

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Lamentations 3:22-33

Psalm 30

The book of Lamentations is attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, who is known as the weeping prophet. And well he should weep as he was an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem and its grand Temple. He was witness to the murder of the king and princes, which brought the line of David to an end. The best and brightest of Israel's citizens – the elders, the priests, and the prophets, were all killed or carried away. He and his fellow Israelites were marched from their homeland to Babylon where they would reside for the next 70 years.

The first two chapters of this book recount the horror and destruction witnessed by Jeremiah as the Babylonians overran and captured the city. Chapter 3 begins with a recounting of the feelings experienced as a result of the tumult and destruction of those days. The prophet laments that he has been made to walk in darkness, that he has aged horribly, and that he is besieged with hardships. He feels that God has walled him in and there is no escaping his present situation. Have you ever felt that way? Have you felt like you were stuck in an unpleasant situation with no way out? Can you identify with the prophet?

For 20 verses Jeremiah laments his situation and probably could lament for another 20 given the severity of the pain suffered by the Israelite people when they were taken captive by the Babylonians. But in verse 21 the prophet says these words, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope."

With these words the entire tone of the lament changes. After 20 verses of pain and heartache the prophet speaks words of hope. He starts by acknowledging that the Israelite people had not been consumed. They had not been totally cast off by God. And it is because of God's great compassion for his people that they were not consumed. Let's face it, the Israelite people had been warned for generations that they needed to change their behaviors, yet they wouldn't listen. But despite their disobedience, God had compassion on them.

The prophet states that God's compassion is new every morning. Each day He is willing to give each of us a new start. The Israelites had gotten it wrong for a long time, but God was willing to wipe the slate clean and start again. He is still doing that today. Even if we don't get it right today, we have the opportunity for a fresh start tomorrow. Why is that?

Because God is good to those who place their hope in him. In the world today there are a lot of options of where to place our hope: the government, the stock-market, technology, but none of them offer true hope. The prophet tells us that for those who are willing to wait quietly for God, they will see God's salvation.

Remember that this chapter of Lamentations started with a litany of despair and heartache, but the prophet waited on the Lord and in time was able to see the salvation of the Israelite nation. It took a long time and at times the people felt like they were face down in the dust! But even then they had hope.

God promises that no one will be cast off forever. God is a forgiving God and is willing to take back anyone willing to repent of their misdeeds and place their trust in Him. Even though the Israelites had grieved God for generations, when they

waited on him and made him their portion even in their exile, He heard them and had compassion on them. His love never fails.

There may be times when we feel like we are in exile. Things just aren't going our way, we feel oppressed, or we feel like we're face down in the dust, as low as we can possibly go. We may feel like God has abandoned us. We might even feel like we deserve to be abandoned by God. But we have the promise that if we wait in faith for God's compassion it will come to us.

There are times when our pain and suffering have come as the result of the actions of others and not our own mistakes. The prophet says to offer the cheek to one who would strike you and let that person be disgraced. These words are later echoed by Jesus. Even though you may be oppressed you can still wait on the Lord and His redemption, because even in those times we are reminded that God is our portion and His steadfast love and compassion will not fail us. Can you think of a time that you experienced suffering because of someone else's actions? Were you able to wait on God's compassion toward you in that experience?

These verses tell us that God's compassion will come to us when we wait. So how are we to wait? The prophet says we are to wait quietly. This doesn't necessarily mean that we aren't to make a sound, but that we should do so with a settled spirit, free from worry or doubt. We know God is faithful and we wait with that knowledge. Our waiting can include meditation on God's word, private and corporate prayers, and our times of gathered worship when we call on God's name to let Him know that we desire a relationship with Him as much as he desires a relationship with us. It is in times of our darkest despair, when we find it difficult to hold onto the promises of God on our own, that our times of gathered worship

become most important. That is part of the message Jeremiah shared with his fellow exiles.

As a community of faith, we are called on to pray for each other, to build up the body of Christ, to be a people of hope for the sake, not only of ourselves, but for the community at large. Those of us who wait on the Lord can become a sign of God's presence in the middle of hardship, struggle, and pain, as this poem by Martha Snell Nicholson attests:

Pain knocked upon my door and said
That she had come to stay,
And though I would not welcome her
But bade her go away, she entered in. Like my own shade
She followed after me,
And from her stabbing, stinging sword
No moment was I free.

And then one day another knocked
Most gently at my door.
I cried, "No, Pain is living here,
And there is not room for more."
And then I heard His tender voice,
"Tis I, be not afraid."
And from the day He entered in –
The difference is has made!

For though He did not bid her leave,
(My strange, unwelcome guest),

He taught me how to live with her.
Oh, I had never guessed.

That we could dwell so sweetly here,
My Lord and Pain, and I,
Within this fragile house of clay
While years slip slowly by!

Just as the Israelites waited years for their trials to end, we, too, may wait for seemingly endless times in our own pain and sorrow. Yet, as we wait quietly for God's salvation, we can rest in the knowledge that He is with us leading us to a deeper relationship with Him. With that knowledge we can praise His name saying Great is Thy Faithfulness!

Lord God, we are so thankful that we are not consumed by our sins and that your compassions are new for us each day. Great is your faithfulness, Lord, beyond our understanding. We will wait quietly for your salvation, promised to us in your son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. AMEN

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