



Hope for Broken Hearts
Part 1 – When Your Nation Rejects God
Pastor Ted Cunningham

First Sunday of Fall. I remember being at a church in Atlanta years ago in the fall. While they were putting the mic pack on me, the guy putting it on me said, “Hey, Ted, I just want you to know that the congregation really won’t be with you today, but I don’t want you to take it personally. They’re not really going to be into it today because Georgia lost yesterday.” I thought he was joking. I go, “You’re kidding with me.” He goes, “I’m dead serious. People will be mourning that loss.” So, I’m grateful to live in a state where I think we kind of expect our team... No, seriously that it doesn’t really affect our Sunday morning service. I think if you go into Saturday with the expectation of loss, you do much better on Sunday.

I don’t know what that’s all about but I gotta tell you I love fall, but I love fall because my wife loves fall. This is her favorite season of the year and when we were taking our walks at 9:00 pm in July... You know she walks me and the dogs every night before sunset, but not in July. It was too hot. At 8:00 pm, we were still at 95 degrees, so we have to do a twilight walk. In July, all we talked about on our walks was fall. We just can’t wait for fall. I don’t know when it officially starts, but for Amy Cunningham, it is September 1.

Now, I drink my coffee like a real American – black. But this is the season of pumpkin spiced lattes. We only do one because they are like 1,400 calories. I think we wait until October. September 1 hits and Amy says to me, as we’re driving errands on September 1, “Swing into Starbucks, let’s get our pumpkin spiced latte.” I had to write down her order because I couldn’t remember it. This is her order – Grande, oat milk, decaf, one pump pumpkin latte, double sleeve, no cup. I added that double sleeve, no cup. Because it didn’t want to remember that or make my own order, I said, “Make that two.” I kid you not. The guys said, “That will be \$13.70.” To which I said back to through the microphone, “How do you sleep at night!?” And then went around and got my pumpkin spiced decaf oat milk, (because we all know milk comes from oats).

This is my last fall thing. I have all sorts of fall stuff. Did you see that guy from Nebraska? It made the news. To celebrate his 60th birthday, he’s been growing a pumpkin for 10 years. I didn’t even know that... Who just found out for the first time in your life that you can grow a pumpkin for 10 years? I thought they went with seasons. He grew this pumpkin for 10 years. It was over 850 pounds. He hollowed the thing out and for his birthday celebration, he floated in it like a kayak 38 miles down the Missouri River. Now when I read that I’m like, Our area has enough stereotypes that we don’t need to be floating gourds down Taney Commo. Can I get an amen on that?

But happy fall y'all as we enter into this time. I saw somebody post yesterday – "Hey, it's pumpkin spiced latte season. Check on your baristas."

We start a new series today called *Hope for broken Hearts*. Today's message is going to be heavy. I'm just going to tell you that. That's why we just had a little fall humor before we enter into this. I actually asked the Lord to relieve me of this message on Wednesday. I didn't like where it was going and... Isn't that a good thing for a pastor say – Oh I'm studying... *Lord, give me something else. This is not what I want right here.*

If you have your Bibles, turn to Lamentations 1. It's in the Old Testament, right behind Jeremiah. We're going to talk today in this very first message about what you do, how you find hope when your nation rejects God. I'm going to go where angels dare to tread just a little bit with this message. It's a heavy message, but I hope it's an encouraging message. I just ask that the Holy Spirit call you by name, the Holy Spirit call me by name as I've been called by name all week long with this and with the text.

Over the next couple of weeks and through September, in this series called *Hope for Broken Hearts*, we're going to talk to the parent, to the grandparent who had a child or grandchild who walked away from God and maybe even the family. We're going to talk to the spouse who is dealing with a cheating spouse, an addicted spouse, a spouse that just one day decided it's over and walked away. How do you find hope in that situation?

Maybe you just went through a bad breakup. You've been dating for a while, and you thought *this is the one. She's the one. He's the one.* And the breakup was sudden, shocking, out of the blue, out of nowhere, and you're dealing with a broken heart. There are some of you who have lost a loved one. We are going to end the series with that.

Some of you have dealt with church hurt. We've all experienced church hurt in some form or fashion over the years. What do you do with rejection and people hurting you that call themselves brothers and sisters in Christ? Some of you just recently had a friend walk away after a long relationship. For others, it's a job and for some it's a boss that maybe is just toxic and is a yeller and constantly abusive even toward you and you're just dealing with what you do if you have to walk away from this job.

