



A few days ago we celebrated Christmas.

And you know there are several things that happen in my life each Christmas..... **# 1 I eat way too much junk.....***[anyone else have that problem?]* We had deliveries of candies, and cookies and it was all really nice, but not for one's waistline.

#2 - Each Christmas I also spent a lot more time with family. Visiting with Aunt's, Uncles, Cousins etc... with the invention of FaceTime we now have access to see our family who may be on the other side of the country. Christmas is the perfect time of year to reconnect with those important people..... **who we neglect for most of the year.**



And **#3**, another thing that happens each Christmas is **I start thinking of the year to come.**

Literally once Christmas is over on December 26th I start thinking about how quickly the previous year flew by.....and I start dreaming about what the coming year will hold.

And each year as I reflect back on the previous year I am reminded of the numerous things that took place that I didn't anticipate...because no year ever goes exactly the way we anticipate...right?

And so I wonder about what the highlights of the coming year will be...and I also wonder what new challenges will emerge.



Now obviously the reason why I bring this up is because the New Year is right around the corner... and for many of us 2019 was a great year.

- Some of us got married... we said “I do” to the love of our lives.
- Others of us welcomed children into the world.
- Some of us landed the job of our dreams.
- We made new lasting friendships.
- Others of us eclipsed some spiritual milestones, we claimed victory over certain sins in our lives... or we successfully charted a course towards deeper discipleship to Christ etc.

And so for many of us 2019 in retrospect was pretty good.



But for many of us 2019 was not so great.

- Some of us lost people we loved dearly.
- Others of us received some bad medical news.
- Others of us lost our jobs.
- Some were served divorce papers etc.

And so for many of us, when we look back at the events of 2019 our hearts sink. And that is real!

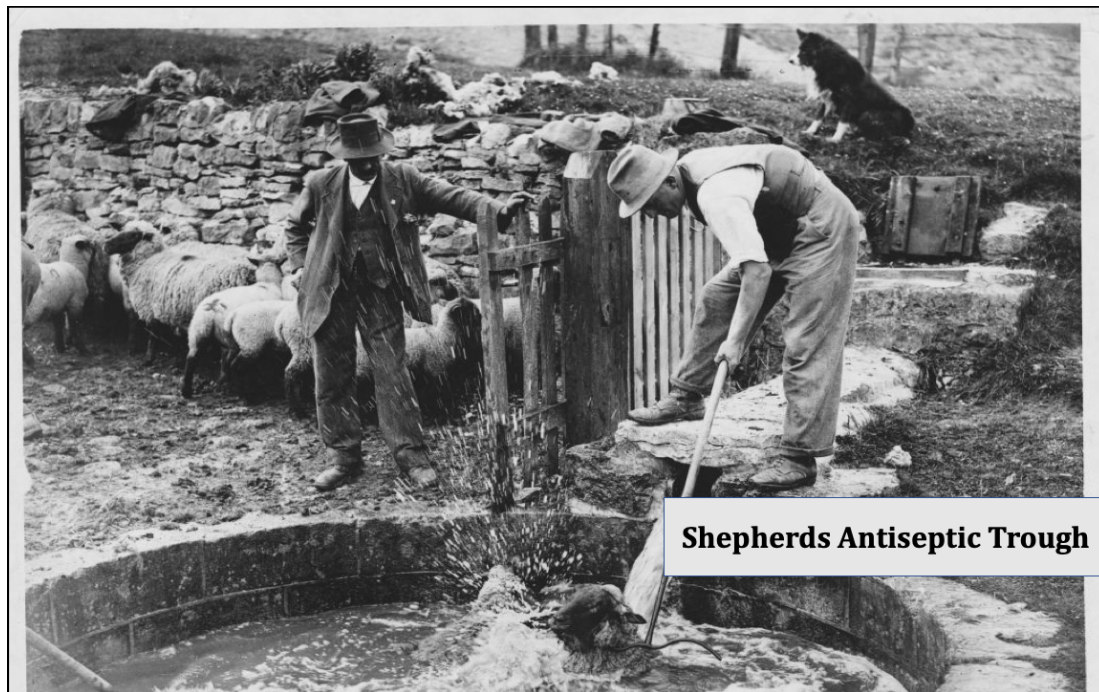
Church you know God is fully aware of both our triumphs and our failings. And He is present when we are experiencing the high's and low's of life. And God has purposed that we might have **HOPE** in spite of our circumstances. And that **HOPE** is what we are going to focus on this morning.



