***Lamentations 3:24-45 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!”***

***25The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. 26It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord. 27It is good for a man to bear  
The yoke in his youth. 28Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because God has laid it on him;  
29Let him put his mouth in the dust – There may yet be hope. 30Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, And be full of reproach. 31For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies. 33For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men. 34To crush under one’s feet All the prisoners of the earth, 35To turn aside the justice due a man Before the face of the Most High, 36Or subvert a man in his cause – The Lord does not approve. 37 Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, When the Lord has not commanded it? 38Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed? 39Why should a living man complain, A man for the punishment of his sins? 40Let us search out and examine our ways,  
And turn back to the Lord; 41Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven. 42We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned. 43You have covered Yourself with anger  
And pursued us; You have slain and not pitied. 44You have covered Yourself with a cloud, That prayer should not pass through. 45You have made us an offscouring and refuse In the midst of the peoples.***

We are back with Jeremiah the Prophet tonight. We left him last time as he talked of the Faithfulness of God. Great is thy faithfulness, mercies and compassions new each morning. He recognizes his only hope is in the Lord. The issue is that the people of Jerusalem did not recognize that. Indeed, it is possible to have strong people of Faith depending on the sufficiency of God while the rest of the nation is locked in wickedness. It was true then, and it is true now. Our nation is wicked, but look around the world! It is wicked as well. Perhaps we have been the Babylon that has brought the world to this point. Regardless, Jeremiah now makes it clear what the road back is and whose responsibility it is to cry out and find it.

We’ll start tonight with verses 24-26 *The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!” 25The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. 26It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord.* ***T****he Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!”* The favor and the love of God is the best inheritance and cannot be compared with any other portion we may have on earth. He is sufficient to keep me in trials and tribulations. In Him is no loss only gain. Both our eternal and our earthly Hope is found in Him. *The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.* It is good for us to Be still and Know that He is God. We wait patiently, coming humbly in prayer, knowing that His timing is perfect. *It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord.* God is never late and never lacking. We wait silently, in Hope, listening for that still small voice.

*Verses 27-30 It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth. 28Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because God has laid it on him; 29Let him put his mouth in the dust – There may yet be hope. 30Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, And be full of reproach.* ***I****t is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth.* Often, the young believe themselves invincible and independent. This leads to rebellion and disobedience. Yet, Christ calls us and the younger the heart, the better the hearing. He calls us to take His yoke. Our relationship with Jesus can never begin too soon. Of course, we understand that our lives in Christ will involve persecution and affliction, trials and tribulations. Romans 5:3-4 *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope*. Nothing in life humbles us so quickly as tribulation. *Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because God has laid it on him.* Jesus instructs us to pray alone, communing with God. Matthew 6:6 *But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* When we are afflicted and learn to be contented, even in affliction, searching for God’s purpose in our affliction, we find that God is good even in affliction and our Faith in Him grows. *Let him put his mouth in the dust – There may yet be hope.* When I pray, I often place my face on the floor. If I am outside, my face is in the grass. Placing our faces to the ground, our mouth in the dust reduces any pride we may hold to zero. Psalm 72:9 says *Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust.* In humbling ourselves before Mighty God, we may yet find hope, as Jeremiah advised the Jews in this verse. *Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, And be full of reproach.* Like our Savior Jesus, we must be willing to forgive those that do us wrong and continue serving God no matter the resistance around. Too often, we are ready to return evil for evil. But Christ says in Matthew 5:38-39 *You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also*. Jeremiah was advising the Faithful to remain Faithful even in the trials they were facing, remain peaceable and humble, because God knows our true heart response.

Verses 31-33 *For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies. 33For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men.* ***F****or the Lord will not cast off forever.* The Prophet points out that the truly repentant, that place their trust in Him, and seek reconciliation with their whole heart will find that God will relent and be merciful. *Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies.* God is merciful. He chastises those He loves, but He has great compassion. *For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men.* God does not punish maliciously. He punishes, as all good parents punish, for the good of the children. My father used to say that punishing one of us was harder on him than it was on us. It wasn’t until I had my own children that I understood the struggle he felt. God does not grieve us without reason.