Maybe some of you have dealt with a bankruptcy. Whatever, as Katie talked about a few moments ago, the brokenness is, the broken heart is for you, this is where we are starting this series in Psalm 34: 18. I want you to know this. whatever your broken heart is about, ***The Lord is close to the brokenhearted...*** He is near and we hope that you experience that comfort today and throughout this series. ***...and saves those who are crushed in spirit.***

Over the last couple of years, just dealing with a lot of folks in the church... This is a local church message today. This is not some campaign stump speech about bringing America back together. That's not what this is. This is for dealing with Woodland Hills Family Church and the people in here that are crushed by what's going on in our church and in our nation right now. And like so many of you seasoned believers in this church... And when I say seasoned believers, I'm not just talking about gray hair. I'm talking about those of you who have walked with the Lord for a while. I see it all the time in

this church. It happens all the time. I call someone to minister to them and they flip the script on me. Instead of a 20-minute phone call or even a coffee with someone to encourage them, the whole thing is flipped on me and "How are you doing, Ted?" I think I found the common thread through all of it. It's just seasoned believers who have total confidence in the Lord. Complete confidence and assurance in the character and promises of God, the resting in that. So, when you're trying to comfort them in their pain, their sorrow, or their grief, they are like, "Hey, God's got this. "Ted, what's going on with you?"

This week was no exception to that. It happens all the time in this church. Yesterday, I called Jerry Buckley (he was in our last service) to check on his wife, Kathy. Kathy is watching today from home. Kathy was given a sudden and shocking cancer diagnosis. It's fast-moving, aggressive. She was told she would have to start chemo immediately to even see a year. So, I called Jerry yesterday to just talk through it with him and, again, Jerry did what seasoned believers do in this church all the time. He flipped the script on me. "Ted, tell me what's going on. How are you doing?"

I'm like "Jerry, you've got this whole thing backwards. This is about me calling to pray with you, to encourage you. What are you doing?" We got into eschatology, we went everywhere as I was talking to a man who has walked with the Lord for longer that I've been alive. He was in the first service. I thanked him for that. We gave him these flowers to bring to Kathy to celebrate your... Kathy, we're bringing these flowers so you can celebrate your 52nd anniversary this month and say we rejoice and delight in you and we praise your love more than wine. Thank you two for being a model, not just in marriage, but in how you walk with the Lord and how you're walking all of this out.

Kathy said what I've heard so many solid believers whose faith is just anchored in Christ say. She said, "I win either way. Would you pray that God heals me, and I get to be here with my family, my children and my grandchildren." Or whatever, as we talked about a couple of weeks ago, for my good and for his glory. "But if I'm not healed in this, I get to be face to face with Jesus."

Let's pray for Kathy today. I want Kathy to represent all of those in our church and church family and those watching online who are dealing with a broken heart right now from a diagnosis that rocked them. Or maybe a family member of yours. Would you pray with me.

Father, Jerry and Kathy are like so many in this church who have walked with you for a long time who have the assurance of their salvation, as we just sang, the greatness of your faithfulness. It has been lived out in their life and in their marriage for all of these years. Now, we get to walk alongside them through this very difficult season as a church family.

The very first thing we pray for, through the power and the authority and the name of Jesus and through the power of his blood, we pray for healing for Kathy. We pray for a cancer count of zero. We pray for an immune system that's strong. We also praise you for the fact that the side effects of the first round of chemo have been shockingly minimal. For that we are grateful. We pray for the doctors and the hospitals, thanking you for them first and foremost for how quickly they responded to this and got her in and got her the treatments that she needed. We just claim the name of Jesus over her now and for healing.

Thank you for her strong walk with you and for her testimony and public profession of faith that she has made and has demonstrated before her family and friends in this church. Your word calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. As we enter into this series, we want to take the time to mourn with the broken hearted and to mourn with those who are experiencing loss, whether that be the loss of health to the loss of life to the loss of a job or a spouse or a child, draw near to us as your Word says you do when we draw near to you.

It is in the name of Jesus that we pray it... Amen.

Can I just tell you it's absolutely the best thing about the local church. It's what I love about the local church. The programming you get in Woodland Hills is obviously very important, but programming will always take a backseat to people and the purposes of God in this church. I'm just grateful for a church where we can take the moments and reflect on that and celebrate a marriage and to pray for someone.

So, today, here's the question. I'm going to go where angels dare to tread. I ask for grace. I look down and see I have 18 minutes left and I'm going to be honest with you in that I'm praising my Father in Heaven for that. I don't want 30 minutes with this question.

How do I find hope when devastated and sorrowful over the spiritual condition of our nation? How do I find hope? Where is it? It's not in your nation and it's not in a politician. And it never will be. Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. I have a whole section here that I was planning on putting on the screen but then I turned it blue. Blue in my notes means it's for me and could get me fired at other churches. And I may or may not share it, depending on how everyone is receiving it.

After the first service, I had ten people that come up and say, "Can I read that blue real quick. I'm dying to know?" "No. You're not reading the blue." I condensed this whole section down to these two words. Let's talk about **the tension**. The tension that is in our church. And it's not just our church. It's churches I get to visit all across the country, and I hear it from pastor friends all the time. Rene Schlaepfer, I don't know if you remember when he was here. I don't want to throw him under the bus. We've been texting all week about this message today. And what a godly man, godly pastor who has given me great insight, but he's a pastor too, so it's not just this is the truth, but this is how to share it. I was so encouraged by him.

I told Rene just last week... I'll just give you one week in this tension. I heard from someone that they can't be a member of Woodland Hills because the pastor is a democrat. In the same week, I get an email that says, "We're considering leaving the church because your conservative bent is coming out more and more in your sermons." I want to get these two people together for coffee because I'm trying to figure out what is going on.

I'm just wondering how do we navigate through this tension as a church? Can I give you the tension without you leaving mad? During the tension in the last service, two people stood up to go to the bathroom. This is not the time to go to the bathroom. We will consider you a democrat or a

republican. Or we'll call you both. How about that? There goes an independent out the back door. Look at me. I have to let you feel the tension because it's there. You know what the tension has created in our country on both sides? Burn it all to the ground. You don't like the way something went down, just tear it down. Burn it down and start all over. And that is a right and a left issue in our country.

But then there are some of you in here who you want the good ole days. Actually, Solomon says we shouldn't ask why were the good ole days better than these days. He says that question doesn't come from a place of wisdom. Do you know why? It's because what you consider the good ole days might be a period in time that the person you're sitting next to this morning would say, "I don't want my family to go back to those days."

Some of you picture the good ole days and I get it. For you, you want to go back to a time... You are devastated and sorrowful over our nation and you want Mayberry. You want a sheriff who doesn't need a gun. You want a deputy with one bullet, who is somewhat competent to use that bullet. This is the tension.

Let me go one more place with the tension and then we move on. There are some of you sorrowful... In this church right now, there are those of you who are like, "We've kicked God out of the schools, we've kicked God out of this nation. We need to get back to a Judeo-Christian ethic." And on the other side... and I'm not saying in this country, I'm saying in this church who look around and they say Christian nationalism, a relatively new term for many I know, and it's still being defined. It has so many different definitions out there saying Christian nationalism has crept into our town and has crept into our church. People this week... I know there was a reporter in town asking me to define it for him. I'm thinking there are so many definitions, so I wrote this. I shared it with Rene, I shared it with other pastors. If you've never heard this term, trust me, you are going to hear more about it. Here's what Christian nationalism is. *It's allowing your patriotism to cross a line and turning your nation into an idol.* That's what Christian nationalism is. We don't believe in Christian nationalism.

Here's what I think some of the tension is as well. People are throwing patriotism out as well. Guess what? I'm here to tell you. And please don't clap for this. That's not what I'm looking for at all in this. You can pledge allegiance to the United States of America flag. You can sing the national anthem. You can root for your team. That's patriotism. But don't let it cross the line to where you elevate your citizenship in the United States above your citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. You have a dual citizenship and if you are a believer in Christ Jesus, your citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is the priority.

I know this line is tricky and there are some of you going, "This is his democrat side coming out." I'm making an observation of what's happening in this church right now and the tension. I get called an idolator by critics for marriage. If you're not on Twitter, you wouldn't see it, and I'd tell you to stay off Twitter. It's a toxic cesspool. But I've been accused of turning marriage into an idol because I speak every weekend on marriage. When my critics call me an idolator with marriage, I say, "Can you help me find the line between the Bible calling us to honor marriage and idolatry of marriage?" Usually when I ask them to just give me a few bullet points on where that line is, the conversation ends.

