

A Study in Lamentations 3:22–66

Great Is Thy Faithfulness — Jehovah Is My Portion — Bearing the Yoke — The Patience of Christ

We are reading Lamentations chapter 3, beginning at verse 22.

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." — Lamentations 3:22–26

"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth; he sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." — Lamentations 3:27–32

"I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. O LORD, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life." — Lamentations 3:55–58

The Setting — Jeremiah in the Ruins

What Jeremiah viewed was the complete breaking of the link between Jehovah and His people. The altar was gone, the ordinances were gone, the city was destroyed, the temple had fallen. Everything in which Jeremiah had placed his delight — Israel's relationship with Jehovah expressed in all those things — was now in ruins. The Chaldeans had been sent against them, and the government of God had allowed everything to be stripped away. And he, the faithful prophet, found himself in the midst of it all, unable to be elsewhere.

This is what the Lord sometimes does with His servants — not to deliver them out of adverse circumstances immediately but to bring them to the place where they walk with Him in them. The path that Jeremiah was brought to was finding his resource in God alone, and being able, though still in the midst of ruin and grief, to view it from God's standpoint rather than only from the sorrow of his own heart. The great verses from 22 onward are the fruit of that journey.

Israel's history illustrated verse 22 repeatedly. At Sinai, when God would have cut them off, Moses interceded and the Lord showed mercy. Through the wickedness of the kings, through Shiloh and all that happened there, through centuries of corruption — yet they were not consumed. Like the burning bush that was not consumed, Israel has never been extinguished. Jeremiah 46:28 states it directly: I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven thee, but I will not make a full end of thee. God has His eye on that people wherever He has scattered them, even in China, which the Scriptures identify under the name Sinim.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness — The Lord Is My Portion

What a peace must have flooded his soul to give utterance to these verses after being bowed in grief. They certainly had not been faithful. He owns his part with them in their sin several times in Lamentations — the we of the transgression is his too, because he stood in the midst of a people whose general condition the

godly could not simply step outside of. Caleb and Joshua gave a good report, and yet they marched thirty-eight years through the wilderness with those who gave the evil report. The government of God over the general conditions of a people includes those who are godly within it.

They are new every morning — the compassions of God are not depleted by yesterday's need. Great is thy faithfulness. God gave unconditional promises to Abraham, and those promises must be made good. The time of Jacob's trouble still lies ahead — worse than anything Israel has yet experienced, including the Holocaust — and yet God's compassions will not fail. He is bound by His own character and His own word to bring them through it into the blessing of the new covenant.

Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. That is open to every godly soul. If it was open to Jeremiah in the midst of the ruin of everything he had loved — the temple gone, the city destroyed, the people scattered — then it is open to any godly soul in any condition of things. The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in Him. The connection between the portion and the hope is direct: because He is the portion, hope is warranted. The hope is in a person, not in circumstances.

There is a connection too with the expression hope of Israel found in Jeremiah and elsewhere. That is not a reference to the kingdom as its primary meaning — it is a reference to a person. Jehovah is the hope of Israel. For us in this dispensation, that is Christ Jesus our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). A person, not a programme or an event.

Seeking the Lord — and the Counterfeits

The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. The remnant in Judah who came to Jeremiah after the destruction and asked him to

inquire of the Lord — saying, whatever the Lord tells you, we will do it — appeared to be seeking Him. They had the outward form of it. But when the word of the Lord came and said do not go down to Egypt, they told Jeremiah that Baruch had put those words in his mouth. That's your interpretation. They were not seeking the Lord. They were performing the appearance of seeking Him while having already determined what they wanted to do.

This is common in Christendom. Since it is professedly right to seek the Lord, many appear to seek Him — inquire of Scripture, ask advice, go through the motions. But when the word of God is brought before them plainly, they say: that is your interpretation. How many times has that been heard? It settles nothing about the truth of what was said, and it reveals everything about the state of the soul that says it. The soul that truly seeketh Him will hear His answer when it comes.

