

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

LAMENTATIONS 3

²² By the mercies of the LORD we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail. ²³ They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.²⁴ My soul says, “The LORD is my portion. Therefore, I will hope in him.”²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.²⁶ It is good to hope quietly for the salvation of the LORD.²⁷ It is good for a man that he bears a yoke early in his life.²⁸ Let him sit alone and be silent, because the LORD has laid this upon him.²⁹ Let him stick his face in the dust. Perhaps there still is hope. ³⁰ Let him turn his cheek toward the one who strikes him. Let him be filled with disgrace. ³¹ For the Lord will not push us away forever. ³² Even though he brings grief, he will show compassion on the basis of his great mercy. ³³ Certainly it is not what his heart desires when he causes affliction, when he brings grief to the children of men.



Happy Independence Day! How exciting for the 4th of July to fall on a Sunday! How appropriate for us to approach God with humility and worship on a day of national independence.

Are you independent? In a way, we have freedoms unlike any other country ever. But that independence is dependent. It depends on a governmental system of three branches that honor our U.S. constitution. Our particular government is also dependent on a citizenry that holds that government to its promises, or voting out the undesirables.

Our independence also depends on a God who feeds us, shelters us, clothes us, and gives us breath and life. Only God properly shapes our days. Only God properly shapes our redemptive future. Are we independent? That depends...

OUR INDEPENDENCE IS DEPENDENT UPON THE LORD

In a way, it might seem odd to read from Lamentations. The book of Lamentations was written as a national eulogy. The prophet Jeremiah wrote this book following the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.). The city and its temple lay in ruins. The nation of Israel had fallen. It was what they deserved for their sins against their own God. This brief book uses five odes, or laments, to communicate its message.

Of five chapters, Lamentations 3 is at the center. The center of a Hebrew book is often the high point of the book. It expresses the most important point or presents the conclusion of the matter. At the center of this series of laments is ... actually, not much of a lament.

Instead, at the center, the high point of the book, Jeremiah remembered the Lord's love and compassion. He recalled that the Lord's compassions are new every morning and that his faithfulness is great. His compassion never fails.

The Lord wants us to know His compassion and mercy, and, when we do, He is good to us. He wants us to seek Him in repentance and faith.

Sometimes God lets people's lives "fall apart" in order to teach them important lessons. Biblical examples include Israel's difficulties during the period of the judges; King David's troubled life after committing adultery; Peter's weeping after he denied Jesus. Historical examples include the fall of empires, civilizations that became proud and whose citizens became corrupt, such as the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans. To observe human beings is to observe self-destruction. We have all witnessed personal tragedies connected with sexual immorality, addictions, selfishness, and greed. Believers will take life's difficulties to heart and repent of their sins.

That is really the problem, isn't it? Sin, sin was the problem for Jerusalem. Our God is a perfect, holy, all-consuming fire. Like Jerusalem, sin, sin is our problem. For our sins, we should be consumed, but we are not. If we postulate a world where we get what we deserve, it would not be a lovely world. It would not be a world of mercies and hope. If you know sin, you know guilt. You know responsibility for wrongdoing. You know we deserve worse than we get. That is Jeremiah's appeal, "*By the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed.*"

Therefore, Jeremiah knew what every desperate sinner needs to hear; God is beyond merciful. His mercies cannot be depleted. He always has more. As long

as a new morning follows the evening, God's mercies never cease. There is no end to our mornings with God. The fountains of divine mercy flow continually.

I ask our elderly men and women, "How are you doing?" They tell me, "Pastor, I'm still here!" Same energy as Jeremiah in Lamentations. They know their sins. They know the real question is, "Why do I get to be here?" Why do I get to live? Why do I get to make any choices in life? Why do I get to be with people who love me? Why does God let me, a sinner, get anything?

These are the questions God equips us with when life gets hard, when our days are full of difficulty, when we are in a position of pain. Let us never take for granted that God allows us to be here at all. If life is uncomfortable, knowing what we deserve teaches us to hope.

One wild thing about Hebrew is that the word for "wait" is the same as the word for "hope." It's a fine line, sometimes indistinguishable, to tell whether to translate that word "wait" or "hope." But it makes sense that if you hope, you wait. The reverse should also be true. If God makes you wait, then you have something to do. You will hope. You will always seek Him in whatever you are going through. You search for the lesson. You pray for the answer.

Whether you wait or hope, you do not depend on yourself. You are not independent if you wait and hope. You depend on something to happen or something else to act. You depend on God. You depend on God's bottomless sea of love, and it can never be exhausted. Millions of proofs and mountains of evidence might lie behind us that God is merciful. Yet each day God treats us as if He were extending His mercy to us for the first time.

Lamentations helps us see that either now or in eternity, life depends. But it doesn't depend on us. Our life depends on God, namely, on Jesus—on Jesus, who waited for His spiritual leadership to grow jealous of Him, waited for His friend to betray Him, waited for His nation to arrest Him, waited for His people to shout crucify Him, waited for His Father to forsake Him, waited for our sins to crush Him, waited for the cross to kill Him, and waited for His friends to believe in Him. Those who hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, who lives again, wait for His return to take them to heaven. There is our true citizenship, our eternal dependence in the Lord; in Jesus' name. Amen.