

Sermon for January 3, 2021 “Christians who sing of hope”

SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 3:18-25

¹⁸ so I say, “Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the LORD.” ¹⁹ The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! ²⁰ My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. ²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” ²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

Introduction: Book of Lamentations

Currently, more than 80 million people are infected with COVID-19 worldwide. The death toll is close to 1.8 million. What I am grateful for, though, is that an effective vaccine came out. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and we do not know when it will end.

But every time a terrible event happens, people ask questions. 'Where is God in this case where so many people are infected, suffer, or killed?', 'If God is a God of love and mercy, why would you let this happen?' The bible does not give a specific answer. That is why there are many people who say they cannot believe in God.

About 2,600 years ago, there was a country that suffered a similar disaster to what the world is experiencing today. It is the southern kingdom of Judah where Jeremiah lived. Though it wasn't a problem with an epidemic like COVID-19, the suffering of the people of the southern kingdom of Judah was even more severe.

At that time, Judah was very devastated by attacks from the Babylonian Empire. Kings, nobles, and engineers were taken to Babylon. Dead bodies filled the streets from ongoing famine, and Babylonian soldiers killed people in Judah indiscriminately. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and all the treasures of the royal palace in Jerusalem were stolen. The book written with tears describing that time was called The Lamentation of Jeremiah.

The new year of 2021 has dawned. We wish for a new year of hope, even though the outlook for this year is not easy. There are many challenges we face in the fields of society, politics, economics, health and the environment. In this situation, I hesitate to use the expression ‘a hopeful new year’, but Christians must be different. Christians should be able to sing hope in the midst of despair. That is the attitude of a Christian who believes in the living God.

We look at Jeremiah, who sang hope in despair, and blessed us to live as Christians who can sing hope in the midst of difficulties.

Body: Hope - The power of our life in an era of despair

Israel in Jeremiah's day was in a similar situation as we are today. Israel sinned and fell before God. Finally, the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by Babylon in B.C 586. Jeremiah could not stand his grief as he looked at the ruined country of Israel and the capital city of Jerusalem. Lamentation of Jeremiah is a mourning poem written with tears about the horrors of the southern kingdom of Judah. Humanitarian-wise, Judah, the southern kingdom; all were completely desperate.

But what is surprising is that Jeremiah saw hope in such a terrible reality. It was like a ray of light shining in the pitch-black darkness. It was the '**light of hope**'. I wish us to see the light of hope that Jeremiah saw. So, in the midst of challenges we face this year, I hope we will enjoy the amazing grace and blessings of God by singing hope. So, what was the light of hope that Jeremiah saw?

1. God's faithfulness

Jeremiah must have felt desperate about the situation before him. But Jeremiah looked to God and saw a ray of hope shining through the darkness. He sang hope for the people who were in grief and despair. Jeremiah

looked to God, meditated deeply on who God was, and relied on what he knew about God. **Today's text, Lamentations 3:22, says, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."**

Jeremiah realizes that God's great love and compassion are endless. The LORD's great love is an infinite love that even sinners love. It is a greater love than parents' love of their children. It is the greatest love that God the Creator gave His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross for us. (Romans 8:32)

Continuing, Jeremiah confesses that God's faithfulness is great. **Today's text verse 23 says, "Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning."** If God is fickle, we cannot live due to anxiety. We don't know when and how our life will be. However, Jeremiah sang that God's faithfulness and compassion are new every morning, and God's sincerity is great.

Even if we do not see God because of the heart of doubt and unbelief, God consistently loves us. We have no reason to be anxious about our lives because of God's faithfulness. God will protect our lives with that integrity. In our lives up to now, we have often betrayed God, but God has never disappointed us. Therefore, through the '**light of hope**' that Jeremiah saw, we can gain new power in the midst of difficulties.

What was another light of hope that Jeremiah saw?

2. Two Wings of Faith are the Word of God and Prayer

The people of the world sing hope with a human will. However, in extreme situations, humans will collapse, because of human weakness. We reach the limit of what we can do from our human will alone.

For Christians, the only basis for unbreakable hope is God. Therefore we must live by looking to God. **Today's text verse 24 says, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him."** By looking to God, a Christian can refresh and sing hope.

The prophet Isaiah also witnessed this. **Isaiah chapter 40 verse 31 says, "But those who hope in the LORD 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."**

It is the power of God's Word and prayer that can keep our faith strong even in despair. Jeremiah was able to sing hope in the midst of despair through the word of God's promise and deep relationship with God through prayer.

Even in difficult situations, holding onto the Word of God gives us courage and confidence. Through this, we will overcome despair and win against the world. **Today's text verse 21 says, "Yet this (suffering and homelessness) I call to mind and therefore I have hope."** This is a passage that shows that only when we deeply meditate on the Word of God, hope can come.

In addition, even in difficult situations, prayer can draw you closer to God. **Jeremiah 33:3 is what Jeremiah received when he was confined in despair. "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."** This is the word of God that gives boldness and courage to those who are in despair. I bless that deep prayer fellowship with God will overflow in the year 2021.

Conclusion: A Christian who sings of hope

Now, let's summarize today's sermon. Although the New Year has come, we will have a lot of challenges. Perhaps some are in despair. But look to God. Please believe in God's faithfulness.

See the light of hope that Jeremiah saw in the times of despair. And I hope you become a Christian who sings of hope.

If you suffer, pray more. If you are afraid, rely on the words of the Bible. And if you fail, be courageous to get up again. I hope that everyone will be a hopeful Christian. In the New Year 2021, I hope you will win no matter what circumstances come.