This morning as we are wrapping up 2019 and moving into 2020... what we are going to focus on is the perspective that....**THERE IS ALWAYS NEW HOPE FOR THOSE WHO TRUST IN THE LORD.**

Meaning that NO MATTER WHAT we have experienced in the previous year/decade... that we can look at the start of this year/decade (2020) with **HOPE** because we are HIS.

And the fact that we are HIS (**if we are IN CHRIST**) means something! It means that while uncertainty swirls all around us and as we experience circumstances that seem beyond us... we are helped by God... a God who knows no uncertainty and who sits above our temporary circumstances.



Illus:

Church to illustrate why we should place our hope in God at all times. I'm reminded about a story I heard about the unique method British Shepherds would use to keep their flocks healthy. {change slide here} They would bathe them in Antiseptic. You see the Shepherds noticed that parasites would live on their flocks... these parasites would literally eat away at their flesh and so these Shepherds developed a method of killing these parasites.

Now, in order to get the sheep and goats fully clean the shepherd needs to fully submerge the head of the sheep/goat into the Antiseptic... you can see in this picture, the Shepherds staff, forcing this sheep's head beneath the water to purify him.



And you might imagine (from the sheep's perspective) they must have thought the Shepherd was trying to KILL him, because the sheep has no concept of antiseptic or parasites.

But the shepherd was trying to do the exact opposite, He was trying to heal him, to cleanse him... to rid him from the parasites which feasted on him.

You see church the parallels are obvious... we too have a Good Shepherd, and He too will allow negative experiences to occur in our lives to purify for himself a people who are His.



Now even though our Good Shepherd may allow things to happen to us that we can't at the moment understand... what we are going to see this morning is that He is trustworthy... and therefore HE IS worthy of our HOPE now and into the future.

[Pause]

If you would please turn with me to the book of Lamentations the 3rd chapter. Today we are going to look for a message of HOPE in an unlikely place.

The Book of Lamentations is written by the Prophet Jeremiah. It is a series of 5 poems of lament about the destruction of the Holy City of Jerusalem by the Babylonians which took place in 586 BC.



And while it might seem counterintuitive to look for a message of **HOPE** in perhaps the most depressing book of the Bible.... I believe that is exactly where we should be looking for a message of HOPE.

Because you see it is easy to be HOPEFUL while everything is going our way... but it is hard to be HOPEFUL when EVERYTHING has gone wrong.... and that is exactly where we find the Prophet Jeremiah in this text.

To set the stage and give you a little context for what has happened.... and where Jeremiah is as he writes these words.



Jeremiah is sitting in a cave overlooking Jerusalem. He weeps as he sees the rubble of the once glorious city that mankind once called ***the perfection of beauty***.

He smells the stench of decaying bodies. He sees starving people and less fortunate souls poking through the rubble. They were once a proud nation, but now they are broken.

But the real tragedy is that this could have been averted. Jeremiah himself had warned the people of Israel to repent and seek God. But they mocked him and imprisoned him. They continued to rebel against God until it was too late. And a significant part of Jeremiah's LAMENT is the notion... ***if only they had listened***.



Jeremiah is reeling from his regret, his shame, and the pain of loss. And as you read the text he blames everyone... he blames himself, he blames the people, he blames God.

But right in the middle of his LAMENT... almost out of nowhere, as if he all of a sudden has a lucid moment... the prophet remembers this.....

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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."

Read: ↑

Alright, so there are three resolutions for 2020 that I'd like us to make together this morning based on this text. Because I believe that as we work through these resolutions they will provide us great HOPE as we move into 2020 and beyond.

The 1st is found in the first half of verse 22... where we see that Jeremiah's **HOPE** is grounded in the remembrance that **God's Steadfast Love Never Ceases.**

The concept of Steadfast Love here in this text isn't just speaking of some ordinary, run of the mill type of love. This is speaking of the {Hebrew - Chesed} **LOYAL LOVE OF GOD.**

*new year
new hope*

L A M E N T A T I O N S 3 : 2 2 - 2 4

God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn him. Ignore him. Reject him. Despise him. Disobey him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish his love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it any more than our stupidity jeopardizes it.

God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.

- Max Lucado "Just Like Jesus Devotional: A Thirty-Day Walk with the Savior"

It is steadfast because God does not change... therefore His Love endures NO MATTER WHAT!

