

Lamentations 3:21-24 What do we see when we review events of this past year? New Year's Eve, 2016
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God's grace and peace for our past, present, and future are ours through Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.
God's Word of to end this new year by looking to our God is written in Lamentations 3:21-24
These are Your Words heavenly Father. Keep our faith strong in the new year. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Since it's the end of the year, there are always news shows and articles reviewing the big events of 2016. There are tributes to famous people who died this year. There are news stories of Islamic terrorism and the loss of life and harm their groups have caused. There were natural disasters across the country. There was the remarkable if not shocking national election. Plus each of us had our own events or tests of faith that we could add to the list. But, I pray we won't just stop our list there.

What do we see when we review events of this past year?

First, we see a world that is true to its nature. Ever since sin entered into our world, people have been like a clock moving at 2 times its normal speed. Every so often, a gear flies out of the clock, like a tragic death, which causes the world to pause for a moment. Then, life resumes faster than ever. In this past year God has allowed many things which most consider "not good" to get people to pause and wonder about who God and how they should know Him.

Many, like Jeremiah, have felt helpless when things happen beyond their control. There has been destruction from floods and hurricanes, huge fires out west and down south, and other natural disasters that have left people hurting or in need. We are reminded that our world has been harmed by pollution. In many cities there are concerns about lead poisoning from the water systems and the expense it will take to fix them.

Earlier in Jeremiah, he wrote about afflictions and his body aching. This past year many of us have experienced the power of sickness in colds or the flu. We also live with the threat of Ebola and Zika viruses and the dread of getting cancer. People were harmed by heart or lung diseases. As fast as doctors find a cure for one illness another takes its place.

Jeremiah wrote that people laughed at or mocked him. He felt like an easy prey to be attacked and taken advantage of. The past year we've seen distrust between groups of people in Milwaukee or with nation against nation. We may feel threatened or not know who to trust because of scams by phone, internet or on TV. There will always be some people in our world ready to cheat us, steal our identity from us, or even harm us. This leads to a lack of trust in others and a lack of peace even in our own homes at times.

Also, this past year, we feel the effects of aging. The older you are the more injuries or sores you live with. Millions of people in our country have died from "natural causes." Their bodies just wore out. Injury and deaths occur from highway accidents especially from drunk drivers and from crimes. When we think of all that kind of news, it makes the past year look bleak. It was the same for Jeremiah. He wrote about being surrounded by darkness and bitterness in his soul. (v. 2, 5) He wrote that every step of life seemed difficult. (v. 9) At times it seemed to him that God had made him a target and arrows were firing at him. His hopes and plans were dashed and it seemed like his prayers were not answered by God. (v.18, 8) Christians are not exempt from such troubles. St. Paul 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 4:9)

God did not create the world to have all this trouble. At creation, God established His law and order but also the consequences if Adam and Eve broke it. He warned, *“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”* (Genesis 2:17) They rebelled against Him; and ever since destruction, disease, suspicion, and death have continued year after year. The devil with all his evil is constantly trying to harm or wreak havoc on anyone that he can. He has used lies, the love of money, and other human weaknesses to cause the strife in our world. He had led us astray at times, too. When we think of the evil in the world, with Jeremiah we say, *“my soul is downcast within me.”* (3:20)

Second, we need God’s Word to see our God. Despite the affects of death, our sins, and the devil, God has not abandoned us. He continues to show mercy and love to all people. He is faithful to His promises. The book of Lamentations was written after the Babylonian captivity. Most of God’s people had been exiled to Babylon or died. Those remaining in the land continued to rebel against God. Jeremiah felt alone as God’s spokesman. Yet, in the midst of their unbelief and destruction he wrote, *“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.”* (v.21-23)

Jeremiah would not lose his certainty in God. He remembered that God had made a covenant of love with Abraham and his descendents and He would not fail to keep it despite evil and His sinful people. King David later wrote, *“If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.... I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope.”* (Psalm 130:3-5) God’s forgiveness won by Christ covers the height of all our sins. God allows us to feel the effects of sin, but He takes no pleasure in our misery. So often when you read the Old Testament you see God using foreign armies, sickness, or other problems to plague His people to get them to repent or to help them to grow in their faith. But at the same time, the Bible describes how God’s heart goes out to His people in their misery. That is what Jeremiah remembered. God was letting him and his people suffer for a while, but a time would come when God would answer the prayers of His people. He would grant them refuge as they trusted in Him. *“God, who promised, is faithful.”* (Hebrews 10:23)

As we look at the tragedies happening in our world, we need God’s Word to assure us of His love and to give us certainty in Him! Our verses continue, *“Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”* (v.23, 24) God keeps His promises even if we don’t see how He does it. He promises, *Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you.* He promises that when we confess our sins, *He is faithful and just and will forgive us,* for the sake of His Son’s sacrifice on the cross. God will not hold any sin against people who trust in Christ to save them. As we trust and follow His Word, He will bless us, even if at times we feel abandoned like Jeremiah.

God has and will continue to protect us from evil. That doesn’t exempt us from suffering, danger, or even death. But evil will not result because of these. Rather God will work for good for all believers. Great is God’s faithfulness to His promises. Psalm 29 states, *“The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.”* (v.11)

With the threats of evil and terrorism growing, I don’t know how our country will defend itself. But I believe that Christ our Savior is our sure defense. As powerful as evil may seem, God’s power for us is greater. And He will see that we who trust in Jesus will be delivered from all evil and taken to heaven. As we remember this past year, we will see that the power of sin and the devil were still at work. Yet, we have a faithful God who has a plan to work everything for our good. His love for us will not change. His forgiveness in Christ is sure. He knows our needs for the new year and out of love He will provide! Amen.