He got no thanks for his effort. This should caution us that even godly people stand a chance of facing some hefty disappointment in this life.

We all have a desire for a perfect world. We long for a place where there is joy and peace, where people don't get cancer, where people don't go to war, where families are healthy and people actually love each other, where there are no jelly fish or sting rays to make life unpleasant when we go in the ocean, where stuff doesn't decay or break down continually. But we live in a broken world, a fallen place full of fallen people. It is a world where there is cancer, weeds, war, decay, jelly fish, snakes, broken relationships and all the rest. This means that disappointment is a certainty for us all.

Some people think if they could just be rich and famous then life would not be disappointing. Marilyn Monroe was obviously both rich and famous. It's interesting that she said, "Dreaming about being an actress is more exciting than being one." In that statement she described life. We dream of things, but in the end they somehow aren't what we hoped they would be. She was disappointed. In fact she was so disappointed she took her own life.

Do you know who Christie Brinkley is? She is a 57 year old former model. She was possibly the most famous supermodel of her day. She was on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue 3 years in a row and has been on more than 500 magazine covers. Her financial net worth is over \$80 million and she is still beautiful today. She has been married 4 times. She created a perfume that she named for her third husband. She called it "Believe" because in her words, "I still believed in love." After her fourth divorce she said unequivocally "I would never get married again." She said if she designed another perfume based on marriage she has the perfect name for it. "I would have to call it 'Stinks.'" Do I detect a hint of disappointment there?

Disappointment is all too familiar to us. I remember a time when a new movie came out some 37 years ago. It didn't get a lot of pre-release hype, but when it came out the thing just blew up huge. You may have heard of it. It was called *Star Wars*. There was a sequel that came out 3 years later. It was enormously anticipated. Contrary to the usual let down that a sequel gives us, it was really good. *The Empire Strikes Back* was as big as the original, same with another sequel called *The Return of the Jedi*. Those movies continued to be absurdly popular for 30 years. Then came the announcement that Lucas Film would produce yet another in that series after that 3 decade hiatus? Do you recall the excitement and the anticipation? Do you remember what happened when that one came out? What a disappointment. They are making another sequel. I don't want to get my hopes up. I hate disappointment.

Carissa was in town for a few days a couple of weeks ago for work. For weeks before coming she imagined herself eating at a particular restaurant downtown while she was here. We took her out to eat and walked to the location of this restaurant in the Gaslamp Quarter only to find out it is no longer there. It has gone out of business. Disappointing. But those are trivial disappointments. Sadly we all have much larger disappointments. Careers don't go the way we wish, jobs get downsized, health fails, marriages don't prove to be what we'd dreamed, the kids' lives don't go the way we wished.

I don't need to tell you that life holds disappointment. You already know it. Unfortunately disappointment can have some bad effects on us. We see the potential for that in Jeremiah. It can cause us to lose perspective. In 1:12 Jeremiah said, "Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me?" It felt to him like no one in their world suffered like he did. Why does this always happen to me? That's what disappointment can do to us. It can cause us to feel abandoned and alone. In 1:16 Jeremiah said, "No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit." In verse 21 he said, "People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me." He felt all by himself. It can undermine our faith. In 3:8 Jeremiah wrote, "Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer." It didn't feel like God cared. What's the point of praying since God isn't going to help? In his book, *Disappointment With God* Philip Yancey wrote, "I have found that petty disappointments tend to accumulate over time, undermining my faith with a lava flow of doubt...I am tempted to pray less often, having concluded in advance that it won't matter." Faith might collapse altogether.

How should we respond? In his book *Your Best Life Now* Joel Osteen said you have to rise up and say, "I don't care how hard this is, I don't care how disappointed I am, I'm not going to let this get the best of me. I'm moving on with my life." In other words, grit your teeth, put your big boy pants on, and forget about it. There is a component of truth in that but isn't there anything better than buck up and try harder? Yes, there is.

THERE IS A REMEDY

Call To Mind The Lord's Great Love

Jeremiah wrote in verses 21-23, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope; because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

The word translated “love” there is the Hebrew term *chesed*. Pronounced correctly it sounds like you’re just clearing your throat, but it is a word with a beautiful meaning. It doesn’t have an exact parallel in English so it is translated in a number of ways. It included both the idea of unconditional love and the idea of total loyalty. So you might see it translated “unfailing love” or “loyal love.” *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* says, “Divine *chesed* is enduring, persistent, even eternal. It sustains life.” You see this often in the Psalms which repeatedly say of God, “your love endures forever.”