Here is Author Max Lucado wonderfully describing the Loyal, Never Ending, Love of God.

Read:

God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn him. Ignore him. Reject him. Despise him. Disobey him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish his love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it any more than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.

This is the blessed message that Jeremiah is beginning to remember.

*new year
new hope*

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"therefore I will hope in him."

It's important for us to take note that Jeremiah remembers this in the midst of tragedy. The text says *he calls to mind God's love. He chooses to remember God's steadfast love when trouble finds him in life.*

This active choice of remembering when times get tough is something we will need throughout our Christian lives.

Why is that significant? Because as I said earlier. It's easy for us to believe that **God's Steadfast Love Never Ceases** when everything is going our way.

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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“therefore I will hope in him.”

But it is **HARD** to believe this when everything we know lies in ruin. But here Jeremiah believes that God’s love for him and the nation is above and beyond their current circumstances.

You see church what Jeremiah knows is that God has priorities and understanding that far surpass what we can know or understand. As the Prophet Isaiah declared, “*God’s ways and knowledge are above our own.*”

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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“therefore I will hope in him.”

Many people believe that God LOVES THEM when life is good, but when life gets hard or unexpected things occur we shake our hand at God and believe His love has vanished from us.

And here in the midst of death and despair Jeremiah dares to believe that GOD’S LOVE NEVER CEASES.

Now some of you might be thinking... “What’s the point of believing that God’s love never ceases if my circumstances don’t improve? In other words, some might think the only point in messing with God in the first place is that pragmatically my life will get better and be free of calamity.

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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"therefore I will hope in him."

Now in truth that's a very complicated question that will take it's own sermon to answer..... but what I will say is that either believing or rejecting the notion of God's steadfast love will alter the course of our lives. That is a fact!

Whether we believe in God's loyal love or not will effect our decision making... it will effect whether we can hold on to faith when troubles come... it will effect whether we can express loyal love to others in our lives etc.

But the primary reason why it's important that we ALL ONBOARD the belief in God's Steadfast Love is because if we DON'T we will miss out on the HOPE IT CAN BRING INTO OUR LIVES.

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

2020 Resolution #1

**We resolve to believe in the
steadfast love of God.**

Lamentations 3:22a

We live in a world devoid of HOPE. Some of our culture's greatest HOPES rest in a stock market, a score line or a reflection in a mirror.... all temporary and circumstantial.

But here in Lamentations we see a transcendent HOPE emerge from a God whose LOVE ENDURES ALL.

And that brings us to our 1st Resolution for 2020,
May we resolve to believe in the steadfast love of God.

Church, I want you to dream with me for a moment. How might your 2020 be different at every opportunity you believed that **GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU ENDURED?**

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

2020 Resolution #1

**We resolve to believe in the
steadfast love of God.**

Lamentations 3:22a

When you receive bad news at work...YOU BELIEVED
THAT GOD'S LOVE ENDURES ALWAYS.

When you get bad news from your doctor...YOU
BELIEVED THAT GOD'S LOVE ENDURES ALWAYS.

When you experience the pain of a strained family
relationship... YOU BELIEVED THAT GOD'S LOVE
ENDURES ALWAYS.

You see friends there isn't anything more pragmatic in
our lives than fighting to believe in God's love for
us... because as we LIVE OUT THAT TRUTH IN OUR
LIVES... not only will our lives improve on a spiritual
dimension [*which is vastly more important*]... but we will
also authenticate our faith to a watching world who
needs to see the HOPE OF CHRIST EMINATING FROM
OUR LIVES.

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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"therefore I will hope in him."

As we move on I want to look at the second half of verse 22 because here we find the source of our next resolution for 2020.

Jeremiah now remembers in the midst of calamity that **GOD'S MERCIES NEVER COME TO AN END.**

The Hebrew word {*here*} for mercy/compassion {**racham**} is used throughout the OT and can also refer to the mercy/compassion one would look upon a ***child in the womb*** with.

This evokes a sense of deep empathy which God looks upon His people.

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

“God’s mercy is His tenderhearted, loving compassion for His people. It is His tenderness of heart toward the needy. If grace contemplates humans as sinful, guilty and condemned, mercy sees them as miserable and needy.”

Millard Erickson – Christian Theology

Millard Erickson gives this comprehensive definition of Mercy in his book Christian Theology.