*Verses 34-36 To crush under one’s feet All the prisoners of the earth, 35To turn aside the justice due a man Before the face of the Most High, 36Or subvert a man in his cause – The Lord does not approve.* ***T****o crush under one’s feet All the prisoners of the earth.* God does not deliver justice with the same evil intentions as man. He does not crush maliciously. He doesn’t treat men as though he was in debtors prison, forcing them to work off the debts owed to God. *To turn aside the justice due a man Before the face of the Most High –* God does not deprive man of his God-given rights. He is perfectly just and adheres to His perfect standards of justice. God cannot be deceived, bribed, or threatened. His judgements are always perfect. The Prophet sees the wickedness of the people and knows what the people deserve. God sees and still He is merciful. *Or subvert a man in his cause – The Lord does not approve.* God’s justice will not be perverted or subverted. His Fairness is complete. God takes no pleasure in afflicting the poor and helpless. He knows man is no match for Him.

*Verses 37-38 Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, When the Lord has not commanded it? 38Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed?*

***W****ho is he who speaks and it comes to pass, When the Lord has not commanded it?* God, and God alone, is in control. Petty tyrants and haughty politicians believe they act wickedly unseen. Psalm 33:10-12 *The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. 11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations. 12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.* Man is God’s tool. God is not man’s tool. *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed?* Poverty and prosperity, calamity and comfort alike all flow from the Most High. Nothing comes and nothing goes, but by the Providence of Almighty God. Not a sparrow falls without God seeing.

Verse 39 *Why should a living man complain, A man for the punishment of his sins?* The Prophet may be recalling his earlier complaints, where he called into question God’s goodness. He recalls that God is perfectly just and we deserve the punishment we receive. The wages of sin are death. Instead, we are given life and forgiveness, the opportunity for reconciliation! How can we complain? While we may ley out our complaints before God, we must never complain against God. We receive honor for dishonor, privilege for rebellion. God is so good to we that are so bad.

Verses 40-41 *Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the Lord; 41Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven.* ***L****et us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the Lord.* The unreasonable and unprofitable use of our time is complaining. The reasonable and profitable use of out time is repentance and returning. In Haggai 1:5, God says - *Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: “Consider your ways!* My grandmother used to say, “Watch yourself or check yourself.” I had a teacher in elementary school who said, You might want to reconsider your ways. All of these were warnings to me that I was out of line. The Prophet here is saying, You’re going the wrong way – turn back to God. We must examine our temper, our words, our actions, our thoughts. Are they pleasing to God? In affliction, let’s examine what is amiss. Is there sin separating us from God’s presence? Notice it is OUR ways we’re examining and not our neighbors. Then, in sincere repentance, let us turn back to the One we love and serve. Psalm *119:59-60 I thought about my ways, And turned my feet to Your testimonies. 60 I made haste, and did not delay To keep Your commandments.* Then and now, let’s not waste time complaining or murmuring, but let’s make haste to return to God. *. Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven.* Prayer and supplication is the only way to return to a Holy God starting with the words, Forgive me Father, for I have sinned. We search vainly in the darkness until we turn to the only Source of Light. His Grace is sufficient to renew us.

Verses 42-45 *We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned. 43You have covered Yourself with anger And pursued us; You have slain and not pitied. 44You have covered Yourself with a cloud, That prayer should not pass through. 45You have made us an offscouring and refuse In the midst of the peoples.* ***W****e have transgressed and rebelled -* Here the prophet reveals the resulting knowledge of the search and examination. Conviction. We are convinced of our guilt. Until we acknowledge our sin, pardon is impossible. *You have not pardoned.* We have rebelled and You have rightfully punished. *You have covered Yourself with anger And pursued us; You have slain and not pitied.*You, O God, have overwhelmed us with Your anger and wrath. You have shown no pity, and rightfully so. *You have covered Yourself with a cloud, That prayer should not pass through.* You have hidden Your face and we have no access in our current state. *You have made us an offscouring and refuse In the midst of the peoples.* We are contemptible in the eyes of the world. We are no better than rodent droppings swept from a storage shed, offscourings of the most disgusting thing we can imagine.

So, we leave Jeremiah tonight. We’ve heard the answer, but we must choose to apply the answer. A healing cure unapplied, left in a sealed bottle, has not curative power at all. It is a salve in a bottle until we apply it to our eyes. God has done His part, now Jeremiah asks will we do ours. And our part remains the same today, crying out for forgiveness and healing in our nation, teaching all that will hear of the commandments, telling of God’s testimonies, so they too might turn back. Let us place our mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope.