

Daily Faithfulness
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God's Daily Faithfulness

*Yet this I call to mind
 and therefore I have hope:
 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." Jeremiah 3:21-24 (NIV)*

We live in a time of great social turmoil and political disillusionment. Some are experiencing religious disillusionment. It's been tough for us--on a grand scale, as well as personally. We need a word of encouragement! What better time to focus on God's Daily Faithfulness? And what better place to find a word of encouragement than the book of sadness, despair, and mourning—the Book of Lamentations. The message of Lamentations is that while affliction may not ease, the name of the LORD, brings hope, confidence, and peace of mind. To understand what led up to these days and really dig in, we need some background to put ourselves in the shoes of the prophet.

PROMISED

Abraham

Go back 1500 years before Lamentations was written and read God's promise to Abraham. God told him that simply because of God's grace and goodness, He was going to make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation. And that through that nation every other nation on earth would be blessed (Genesis 12)

Moses

Fast forward 500 years. God is renewing that covenant with Moses. He tells Moses to lead the people out of slavery and into that land of promise. God renews the covenant with the people of Israel. He promises again that they will come into possession of the land and be a great nation. God will establish that nation as His chosen people through which other nations will be blessed—*If* they remain faithful to him. And God gives a list of promises and condemnations if they do *not* remain faithful. (Exodus 19)

David

Fast forward another 500 years and you have David establishing the kingdom that they had been waiting for with Jerusalem as its center. God gives military

victory over all the surrounding nations. There is finally peace on every front, God promises David an everlasting dynasty and that one of his own descendants will sit on a throne and rule and reign forever. (2 Samuel 7)

These are the promise that formed the worldview of anyone living in the day of the Book of Lamentations. And they were not empty promises. God had poured out blessing upon the nation.

BLESSED

In David's day and Solomon's day, the nation of Israel was the greatest kingdom in the known world. David established a peaceful and powerful kingdom. His son, Solomon, followed in increasing the glory of that kingdom. Solomon built up the city of Jerusalem and other powerful cities within the land, he increased the army, and expanded the borders.

“King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills.” (1 Kings 10:23-27)

This is the heritage of the author of Lamentations. This is the heritage of any individual who walked the streets of Jerusalem. This is the great heritage and hope of the people.

SQUANDERED

But part of that heritage is also a history of squandering the promises and the blessings through idolatry and immorality. From Israel's very first days, 1500 years earlier, when Moses climbs Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments and the Covenant is established, he comes down from the mountain and finds a people worshiping two golden calves and engaging in immorality.

Even King David, the greatest king that Israel has known, engages in adultery and murder. His son Solomon, for all his wisdom, is a prolific polygamist and idolator, as he worships the gods of the nations of the wives that he has taken for himself.

Rehoboam, through pride, brings about the division of the kingdom. Jeroboam leads the people once again to worship of golden idols. We see one evil king after another. There are a few good kings, but generally we see a spiral further and further into unfaithfulness and idolatry.

Finally, we read these words, “The Lord sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against him to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the Lord proclaimed by his servants the prophets. Surely these things happened to Judah according to the Lord’s command, in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood. (2 Kings 24: 2-4)

LOST

And so we come to Lamentations, to a nation experiencing devastating loss. All of the splendor has departed from Israel. Nothing is left after the siege. Starvation has led to cannibalism! The city is destroyed, the temple torn down. The riches and glory are gone, the gates are burned, the leaders killed or taken into captivity and the people exiled. Absolutely nothing is left. The prophet describes national disaster on a scale they had never seen—national, economic, and spiritual-literally, everything gone.

But the prophet says this is the Lord's action! This is God pouring out his wrath on the people., as God is pitiless towards them. He is actively slaying, destroying, and laying waste to the nation. The poet’s thesaurus runs out of words as he describes how God, has forgotten and withdrawn himself from them--even acting towards them as an enemy!

The prophet describes himself personally as weeping and tormented in his soul. His heart and his eyes have poured out everything, he is driven away from the presence of the Lord, walking in darkness, besieged, and surrounded.

This is a loss; of a heritage; of an inheritance; of a dream. And we've been there, each one of us. We understand. Perhaps the death of loved ones, or joblessness, or betrayal, or failure—in our endeavors, our relationships, or our personal holiness. We know disillusionment. It is into this situation that we need a word of encouragement—But we're not quite there.

LESSONS

We Deserve it! The Prophet writes this book so that people will see and draw conclusions. And the first conclusion, without equivocation is, *we deserve it*. He looks squarely at the people of Israel, at the history of the nation, and says, *we deserve what we have experienced*.

He says, “Everything that has happened is a fulfillment of the LORD's word (Lamentations 2:17.)” Privilege brings responsibility and sin has consequences. And that “we deserve it” of the day of Lamentations is also a “We deserve it” to every one of us today.

We deserve God's condemnation. We deserve to be cut off, devastated, and destroyed because we too have idols in our lives. Our idolatry of self is seen in our pursuit of personal pleasure or success above all else. Or in our relationship to finances or possessions. Or perhaps in our political affiliations, or personal addictions—our narcissism that we wallow in day after day.