“God’s mercy is His tenderhearted, loving compassion for His people. It is His tenderness of heart toward the needy. If grace contemplates humans as sinful, guilty and condemned, mercy sees them as miserable and needy.”

We have all found ourselves in this life miserable and needy and without doubt we will find ourselves there again... THIS IS LIFE.

But the question that remains for the believer in God is, how will we respond when we find ourselves there?

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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"therefore I will hope in him."

Yet again in our text we see that Jeremiah resolves to believe that God will be merciful to him in his desperate state. He resolves to believe that God doesn't run out of mercy, as some might believe.

When I was a new believer, I remember saying the sinners prayer over and over again, usually after I had done something I was just certain God would not forgive. You see I had bad theology as an early Christian because I thought that God could get sick of me and withdraw the mercy I'd first received.

But church a part of the beauty of the Gospel is that God can't get sick of any of you. Amen!?!?

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

2020 Resolution #2

**We resolve to believe that God's
mercies are never ending.**

Lamentation 3:22b

In God's economy there is no such thing as a person who's too needy or miserable. Mercy is a part of His very nature. And that is a message of HOPE.

And that brings us to our 2nd resolution for 2020... ***We resolve to believe that God's mercies are never ending.***

Dream with me again... How might your 2020 and beyond be different if you truly believed that God's mercies towards you never ran out?

It would allow us to see our sins for what they are and immediately lay them at the foot of the cross. Satan's lies wouldn't take hold of us as strong when we sin. We'd be much more free to continue our pursuit of God even in the midst of our many missteps.

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

2020 Resolution #2

**We resolve to believe that God's
mercies are never ending.**

Lamentation 3:22b

But you see Church our enemy Satan wants you and I to believe that God's mercies **DO** come to an end.

Because you see when we believe this.... we run from God like Adam and Eve in the Garden.

When we believe His mercies end we isolate ourselves, and break fellowship with the only one who can truly bring our souls peace & rest.

We need to fight to believe that God's mercies never end. Because not only is it TRUE, but this truth will free us up to be AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES WHO LIVE LIKE JESUS.

And again, as we onboard a proper understanding of **MERCY** we will also be better equipped to MODEL MERCY TO A WATCHING WORLD.



Jesus is our model in all things, but especially with regard to **MERCY**.

Earlier we defined **MERCY** as *tenderness of heart toward the needy*.

And the gospel truth is that a **LOVING MERCY** is precisely what compelled Christ to leave heaven and come to earth.

He saw our neediness and he responded... and with His life He gave MANKIND a new paradigm for living.

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

2020 Resolution #2

**We resolve to believe that God's
mercies are never ending.**

Lamentation 3:22b

One of my favorite things is when secular academics in their research discover gospel truths and are also intellectually honest enough to admit them.

I want to share with you a quote from a Berkeley Ph.D. Rodney Stark (*who identifies himself as an agnostic*). Rodney is a Historian and he has researched the relationship between how cultures throughout time have dealt with the issue of **MERCY**.

The following quote from his Book *The Triumph of Christianity* reveals what his research yielded....

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

In the midst of the squalor, misery, illness, and anonymity of ancient cities, Christianity provided an island of mercy and security It started with Jesus ... In contrast, in the pagan world, and especially among the philosophers, mercy was regarded as a character defect and pity as a pathological emotion: because mercy involves providing *unearned* help or relief, it is contrary to justice ... [Thus] humans must learn "to curb the impulse [to show mercy]"; "the cry of the undeserving for mercy" must go "unanswered." "[Showing mercy] was a defect of character unworthy of the wise and excusable only in those who have not yet grown up." This was the moral climate in which Christianity taught that ... a merciful God requires humans to be merciful. Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*

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new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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Basically Rodney is stating that it was God, Jesus, Christians who revolutionized how our world views the necessity of **MERCY**. This cultural shift no doubt has made our world significantly better.

And the reason why I emphasize this is because just as it was Christians through the past 2 millennia who helped push the Gospel forward... giving our world **NEW HOPE** that it didn't possess before, we too need to be thinking about HOW WE CAN CONTINUE TO PUSH THE GOSPEL FORWARD.

Well Church, one of the ways we do this is by BELIVING IN GOD'S MERCY IN YOUR LIVES AND THEN LIVING AS VESSELS OF THAT MERCY.



Because as we live this way it will not only illuminate our own lives with **HOPE** but it will also impact everyone we interact with.