It is important when we experience disappointment to remember that God loves us. He doesn’t just love us, he has compassion on us. The word “compassion” literally means “suffering with.” He is with us in our hurts. Any parent can understand this. We suffer with our children when they hurt, and God does the same for us. He cares when we suffer disappointment. The most important thing we can do when the disappointments come is to remember that he loves us. He loves us infinitely. His faithfulness is great. But what is he faithful to do? Not to always give us what we want or what feels good to us. He is faithful to always love us, to be with us, to be with us in our pain, but to always seek what is best and to work out good for us in whatever happens, even in the disappointments.

Here’s another quote from *The New International Dictionary Of Old Testament Theology*. “The biblical writers seem persuaded that life is fragile. One lives surrounded by the threat posed by the calamities of nature, the hostility of enemies, and the weakness of self... This effective loyalty on God’s part is their only hedge against disaster.” In other words, you cannot imagine the horror were it not for God’s love being poured out continually in your life. As bad as it might seem in the dark days, it could be a whole lot worse.

If we experience a disappointment or two we usually can deal with that. We can just move on. But what about when disappointments start to pile one on top of one another? That can grind us down. As we go through that the thing that absolutely will be attacked will be our belief that an Almighty God actually cares about us. The most important thing we can do when we are experiencing that is to call to mind this truth: God loves us with a love that will never end. Jeremiah went through not just weeks, months or even years of disappointment. He experienced decades of it. He was as human as we are. I can tell you that when you are trying to do the Lord's will and people reject you it hurts. It was hard for him as it would be for us. Yet he was able to keep going because he called to mind that God loved him. Remember that he had no knowledge of God's Son coming into this world and dying on a cross for us, yet he knew of God's love. We have been given irrefutable

proof of God's love at the cross. So the most urgent thing we can do is not doubt God's love. Jesus has proven that his love is real, priceless and infinite.

The thing that most often causes us to feel disappointed is when we are certain we know what we need to get or have happen in our lives, we pray diligently about it and then we don't get it. In fact we get the opposite. So how could God love us? We need to remember that we don't know what is best. Max Meyers was a pilot who flew for Mission Aviation Fellowship. He wrote a book entitled *On The Wings Of The Dawn* about his adventures. One story he tells in the book took place in Papua New Guinea. He was called to a village to get a man who had been bitten by a venomous snake and to fly him to a hospital. The man was in bad shape. He was drifting in and out of consciousness and foul mucus was flowing from his nose and mouth. They laid him down on the floor of the plane, but Max seeing all the mucus thought he would do better sitting up. So he propped him up. But he fell over again. He wanted to sit him up, but he had to let him lie so he could fly the plane. When he made it to the airstrip near the hospital Max pulled the man out of the plane and propped him up against a wheel, but he just fell over again. Max tried again to no avail and just gave up. He let him lie on the ground. After a bit of a wait an ambulance carrying a doctor finally arrived. The doctor said they'd be able to save the man, then said, "How is it you MAF guys know so much about medical things?" He explained that laying him down flat probably saved his life and that if he'd sat him up he likely would have died. Max wrote, "Between the snake and me that poor man just about used up every chance he had." He thought he knew best, but he was wrong.

When we are disappointed we need to remember God loves us and that he knows way better than we what is best. We get disappointed when God doesn't give us what we want and often question his love, but we need to remember that we don't know what is best for us. He does and because he loves us he always seeks our good. He is always faithful to us. This is the thing that will give us hope. The most deadly thing you can do when you are disappointed is to doubt or lose sight of God's love, compassion and faithfulness.

Make The Lord Your Portion

Notice what Jeremiah said in verse 24. "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion.'" He had a conversation with himself. He had to tell himself something. He reminded himself that the Lord was his portion. What did he mean by that? In Psalm 105:11 the writer tells us that God said to Jacob, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit." When the nation finally entered the land they did as God instructed and divided up the land. Each tribe, each clan, each

family was assigned a portion, a part that would be theirs. This was their most prized possession. It was their treasure, the source of their wealth.

Let's imagine that you and several friends decide to pool your efforts and resources and buy some lottery tickets. The tickets will belong to the entire group, thus increasing the group's chances of winning from astronomically small to not quite as astronomically small but almost. By the way, I am not recommending this. To your surprise and delight one of the tickets turns out to be a winner. The last I saw, thought I don't keep up on this, the jackpot was \$101 million. So now the group must determine what each person's portion is. Your portion is your reward. Jeremiah is saying that he had to remind himself that his portion, his most prized possession, his treasure, the thing he valued more than anything else, was the Lord.

David said something similar in Psalm 27:4. "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord." He asked one thing. No doubt David asked many things. What he meant was above all else, the thing he wanted most, the thing he would say, "if I can't get anything else, please give me this," was to live in God's presence, to see his beauty. The Lord was his portion.

If there's something I really want and I get that thing, I may experience other disappointments, but those let downs won't matter as much to me because I got what I really wanted. When Laurie and I got engaged to be married a friend of ours asked us what we were going to do for a honeymoon. We had practically no money so we didn't have a big plan. We said, "We're not sure. Maybe we'll go up to Santa Barbara and see if we can stay there for a week or something." Start with this: we were thrilled to be getting married. That's what we really wanted. It would be nice to have an exciting honeymoon, but if we didn't that would be all right because we'd still be married. That was what mattered. So a disappointing honeymoon would be no big deal.

Our friend came back a week later and said, "My parents want to give you guys a wedding present. They own a couple of condos on the island of Kauai and they would like to offer you a free week in one of them for your honeymoon." Wow, how great was that? We were thrilled. My parents helped us with airline tickets and the other costs so we could go. We thought we had the best honeymoon ever. We'd never been to Hawaii and had not even considered going there until our friends helped us. Our portion was that honeymoon condo near Kapaa on Kauai. In retrospect I can see that it really wasn't perfect. The beach it was on was not a great beach. There was no snorkeling there and no waves you could surf. You

couldn't even swim much there because it was pretty rocky. The condo wasn't air-conditioned and while we were there they had a record high temperature. It was hot! As I said we didn't have much money so we ate at such notable dining establishments as the famous Italian trattoria Pizza Hut and the world renowned Scottish bistro McDonalds. That's right, you heard me. We ate dinner at McDonalds one night on our honeymoon. How very romantic. Well, we did eat al fresco. It was a lovely evening. Those things were less than ideal, thus qualify as disappointments. We didn't care at all! We were married and in Hawaii on our honeymoon. So what if it wasn't perfect! When you have the thing that you want most other disappointments don't matter so much.

The greatest aid to dealing with disappointment is to have the Lord as your portion. That means believing at the core of your soul that the most important, the most valuable, the most precious, the most momentous thing you could ever have is to be God's child, to be loved by him and adopted by him into his eternal family.

Have you considered what life is like for those who do not have the Lord? If you don't have that you will be disconnected from him. You were made to live in relationship with him, so if you're not connected to him you will always feel a bit, or maybe a lot, lost. You will always sense that something is off, something is missing. You will have a burden of guilt you will carry around with you because you have fallen short, you have failed in so many ways. You have no way to be rid of the guilt of that. In the end your life won't make any sense because there is no meaning, no real purpose to it. You will not have any hope beyond trying to make life as good as possible right now. You will discover that's a losing battle and there's nothing you can do about it. You will become increasingly frantic to avoid confronting the inevitable tragedy of your life. Fear and death will be an ominous specter dogging your steps.

If you have the Lord, you have what you were created for. You have his love, his presence with you continually. You are forgiven. You are loved and valued just as you are. Your life has a clear purpose. You have hope. You have the best thing you could ever have in life. Will there be disappointments? Yes, but you have what matters most, so you can still be joyful even in the midst of disappointment.

Wait On the Lord

Jeremiah says, "The Lord is my portion, therefore I will wait for him." In verse 25 he says it is good to put hope in the Lord. In verse 26 he says, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

For Jeremiah that meant looking at the train wreck that had been his life, looking at the horror that was the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, his beloved people and city, and not saying, “How could you do this, Lord? How could you let this happen?” Instead it was trusting that somehow a loving, good, wise, powerful God had a plan that he was carrying out that in the end will prove beautiful. For Jeremiah it meant trusting that God was still good and wise and that what was happening would somehow be for the best. In his commentary on Lamentations Philip Graham Ryken says, “Christians who suffer do more than suffer. They also wait... There are times when the only thing a sufferer can do is wait for God. But waiting is good because *God is worth waiting for.*”

The terms wait, hope and trust are inextricably linked. Waiting on the Lord is putting your hope in him. It is trusting that he is somehow going to work good out of the disappointment. The problem is waiting can be debilitating. When we see no good happening, no hope of things changing, we can become so defeated and frustrated that it strangles our souls. But the irony is that if we wait on the Lord it will have the exact opposite effect. Isaiah 40:31, an often quoted familiar verse, says, “Those who hope in the Lord,” which is to say those who wait on him as some translations have it, “will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

We don't have eagles here. But we do have hawks, falcons and kites. Perhaps an eagle might be more majestic, but it is pretty cool to see those birds of prey soaring over the hills around our house. You can see them at times just gliding, almost stationary in the sky as they catch the updrafts, always looking down hunting for their dinner. We've got a cat in our neighborhood that hunts for birds. That cat is no threat to the hawks and falcons. Those birds calmly sail along above seemingly almost without effort. That is the picture of us as we wait on the Lord...almost without effort soaring above the fray, catching the updraft of the Spirit of God to support us.

Jeremiah could have looked at his present circumstances at almost any time in his life and concluded that God was not to be trusted. What happened to him personally didn't feel like what someone chosen and blessed by God would experience in any way. What happened to his people felt like nothing but a total loss. But he trusted in God's faithfulness and compassion. He waited and put his hope in the Lord, meaning he didn't abandon his faith. He didn't doubt God. He didn't give up. He kept believing, serving and praising God despite all of it. What he never saw was that what was happening would be used by God to bring about the rescue of the entire world, not just the Jewish nation. What he never saw in his

personal circumstances was that his own writings would be passed on and read not just by a few, but by millions of people for thousands of years. Do you think he had any idea that 2600 years after he was gone people on the other side of the globe would still be instructed, encouraged and strengthened both by his example and by his words?

We want so badly for this life to be the answer to our prayers, to have our dreams, hopes and aspirations fulfilled here. Here's a news flash for you: it's not going to happen. Some dreams will come true and we will have great joys at times. But at the end of the day you need to remember this world is broken and it is going to end badly. Yeah, you don't need to tell me. I get reminded of that every morning when I wake up. The dreams we hope will only be fulfilled in God's eternal kingdom. We need to wait on the Lord to fulfill the hopes.

We are going to be disappointed. We can wait on something other than the Lord and end up weary, resentful and defeated. Or we can wait on the Lord and find that we can run and not grow weary. We can soar like an eagle on the wing. Which would you choose?

In his book, *Gettin' There* (p. 185), Steve Farrar tells a story about a young man named Bunky Knudsen. Bunky could easily have ended up one of the most spoiled and entitled people ever. His dad was the president of General Motors and they lived in a huge mansion, complete with servants. He was 17 at the end of his junior year in high school and planned to have a nice easy summer full of fun before his senior year. But the first day of his summer vacation his dad called him at 8 in the morning and asked how soon he could get down to the GM plant. Bunky said he could get there in an hour. His dad said, "Great. Come down as soon as you can because I have a brand new car here waiting for you." He broke records getting to the plant. He was so excited to get his very own car. When he got to his dad's office his dad took him past all the assembly lines to an old warehouse behind the plant. He unlocked the rusty padlock and opened the doors of the warehouse. His brand new Chevrolet was right there, only not quite the way he expected. What he saw was thousands of car parts sitting in that warehouse. It was more than a little disappointing. He was expecting a car, not a mass of disconnected auto parts. However, Bunky didn't waste his summer doing nothing. Every day he eagerly went to that plant and worked, often until 10 at night, building that car piece by piece. In the process he learned the automobile industry from the ground up and ended up with something valuable. His wise father had come up with a way to enable him to grow, to find something he enjoyed doing and get what he really wanted. It was a way he himself would never have dreamed up. We may not

always understand why God allows what he does in our lives. But the solution is to wait on the Lord, for that will renew our strength.