

Lamentations 3:22-33 God is faithful to us! Pentecost 6 July 5-6, 2015

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Grace and peace to each our hearts from our faithful God and Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! God's Word that helps us in these challenging times is written in Lamentations 3:22-33 These are Your words, our faithful God and Father. You will keep Your promises. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian Friends,

Our verses for today were written by Jeremiah, who wrote mainly about the sadness of God's people after His destructive judgment against them. Could it be a prophecy of our nation's future? Only God knows at this time. Yet, just as Jeremiah's message still gave hope to God's crushed people, so God offers us these verses to comfort and encourage us. Despite troubles we experience personally and in our nation,

God is faithful to us!

First, our faithful God allows His people to know grief. That sounds contradictory. Usually we think that people who care don't want us to suffer. For Jeremiah, after the death or exile of most of his people, only the poor remained. They were hungry. The Jerusalem walls had been destroyed leaving them defenseless. The temple was destroyed so they could no longer worship God or offer sacrifices. Is it any wonder that many of the people did not listen to Jeremiah's message? The people had sinned, and instead of repenting they had trusted in false gods and in their possessions. There was spiritual emptiness among the leaders and the people. So, like a fierce storm, the Lord rained down His judgment on the people. He planned and carried out the destruction, but He did it with sadness. We know why this judgment happened.

This does not mean that natural disasters or that every problem we face is a judgment of God for sin. Yet, when people make excuses for sin rather than repent, or when they break God's law and say they're doing good, they can hasten God's judgment of a nation. Families are to be the backbone of a country. Yet, so many families are becoming fractured. Parents are not taking time to give Christian training and be examples for their children. Children, even when instructed, are not obeying parents. Our country needs faithful leaders in church and state to guide citizens to know right and wrong by the truth. Too many leaders in our nation don't know the truth and are guiding people right into hands of an angry God.

It's not only other people who have faults; we are included. Like Paul, we say, "*I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.*" (Romans 7:18-19) We struggle to be faithful to God and to each other. page 2 And when we fail, like Peter who denied knowing His Lord, we feel miserable, and also like Paul who wrote, "*What a wretched man I am.*" (7:24) Grief is not pleasant, but it helps us turn to God who helps and heals. He forgives and restores His people and even nations who confess their sins and seek His mercy.

By the time Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, God's full judgment had fallen on Judah. Yet, God was not vindictive. "*For [God] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.*" (v.33) He takes no joy in harming anyone. He has a purpose so that even when in despairing conditions, Jeremiah exclaims that it was good for God to let these things happen. He allows people to experience grief so that they throw themselves fully on His mercy to save them. It states, "*Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.*" (v.32) The book of Hebrews describes the positive effect of suffering. It states, "*The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.*" (Hebrews 12:6) We may wonder why the Lord lets us suffer or feel oppressed as we struggle by faith. But what if God just let us drift away in ease? What is the alternative: losing faith, living under sin's control, being captive to the devil, facing death without Christ, and then experiencing eternal suffering.

No wonder Jeremiah continues, *“It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For men are not cast off by the Lord forever.”* (v.27-31) At Jeremiah’s time many teen-age believing young men, like Daniel were taken into exile - far from home, family, and worship life. Yet, this early trouble in their lives gave them a humble trust in God that they kept for life. They were willing to accept the Lord’s discipline without complaint, just as Jesus allowed Himself to be humiliated before His death. We read, *“When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”* (1 Peter 2:23) The Lord caused His own Son to experience the worst grief for our sins so that we are guaranteed eternal joy in Him!

Second, we will wait for the Lord! *“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.”* (v.22, 23) These types of promises kept the Apostle Paul serving. He suffered much in his conscience for his own sins and suffered for preaching Christ. He wrote, *“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”* (2 Corinthians 4:8-10) Paul didn’t quit because he knew God’s patience with him. God’s forgiveness in Christ has no limits. Through Christ, we are renewed every morning. It’s like when a sunrise drives away the darkness with its light, so God drives away our sins in His Son. In Christ, we are sinless in His sight and nothing can condemn us. As we take His promises to heart and trust in Christ, we can be certain in all circumstances that: *“The LORD is good and His mercy endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.”* (Psalm 100:5)

Our faithful God kept His promise and sent His Son. Jesus faithfully kept all of God’s laws and died for us out of faithfulness and love to God and to us. Jesus is our complete Substitute so that by faith we receive what He won. Jeremiah wrote, *“I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.’”* (v.24) If we lost everything in life: family, friends, job and possessions, even our health, but still have Christ, we have everything we need and His love in heaven forever. Waiting for something is never easy. Sometimes we don’t wait. We don’t pray about a problem and seek God’s will and then we fail Him. Yet, because of God’s faithfulness in Christ, we are forgiven and restored by Him. The Bible promises, *“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this. Wait patiently for Him.”* (Psalm 37:5, 7)

Too often we’re tempted to retaliate like James and John. They wanted to call down God’s fire on people who insulted Jesus. But God tells us, *“Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay.”* (Heb. 10:30) Also, God loved all in the world and sent His Son to win everlasting life. We want all to trust in Him. Jeremiah wrote, *“The LORD is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”* (v.25-26) Picture a land in a drought with trees and bushes withered except for one tree which is green and flourishing. With water sources on the surface gone, this tree sent its roots down deep into an underground stream. God is like that underground stream for us. Even though He is unseen and we have losses in life, by faith we go deeper into God’s Word and find a constant source of life and love! Now is the time to call on the Lord. Peter wrote, *“Humble yourselves... under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”* (1 Peter 5:6-7) Peter’s mention of anxiety reminds us that even as Christians we will have trouble in life. But, we also have God whose promises do not depend on us, but on His faithfulness. Trust in Him forever! Amen