Illus:

Ok, so. Has anyone ever had the car in front of you pay for your meal at the drive thru?

Because there is the phenomena of kindness that people are videotaping and uploading online.....where people will pay for the car, [or in some cases] several cars behind them at the drive thru window.



And typically you know what this elicits....right?
The people who get their meal paid for.....they want
to pay for the person behind them.

And then this begins a chain reaction of people
paying for other peoples BIG MAC's and Milk Shakes
[down the line].....and it all began with ONE.

Well....there is a Chick-fila in New Braunfels, Texas
that holds the record for the most consecutive “pay
it forward” meals.....One day the attendants at that
Chick-fila witnessed 228 cars IN A ROW pay for the
meal of the person behind them in line.



These people didn't know one another.....but because someone paid for their meal....they felt obliged to do the same.

Now it makes you really wonder about the 229th person though right. I'm certain they were told that they were a part of an amazingly long chain of kindness.....before they said.... “Nope, not paying for the people behind me.” While driving off with their free meal.



Church just like that chain reaction of drive-through kindness began with ONE person.....2020 can be a year where we see a chain reaction....a chain reaction that emanates from our lives lived in faith revealing that GOD'S LOVE IS STEADFAST AND THAT HIS MERCY NEVER ENDS.

This chain reaction impacting and effecting the lives of those whom God has placed on our path.

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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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.”

Back in our text... verse 23... in the midst of the darkest day in Israel's history Jeremiah speaks to the deeper level understanding of God's love and mercy... stating that they are **NEW EVERY MORNING**.

This is a profound idea that I'd love to unpack with you. The Hebrew translation of this phrase [**new every morning**] simply means that God's love and mercy are brand new and available to us each new day when we wake up.

This would have been refreshing to hear during the desolate times Israel was experiencing. The concept is that God's hand of blessing isn't permanently removed from them..... but that his faithfulness endures to each new day.

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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Question: Do you know how many days you have been alive?

As I was thinking about God's love & mercy being NEW and available to me each new day I decided to figure out how many days I've been alive.

And as of today I've been alive for 14,356 days.

Which means that God's love and mercy has been brand new in my life 14,356.

How one might ask, why does it have to be new?

Well it's because I'm not the same person I was 10 years ago or 10 days ago. As I experience new things, and I overcome certain obstacles or new troubles emerge. God's love and mercy embraces every circumstance life can produce.

new year new hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

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"therefore I will hope in him."

Verse 23 ends with a declaration of the ***Greatness of God's Faithfulness*** and I think in part why God's Faithfulness is so amazing is because it can roll with whatever it faces.

God isn't phased by what we do... He knows we will miss the mark, He is not surprised when we fail.

But He expects us to not wallow in our failings but to trust in His steadfast love... to place our faith in His never ending mercy, and to believe that **each** are NEW EVERY MORNING WHEN WE AWAKE.

Church if that isn't a HOPEFUL CONCEPT I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS!

*new year
new hope*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

2020 Resolution #3

**We resolve to believe that God's love
and mercy are brand new each day.**

Lamentation 3:23

And that brings us to our 3rd resolution as we head into 2020, **We resolve to believe that God's love and mercy are brand new each day.**

How might your 2020 be different if each time you woke up you truly believed that it was a brand new day with your Savior?

This is one of the most profound concepts with regards to our relationship with God.

Often we make the mistake of thinking that God is like our friends or our spouse.

If we hurt our spouse the evening before... the only thing that will be new in the morning is the ***death stare of disappointment.***



But thanks be to God He is not one of us. And that is why we have HOPE.

The New Year/New Decade is right around the corner. In addition to all the resolutions you may have to eat less and sleep more, financial goals etc.

Make sure you set some spiritual resolutions that will fill your spiritual wallet.

Realizing that this world is short on hope... but there is a God who holds this fleeting world in the palm of his hand, and he has spoken promises to His people that will endure far past this temporal plain.



As we invest in those promises and the God of those promises we receive a HOPE that transcends every circumstance that we could ever encounter.

As you read the Book of Lamentations Jeremiah ends the book by expressing his belief/hope that in God stating Ch. 5 v. 19, **“You O Lord Reign Forever.”**

That Forever Reign of the God whose LOVE AND MERCY NEVER ENDS... Church that **IS** a HOPE to stake your life on, now and into eternity.

In 2020, may we resolve to be people who live out that **HOPE because we are HIS.**

Pray: Offering