I think the conversation with patriotism vs Christian nationalism is I'm seeing that play out similar to the conversation I have about marriage. It's like help me find that line – where it crosses over and where it becomes an idol – because you can love your nation, you can honor your nation, but as a follower of Jesus, remember God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only son. Therefore, go and make disciples of *all nations*. You and I, as followers of Jesus, are to have a heart for the entire world. We're to care for the nations of the earth and that the gospel would go forth.

We just took an offering and in that offering, money from this church is going out to other nations of the earth to missionaries to meet the physical needs in communities like Morogoro, Tanzania, and Indonesia for the purpose of sharing the gospel with them. This tension is in our church. I want us to come back to this and understand this as we move into another election this year and in two years. With some of you within this tension, I'm just going to be honest, you've lost hope. You have no more hope for the people of this nation than you do for any other nation around the world. You just have this very dismal, doomsday, despair, and you need to be reminded today that there is hope in these very dark and trying times. Some of you have hope, but I would call it misplaced hope. You've put your hope in a place where it doesn't belong.

GK Chesterton says this: *“Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.”*

Here's where we start today as we launch into this. We are a local church, not a political party. We're the family of God. And that means our leader is Jesus, not a politician... and it never will be. For those who have lost hope or misplaced hope, keep this in mind. We will never find hope in people, places, or things. Your hope is not in your spouse. Your hope is not in your child. Your hope is not in your nation. Your hope is in one name and one name only and that is the name that is above every name, the name of Jesus.

In Acts 4:12 we read, ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”***

We read in Philippians 2 ***9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge (or confess) that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

So, we get this great book in the Bible called Lamentations. It's a funeral song. It's Jeremiah lamenting over the national tragedy of the Babylonians coming in and destroying Jerusalem in 586 BC, carrying off Judah into exile. He's an eyewitness account. If you look at these books of the Bible in your Old Testament, the Book of Jeremiah is Jeremiah prophesying that this is going to happen. *You keep rejecting God, you keep disobeying, you want nothing to do with Him, this is what's going to happen.* Lamentations is the book of the Bible that looks back on that. And he is expressing sorrow and grief. You really get this in Chapters 1 and 2. The sorrow and grief that he has over this national tragedy, but even more than that, what brought the national tragedy on, and that was the people's rejection of

God. So, he's going to paint this picture in Chapters 1 and 2 of what he saw and the destruction in Jerusalem and in Judah – the people now in exile.

In Chapter 3, we get the turning point. And at the end of the book, we get what all of us should be doing when we have sorrow and when we are lamenting over what's going on in our nation, we should end every conversation and every prayer with a confession of trust just like the lament psalms – God, I'm hurting, the enemy is winning, and you don't seem to be involved in this." But it ends with, "But we trust in you no matter what's going on."

In Lamentations 1, Jeremiah begins. He talks of Jerusalem. ***How deserted lies the city... God's city of God's chosen people ...once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.*** And it has flipped.

In Verse 3 of this same chapter, he moves to Judah. ***After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.***

In chapter 2: 11, you get why we call Jeremiah the weeping prophet. In Verse 11 it reads. ***My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground...*** I think all this tension we see in our country and all this tension that we see in our church, we need to be reminded of the fact it is okay to be lamenting over what's going on. It's okay to be broken over this and to have a broken heart and to express that to God. Jeremiah is doing that in this psalm. ***...because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city.***

When you get to Chapter 3, there is a turning point. ***19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. 20 I well remember them...*** In other words, when I focus on the devastation in Jerusalem and Judah, ***...and my soul is downcast within me.*** We get this.

If we were to give you a plan today to live in despair, like we want everybody, by this evening, to be totally depressed, do you know what I would tell you to do? Go home, have every meal in front of the television and don't leave the television. Turn on the news and find every bad thing possible going on in our world and meditate on it. You would be downcast by the end of the day. Some of you are there right now. That's why some of the women in here are hitting their husbands, saying, "This is why you're so grumpy."

But that's what happens when we focus on our surroundings, when we focus on what's going on. And that becomes all we think about and all we take in. It's our steady diet. All the bad, all the frustration, all the yelling, all the screaming, all the opinions on Facebook. A fool finds no satisfaction in understanding but only in expressing his opinions.

