

God Is Faithful to Humble & Bless

Lamentations 3:19-24

Everyone here today has suffered loss because of Hurricane Ida. The important thing about our outdoor service today is you all getting together as the church. Our facility is unusable, but the church is still working, even if we don't have a building to meet in.

In the midst of our grief, we need to remember that *God is faithful to both humble us and to bless us when we turn to Him!*

Our text today are two strophes from the third chapter of Lamentations which I will read now:

Zayin

¹⁹ The thought of my suffering and homelessness
is bitter beyond words.

[Many versions translate the words 'wormwood and gall,' but these words convey the idea of 'bitter.']

²⁰ I will never forget this awful time,
as I grieve over my loss.

²¹ Yet I still dare to hope
when I remember this:

Heth

²² The faithful love of the LORD never ends!
His mercies never cease.

²³ Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.

²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance;
therefore, I will hope in him!"

It is important to lament the loss. A lament is a poem of the grieving. It can also be called a dirge, a song expressing grief. The Book of Lamentations is a series of five dirges mourning the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the deportation of many of the people as well as the death of many whose bodies lie in the streets unburied. *The Holy Spirit chose to include these laments as a part of the inspired Scriptures that we might know to lament our losses and how to do so.*

Jeremiah states that he will never forget this awful time. When I look around me, I cannot help but reflect upon Hurricane Katrina and the destruction I saw there. In our parish, this is much worse than we experienced from that storm.

Each of the five dirges are arranged in chapters which are based on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The verses in chapters one, two, and four start with a word that has a different letter in alphabetical order. You can read *Psalms 119* to see these Hebrew letters.

Chapter three, the heart of Lamentations, has three times the number of verses, sixty-six, but is arranged in twenty-two groups of three. Chapter five follows the pattern of twenty-two verses, but does not make an alphabetic acrostic. *The point is that the artistry that went into the poetic structure shows reflection, not mere complaint.*

A lament poem is also *reflective*. This is the opposite of just forgetting about it or pretending it doesn't matter. Some of our losses are *sentimental*, while others are merely *financial*. We have also lost *time* together as we are separated, perhaps for a long time, for some it may be forever. It will take time to get things fixed as well as money.

Jeremiah was in a much worse situation. Both friends and enemies lie dead in the streets. He has seen the bulk of the people forced to walk into exile. During the siege, he witnessed much worse. Never again will this weeping prophet see worship in the Temple or even the walls rebuilt. He mourns, but not without hope.

His laments remind us to *think deeply* about our experience of loss. Some of you may express your grief and faith in a poem, others may compose a song, we will all certainly have to make lists of things for the insurance company. Some of us will be writing accounts of this to let the rest of the world know what we have experienced.

The prophet poet closes the *zayin* strophe with these words:

as I grieve over my loss.
²¹ Yet I still dare to hope
when I remember this:

It seems unfinished, until we recognize that he is leading us into the next strophe where all the verses begin with the Hebrew letter *heth*. It is the reason he dares to hope ...

It is vital to understand faithfulness. This is something we don't often grasp. It means that you can count on God's blessing. This is what we *tend* to think about God's faithfulness. He will always be there with the purpose of meeting our desires. After all our wants are good and why wouldn't He want what we want.

This is a very *limited view* of faithfulness that leads to disappointment when things go contrary to our aspirations. Grief tends to make us forget that God IS faithful to bless us and never ceases to do so, but sometimes that blessing comes through humbling us.

Faithfulness means you can count on His discipline as well. God will *humble* us from time to time to get our attention. C.S. Lewis wrote,

*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience,
but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*

Sometimes God goes further than mere humbling as it did with the Jewish people. Jeremiah had seen scores of his friends, fellow Jews led away into captivity ... never to return. He would never see Jerusalem rebuilt. Bodies were everywhere ... many unburied. The acrid smoke of ruin was in his nostrils as he

wrote these words. He would never forget the smell. Judah experienced judgment.

We need to make *God's will* for us our priority over rebuilding. It is very easy to get frustrated on phone calls to the insurance adjuster, to the roofers, to the tree people. There are times almost daily when we want to give up and do as our friends are saying, "Just move." Walking in the power of the Spirit will cause us to stay the course and keep true to the Gospel.

As we turn to God, He will bless. This morning I heard the sound of God's faithfulness. A truck was dumping tree debris and household debris into the metal bed of its trailer. It reminds me that every morning He is faithful.

God is also purposeful. Romans 8:28 reminds us,

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Even in our grief, we have hope that God is still blessing us. He is changing our plans, even our good plans, for something better. He wants more for us than our small ambitions.

Our hope is not that we are strong enough to survive and thrive, but that our God is not only strong, but also faithful.

There is a hymn that comes from this passage, verse 23, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. It uses the words, but misses the context, unless you have read the Book of Lamentations. Knowing the prophet's point, you are prepared to sing its words, even with tears of grief in your eyes.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father. There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not. As thou hast been thou forever will be.

Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide, strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow; blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Discussion Questions

Select the ones you think are appropriate for the age of your children. Talking about this will be a good opportunity to disciple your children as you sit around the table or before they go to bed or while you are riding in the car. It will also help us improve our thinking with the truth of God's word.

1. Why is it necessary to note the losses we have experienced?
2. What are the two aspects of God's faithfulness?
3. Why is doing God's will more important than getting our life back to normal?