It Is Good to Wait — and to Bear the Yoke in Youth

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. That is not an easy thing to come to. Everything in our nature wants to jump forward, to find a human solution, to be doing something. The Lord's warning in Psalm 32 is apt: be not as the horse or as the mule — the one plunging ahead, the other refusing to move. I will guide thee with mine eye upon thee. But to receive that guidance requires that the eye of the Lord and the eye of the soul be in contact — which means looking at Him.

Caleb is a quiet illustration of this verse. We have no record of anything he did or said through thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness among those whose unbelief had forfeited the inheritance. He waited. And when the time came, he was the same man — the same steadfastness, the same faith, the same wholehearted following of the Lord. He laid hold of the inheritance that was his. That is what quietly waiting for the salvation of the Lord produces.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. The yoke is restraint — but not only restraint. The Lord said: Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. The yoke does not just prevent wrong movements; it is the means of learning. The ox in the yoke moves slowly and steadily, not fast, but faithfully. That is the character of patience — the patience of hope. In 2 Thessalonians 3:5, the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of the Christ. That is the patience of Christ Himself as man here below, bearing the contrariety of man, waiting on His Father, not answering personal attack, giving His cheek to him that smote Him. Revelation 1:9 speaks of the kingdom and patience in Jesus — the patience that characterized His own walk in this scene as man.

He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him. He is filled full with reproach. These verses were more perfectly true of the Lord than of Jeremiah. The Lord never answered personal attack. He insisted on the rights of God, but against personal attack He was silent — as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.

Separation from Evil — the Misuse of Jeremiah's Position

There is a misuse of Jeremiah's situation that must be addressed. Because Jeremiah could not extricate himself from the conditions of his time — because he was even forced to go down to Egypt with the rebels against the Lord's word — some use these scriptures to argue that believers today should remain in fellowship with evil rather than separate from it. That argument fails on a crucial distinction.

The unity of Israel was a national unity composed of twelve tribes. It was not a spiritual unity. A national unity is not maintained by separation from evil within the nation — it is maintained by belonging to the nation. But Christian unity is a spiritual unity, expressed in the one body of Christ formed by the Holy Spirit. And a spiritual unity cannot be expressed apart from the truth of separation from

evil unto the Lord. In Christ, there is no tolerated evil. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3) means walking in what is consistent with who Christ is — and Christ is not in fellowship with evil.

To stay in fellowship with evil and appeal to Jeremiah's situation is a subterfuge. It is not that we separate from Christ when we take the position of separation from evil — it is precisely that we reflect our union with Christ, in whom there is no moral compromise. The directions given to believers regarding the great house are not to leave it but to separate from iniquity within it, and that is what expresses the unity we have in a holy Christ.

I Called Upon Thy Name Out of the Lowest Pit — Thou Drewest Near

I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the lowest pit. Thou hast heard my voice. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. This is the personal experience of the prophet — and it is the experience of every soul that calls in genuine need. God draws near. Not from a distance, not after a delay that tests our worthiness, but in the day of calling. Thou drewest near.

Verse 39: Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? The answer implied is: he should not complain. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. The chastening of the Lord is not to be despised (Hebrews 12:5), and to murmur against it is to blame God for it. The right response — let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Jehovah — is the turning of true repentance toward the One who is always faithful.

Out of the mouth of the Most High doth not there proceed evil and good? The evil here is not moral evil — God is not the author of sin, He created man upright and did not create sin. The evil in this verse refers to calamities, adversities, the things that befall men as instruments of divine government. Isaiah 45:7 says I

create evil in exactly this sense — the calamities that fall upon men under the government of God. These proceed from Him. The good — the rain on the just and the unjust, all that blesses — proceeds from Him also. Both come out of the mouth of the Most High.

It is of Jehovah's loving-kindness that we are not consumed — great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in him.