So, we have opinion after opinion. You're going to be downcast. You're going to live in despair. But watch this. ***21 Yet this I call to mind..*** So, there is something you must do, there's something I must do if I want hope.

I have to change the way I think. **...and therefore I have hope.** Here's what he is saying in these three verses. Focusing on what's going on around you will fill you with despair. But as we are going to see in this text, focusing on the Lord's love, compassion, and faithfulness, the character and the promises of God will fill you with hope.

In Lamentations 3, he continues with that thought. **Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 I say to myself...** Don't you love that. I love that line. How many of you talk to yourself all the time? We pray, we talk to the Lord, but I talk to myself all the time. I have a verse for it right now – Verse 24. And how many of you win every argument you have with other people as you're talking to yourself? Listen, you and I can debate over coffee and I lose, but when I get in the car, by the time I get home, I have won the debate. You were wrong on every front, and I was right. I say to myself. Meaning I'm going to meditate on this: **"The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."**

And just so you know, in this text, waiting... which is something Americans love to do. We love waiting. Amazon Prime has really reinforced our desire to wait. But we hate waiting. But waiting and hoping in this text is not sitting there impatiently. In this text, wait and hope mean a confident expectation. You know... This is the seasoned believer we were just talking about. You know that God will work out everything for his purpose and his glory. You rest in his character and his promises.

25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; 26 it is good to wait... Not just to wait. Here's another word we all like in our country, **...quietly...** I long to be that old man down at The Landing, sitting on a bench waiting for his wife while she's shopping. You've seen him. He doesn't say a whole lot. You walk by him and say hi and all he does is slowly nod his head. Thirty years from now, I'm 78. I pray you find me on The Landing just sitting there slowly nodding. He's raised his family, he did his job, he's worked hard, he's full of opinions, but guess what? He's got nothing more to prove. Oh, we all need to be an old man on The Landing, waiting quietly. Yes, you have opinions. Do you need to express them every moment of every day? No. I think that's the other thing I see when I talk about seasoned believers who have a confident expectation in the Lord. When you call to comfort them and to minister to them, here's their response: "I know the Lord's got this." **...for the salvation of the Lord.**

This week, for myself, I put together what I'm just calling The Hope Plan. It just sounds simple. It's three simple things that I can be doing to be filled with more hope and to not live in despair. When I look around and see all the nastiness going on in our country, all the fighting and all the frustration and all the bitterness.

1. Be aware of what's going on in our country, but don't obsess over it. I'm never going to be one of these pastors that tells you to stop watching the news. I think you need to watch the news. How else are you going to learn about the pumpkin guy floating down the Missouri River? I would never have had that understanding. But I would encourage you to limit your exposure to the news. You need to find out what's going on. We have an election coming up. I want to be an informed voter and vote well. And I have to watch. But I don't have to watch it 24/7 and obsess over it. I want to watch the news and Amy asks me, "What's going on in the world?" And I'm just nodding my head.

2. Call to mind... That's been my language this week from Lamentations 3. Call to mind God's character and promises. Meditate on those. Meditate on his faithfulness, on his love, on his compassions. And as you're focusing on that, I think the more we do that, it leads to number 3. This is for me and maybe not for you.

3. Speak less, pray more. When people ask you for your opinion on something, you can share it. But then they're like, "How does that make you feel?!" Just nod your head. Remember we always want to end with a confession of trust. And that's what we get at the end of the book of Lamentations when Jeremiah says, "You, Lord, reign forever." In all that's going on, you are the Lord of all the nations, over all the nations. You reign forever. Your throne endures from generation to generation. And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, prepare our hearts for what's next in our nation, not that we focus to become filled with despair, but that as believers in Christ Jesus, we always keep Jesus the main thing. We never put our hope or a trust in a nation or a politician or a system or, as the scripture says, horses, chariots. We're grateful for the country that you have us in. Many of us, when we think about all that you have done in this nation and through this nation, we are overwhelmed with gratefulness. We are overwhelmed with gratefulness for those who fought and died for this nation. May we, in all of that, remember that our hope is not in our nation, our military, others, politicians who are present and those who will come in the future, but that our hope is in the name that is above all names and that is the name of Jesus.

And for the one today who has never placed faith in that name, that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

We pray all of this in the authority of that name. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.