

Lamentations 3:22-33 - <sup>22</sup> Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup> I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." <sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; <sup>26</sup> it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. <sup>27</sup> It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. <sup>28</sup> Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. <sup>29</sup> Let him bury his face in the dust— there may yet be hope. <sup>30</sup> Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. <sup>31</sup> For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. <sup>32</sup> Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. <sup>33</sup> For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.

*The LORD is my portion...I'll wait*

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

*(1 John 3:1)*

Do you ever start reading a book or watching a movie and within a few minutes of a couple of pages, you're pretty sure you know exactly where it's going to end up? The high school senior applied to a dozen different colleges and received a dozen different letters in return. Gauge the difference in her reaction when she reads just the opening sentences, "We regret to inform you," vs. "We're delighted to have you." Sometimes the final trajectory or conclusion of a letter, a song, a movie, or a story can be easy to pick up based on a knee-jerk impression and some clues along the way. *I know how this is going to pan out...* Romantic comedy movies all pretty much follow the same basic plotline: boy meets girl, boy does something to lose girl's trust or hurt girl's feelings, boy feels lousy, girl tries to move on with encouragement from her fun-loving girlfriends, neither boy nor girl are very happy, but boy wins girl back with over-the-top romantic gesture preferably at the homecoming football game or on stage during a school drama production. The conclusion is evident from the way it all started. We've become accustomed to the canned plotline.

As I read the Scripture lessons this morning, did you find yourself thinking, *I bet I know how this is going to turn out?* Did the conclusion seem evident from the way it started? The Apostle Paul had been transformed from persecutor of the church to pastor of the church. His life's work was to take the glorious gospel message of sins forgiven and heaven won to the world – what could be better than that? So when he started talking about being hard pressed, persecuted, struck down, and being given over to death – where did you think he was going to end up? It might sound like he was ready to give up. Instead he rejoices. We are hard pressed...but not crushed. We are perplexed...but not in despair...we are persecuted...but not abandoned. We are given over to death...but that's not the end of the story. Just wait...

Or what about Jairus in our gospel lesson? Every parent in this room dreads to feel his pain. His little girl was sick. The doctors couldn't help. The home remedies hadn't worked. But then Jesus showed up. Throwing all professional decorum out the window, Jairus threw himself at Jesus' feet and begged and pleaded, asking him to come and put his hands on his daughter and make her well. But it didn't happen soon enough. A delayed departure; a dead daughter. The news came before they'd even made it back to his house. **"Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher any more?"** That was it. We know how this plotline ends up, because we've seen it before. As tragic as it was, his 12 year old daughter had come to the end of the one way street that is death. Jesus told him, **"Don't be afraid; just believe."** Not even death is the end of the story...just wait.

How about our Old Testament lesson? How do you suppose Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations was feeling? It's not often you hear a passage from the book of Lamentations. A "lamentation" is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow; it can also mean "weeping." As an eyewitness to divine judgment on Jerusalem, Jeremiah had something to weep about. He knew about things looking bleak for the future. Sharing his overwhelming sense of loss, Jeremiah paints a grim picture of destruction of the temple and worship, ransacking of the city, and exile of her inhabitants. Read through the beginning of Lamentations 3, and see if you can predict where this story will end up. See if you can chart Jeremiah's trajectory for the future when he utters phrases like these: *"[The LORD] has turned his hand against me...he has broken my bones...he has weighed me down with chains...he left me without help...he pierced my heart...he has broken my teeth with gravel...I have been deprived of peace...My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."* The people of Judah and Jerusalem had sinned, and sinned, and sinned. When God sent prophets to call them to repentance, they ignored, and ignored, and ignored. And now they were being disciplined by God. The

Babylonians had come and laid waste to the city and taken the people into captivity, leaving only a few behind. Things were bad in the decimated Jerusalem, and Jeremiah got to see it all. By all outward appearances, the Lord had abandoned his chosen people. Look at Jeremiah's vivid description of what life was like for those few survivors in Jerusalem. Toddlers fainting from hunger right in the city streets; priests and prophets cut down right in the sanctuary; hunger pains so severe that parents resorted to cannibalism.