In the Old Testament, we are told, “All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned to our own way” (Isaiah 53:6.) In the New Testament, we read, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23.) And we understand that “the wages of that sin is death” (Romans 6:23.)

There is Hope! Not because of anything that we can do, but because God is faithful. And right in the middle of this awful book, we read these words, “*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; great is your faithfulness.* (Lamentations 3:21-23.) Amen. There is hope in the faithfulness and character of God!

God's Attributes

The word of encouragement that the Prophet has to offer is due entirely to who God is. This is summed up in expressing the name of the LORD four times in these verses. God's covenant name is the summation of all of God's perfections and of his loving relationship towards those whom He has chosen.

God's Covenant Love. The first is God's covenant Love. His love that He promised to Abraham and to Moses This name is the summary of all of God's perfections and attributes and is available even to the people in the day of Lamentations. God's loyal love.

God's Faithful Love. God's love is faithful even when we are unfaithful to Him. At the heart of this love, as one commentator described, is God's generous sense of compassion and grace and mercy. God's love surpasses ordinary human love that comes and goes. God's love surpasses kindness and friendship...It is the inclination of His heart towards his people to pour out his grace on those whom he has taken for himself.

God's Unchanging Character. God's character is unchanging, and therefore His love is unchanging. Based on his character, part of which is summed up in his name as “the LORD”, is his compassion that he has never taken away, and that is renewed every morning.

The Prophet does not have hope because He necessarily believes that his circumstances are going to get better. He has hope because God is unchanging, in His Holiness, His mercy, and His love. He punishes sin and *must* punish sin

because he is perfect and holy. But he is compassionate and merciful to all who turn to him in repentance.

We read in Exodus 34:6, the Lord passed in front of Moses proclaiming *the name* and the character of God. “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation”. (Exodus 34:6,7) It was true in Moses’ day, it was true at the writing of Lamentations, and it is true in our day.

People change and our circumstances change, but God never changes. The God of Moses is the God of Jeremiah, and He is our God. He is faithful and we can depend on him. And that is so important in our day, because we've lost confidence in just about everything else. We feel like we can't trust anyone or anything. But we know this: Heaven and earth will pass away, But God's Word will never pass away from everlasting to everlasting (Matthew 24:35.) He is God. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8.) And therefore, we can have hope!

A Proper Response

The proper response to this affliction is confession, repentance, and waiting. “Let us examine our ways and test them. And let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God and Heaven and say we have sinned and rebelled and have not forgiven.” Lamentations 3: 43,42)

The prophet describes a people who ought to sit alone in silence, in a position of repentance, with faces buried in the dust, waiting for God to pour out His mercy. And here's where we get to the great news for us. In the prophet's day, he knew that he could trust in God's faithfulness, and he could wait for the Lord's compassion. But he didn't really know why!

We have Jesus! How is it that this God of justice and holiness who pours out his wrath on sinners can be merciful towards me? Well, we have what he didn't have. We have Jesus. That's what this passage in Lamentations means for us more than anything else. Yes, we deserve wrath. He ought to pour down on us all of the condemnation that we deserve. But he won't because Jesus took it in our place. When the sinless, perfect Jesus went to the cross in our place all of the wrath that Lamentations describes—all of the justice and condemnation was poured out on Him. Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46.) Jesus took our punishment. Through Jesus we have forgiveness and newness of life and eternal hope in him.

This doesn't mean we won't have affliction. We live in tough times! Jesus promised that we will have trouble in this world, that we will experience affliction. But we can be sure we will never experience rejection or wrath because he took that for us. Some affliction is God's corrective action in our lives. But it is not because he has turned away. Rather, it is because he is the God of covenant love. The author of Hebrews reminds us that because God is a loving father, he will discipline us. And the purpose is not retribution, but rather holiness to fit us for his presence. (Hebrews 12:6)

This is for you! If we have Jesus, we have hope, peace, and life. This is for you! No matter what you've done, what you deserve, or who you are. None of us deserve God's mercy and compassion. But all of us can receive it. Because of God's unchanging character. His mercy, compassion, and covenant love are renewed every morning in Jesus' name. I don't know what you've done, but I know what Jesus did on your behalf—He took your sin upon himself and was punished in your place. By placing your faith in him, you can receive all of promises and none of the curses. You are accepted because he was rejected. He took the curse in your place.

Experience His Faithfulness Daily. We can experience his faithfulness daily. This series has been about things we *do*—the practices and the beliefs of the Christian life. The message today is not about anything we can do—It's about who God is and what God does.

Our afflictions may not ease, but in the great and glorious and unchanging name of the Lord, we have hope and comfort and peace for our hearts and minds, because great is His faithfulness.

Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, How amazing it is that the Almighty Creator of the universe who is holy, holy, holy, and entirely removed from any imperfection, that you allow us to call on you loving and gracious Lord. Enable us to cling to those promises and your faithfulness, no matter what turn our circumstances may take.

You know everything that we have done. And because of Jesus, you love us and you accept us. And so, Lord, we pray that where there has been bondage, you would bring freedom, where there has been sin and condemnation, that you would bring forgiveness, where death has been at work Lord, we pray that you would bring life in Jesus name.

Amen.

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