

# Living Lent | Friday, March 30

Gwen Williams

## Hope for Those Bowed Down in Despair

*Today's Reading: Lamentations 3:1-9; 19-24*

*"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. 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. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."*

**Psalm 71:3**

### **Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:**

"I am the man who has seen affliction," laments Jeremiah. "Surely against me, He has turned His hand repeatedly all the day." These are the words of the prophet Jeremiah who had previously been given the difficult assignment of warning Judah of coming judgment if they did not heed His message and return to Him in repentance. Adding to the weight of the assignment, God told him, however, that they would not listen and would not return. The fact that they had watched their fellow countrymen of the Northern Kingdom do the same thing and suffer judgment without learning from their example surely added to the heaviness of Jeremiah's grief.

Judah's refusal to turn back to God resulted in His turning His hand against them. In Lamentations, chapter 3 we find Jeremiah lamenting over his personal suffering as he shares in theirs. He is in the depths of despair and hopelessness and paints a picture so dark that it takes our minds to Calvary. The canvas of Lamentations 3 is splattered with words like afflicted, darkness, besieged, bitterness, hardship, heavy chain, shut out, blocked, crooked paths, and perhaps the most dreadful, "In dark places He made me dwell, like those who have long been dead. Jeremiah obviously felt separated from God's mercy and blessings for that horrible season. As he "remembers his afflictions and his wanderings, the wormwood and bitterness, his

soul is bowed down within him." (Verse 20)

BUT THERE'S A HINGE THAT TURNS IN VERSE 21 . . . Jeremiah recalled to his mind something that turned his despair to hope! It was the LORD's lovingkindness . . . His hesed – the Hebrew word that describes the distinctiveness of God's character, the most mysterious and inexpressible word of all, a concept so rich in meaning that it doesn't translate well into any single English word or phrase . . . God's covenant faithfulness or steadfast love.

When Jeremiah recalled to mind the lovingkindness of God everything turned, and he continued a glorious confession in verse 22, "The LORD's lovingkindness indeed never cease. For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." His despair turned to hope! His song turns from mourning to joy! In verse 24, where his soul had been bowed down, it turned up and proclaimed, "The LORD is my portion. Therefore, I have hope in Him."

### **Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ:**

*A pastor's wife of 43 years, Gwen has primarily been involved in women's ministry for all those years, serving as Women's Ministry Director, Events Coordinator, Women's Bible Study Leader, and Women's Event Speaker. A priority commitment to know God was born out of her own personal struggles as a young woman and pressed her to a deep love for the study of the Word of God. Her greatest passion remains to know Him personally and to help other women know Him as well. She and her husband, Dannie served churches in TX, FL, and GA before recently retiring from the full-time pastorate and First Baptist Church of Lyons where they served for 20 years. They are continuing in service to the Lord as new members of First Baptist Church of Vidalia, and their kingdom hearts will keep them closely connected to world missions and church planting.*