So, do you know where he's headed with his lament? It's starting to make some sense - "[The LORD] has turned his hand against me...he has broken my bones...he has weighed me down with chains...he left me without help...he pierced my heart...he has broken my teeth with gravel...I have been deprived of peace...My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." With a life like that, things didn't look too bright for Jeremiah's or Jerusalem's future. So what did the prophet do? Despair? Give up? Resign to the inevitability of ultimate destruction? That's not the end of the story...just wait. Instead, he said, **"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.'**" What could possibly lead Jeremiah to say something like that? What was it that brought Paul to rejoice in the fact that he was as feeble and frail as a cracked clay pot? What was it that allowed Jairus to look into the cold, lifeless face of his twelve year old and still hope? It was one and the same thing, and it's the same reason for your hope. When the situation seems hopeless and helpless, remember, that's not the end of the story. You have a God who's in the miracle working business. So, with that same heart of faith in the promise of your Savior God, you can say with Jeremiah, *The LORD is my portion...I'll wait.*

Jeremiah knew something beyond what his tear-filled eyes and broken heart were screaming. He knew the still, small voice of the gospel of a gracious, forgiving, loving God who wouldn't let his people suffer even for a moment longer than was necessary. Jeremiah knew the LORD, the God whose compassions *never* fail; whose mercies are new *every morning*. With the LORD by his side, he knew he'd be more than alright. He'd be saved. You, dear Christian, have the Lord of all creation on your side. He is the one who calls things that are not as though they are; his power over death and destruction turns despair to joy, guilt to freedom, and even death to life. With the prophet and the people of Jerusalem, you can say, *The LORD is my portion...I'll wait.*

But it's not easy to wait, is it? It cuts completely against my ingrained nature of wanting to serve only myself. If sitting at a traffic light for longer than I think I should can make me stir crazy, then what about the big things? Maybe you haven't ever found yourself in Jeremiah's shoes or Paul's hard-pressed and perplexed clay pot or ever had to look into the once vibrant face of your now deceased twelve year old. But your marriage isn't what you thought it would be, and certainly isn't what you think it should be...Your life's work seems like more of a daily inconvenience than a cause for joy...You promised yourself you'd never sin like that again, but it happened...You still have a sinful nature that gets the better of you, causing you to lash out at loved ones and all but give up on any sort of hope in life. And what makes matters worse, is when you look around you and everyone else seems to have it all together. Things in their life look great, but you're barely holding on. So you ask the biggest question that's only three letters long - Why? What are you doing, God? Don't you care? You want answers, you want something bigger and better, you want continuous noticeable improvement in your life, and it doesn't seem to be happening. You hear about "hope in Christ" but you'd rather have something to deposit in the bank or park in the garage. You've seen the way it started and goes on and on - so you think you know the way it will end. In short, you're just doing what comes naturally - searching for God in all the wrong places and bowing down to an idol of your own making - yourself. *If the LORD is my portion...he'd better hurry up!*

What a remarkably gracious God we have! In the face of our impatience and complaining, he is patient and forgiving. The Lord of all creation is on your side, and to show you just how much he's for you, he's proved it. Jeremiah said, **For [the LORD] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.** In other words, God is not a sadistic Sovereign who only wants to fry us human ants with his divine magnifying glass. This isn't what God wants, but, make no mistake, he will go to any lengths it takes to bring his people back in repentance. He'll go to any lengths to bring you back...and he has. Instead of the starvation and thirst you deserved, he let his own Son cry out, parched from his cross, "**Father, forgive them.**" Instead of the gravel you deserve to be chewing because of your sin, God had his one and only Son flogged and beaten beyond recognition, for you. Instead of letting the earth open beneath your feet and swallow you up, consuming you with his wrath, God moved the bullseye off of you and fixed it squarely on Jesus Christ. The Son of God absorbed the wrath of God, and was consumed so you are set free. **Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.** That's what gave Jeremiah hope in a hopeless situation. That's what prompted Paul to rejoice in his sufferings, because the gospel was being proclaimed. That's what gave Jairus hope as he stared into the face of his daughter's death – the sure and certain promises of a God whose compassions never fail, whose mercies are new every morning. As much as we think we know the way things will turn out based on the way they start – rejoice that you have a Savior God who knows the end from the beginning, and he promises to work all things for your eternal good.

What a difference that makes! Because of the Lord's same never failing compassion and new mercy every morning, you have hope. But hope doesn't mean that everything will suddenly go the way I think it should. Think about our Scripture lessons again – the Babylonian captivity would last for 70 years. Paul would eventually become a martyr for the faith he proclaimed. Jairus' daughter would die...again. So the world around you will ask, "What's the point of hope?" Hope doesn't mean that everything will suddenly go the way I think it should. Hope means my faith rests on the promises of a God who's never lied to me and he's not going to start now. No matter what, I can and I will still say the Lord is my portion...I'll wait – why? Because he's loved you enough to punish your sins in his Son. He's promised that no matter what comes, he's working it for your eternal good. He's already delivered on the most spectacular promise of all – your salvation. The promises of others can and will fail you. God's promise in the gospel never will – he's already delivered on it, fulfilled it, and given it to you in Christ. With that assurance, you can gladly say, "The LORD is my portion...I'll wait for him."

Amen

*And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

*(Philippians 4:7)*