
DEVOTION: Great is Thy Faithfulness

Tucked away in the Old Testament, between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is the little book called **Lamentations**. It was almost certainly written during Israel's Babylonian Exile (587–539 BC). Most likely written by the prophet Jeremiah, Lamentations consists of five poems, each one is a chapter of the book. The first four poems are *alphabetic acrostics*-poems in which each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The fifth chapter may have been written later, but still during the Exile. The book as a whole serves as a funeral dirge for the nation. It's pretty bleak reading, *apart*, that is, for a few verses from chapter 3, which shine like stars in a dark, dark sky: **Lamentations 3:17–23** (NIV)

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¹⁷ I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.
¹⁸ So I say, 'My splendour is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD.'

¹⁹ I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. ²⁰ I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

After *so many* weeks of lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we might feel a bit like those opening words – *'I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is ... the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them.'*

The affliction and homelessness that seem so *bitter* to Jeremiah have to do with the devastation of his homeland and the forced exile of his people to a foreign land. For **us** it may be the removal of opportunities for congregational worship and fellowship, the loss of income, illness, loneliness, anxiety or fear. Things just aren't the same any more! The sense of loss weighs us down, and with Jeremiah we can say, 'My soul is downcast within me.'

But then Jeremiah switches from *despair* to *hope*. There is no denying the terrible consequences of Jerusalem's ruin and the exile to Babylon, but there is also *no denying* that the Lord has rescued Israel from terrible situations in the past – giving the hope that the Lord will rescue Israel once again. And then we have those beautiful words in verses 22 and 23: ***'Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning.'***

That phrase ‘great love’ is sometimes given as ‘loving kindnesses’. The Hebrew word is ‘**he-sed**’ which has a rich variety of meanings – *kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, goodness, faithfulness, or love*. Like the Greek word, ‘**agape**’, in the New Testament, ‘**he-sed**’ is a word that involves **action** – kindness or love as expressed through kind or loving *actions* rather than simply kind or loving feelings.

The writer’s faith is that God’s ‘**he-sed**’, His loving-kindness, *never* ceases and his mercies *never* end. It’s a new day! Yesterday is over and the morning has come! Listen! The birds are singing! God’s loving-kindness and mercy are renewed *every morning*, so they remain *ever fresh*. Since that is true, Israel has nothing to fear, **and neither do we!** Israel’s present circumstances might be terrible, but its future is assured, **and so is ours!** Almighty God and Israel are bound together in a covenant relationship and Israel can trust God to be *true* to that relationship, **and so can we!** For we are bound to God in a *New Covenant* relationship through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ when we acknowledge Him to be our Saviour and trust Him as our Lord.

Then we come to the lovely words in v. 23b: ‘**great is your faithfulness.**’

These words express the faith that *God has both the will and the means to rescue His people from every situation, no matter how grim*. They inspired Thomas O. Chisholm to write the hymn, ‘*Great Is Thy Faithfulness*’, which is based on Lamentations 3:22–23. May we reflect on these lines from that hymn:

‘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 wilt be.	Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, sun, moon and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
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[Chorus]

‘Great is Thy faithfulness!

Great is Thy faithfulness!’

*Morning by morning new mercies I
see.*

*All I have needed Thy hand hath
provided –*

Pardon for sin and a peace that
endureth,

Thy own dear presence to cheer and to
guide,

strength for today and bright hope for
tomorrow,

blessings all mine, with ten thousand
beside!

Look out for God’s new mercies today, for His loving kindness, mercy and love are fresh and new every morning!

Colin Taylor writes in his book, *God says, 'I AM':*

'We have received many great and wonderful promises from God through His Word, and we can fully trust in Him and them. We have His promises for our daily living, for our salvation, and for our eternal destiny. Our faithful God will bring to pass ALL His promises. We can trust in His faithfulness.'

He then goes on to quote the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who says:

'It is often in the valleys and storms of life that we begin to doubt God's faithfulness. But how could we? He is faithful to never leave nor forsake us. In the times of trouble, His faithfulness is most demonstrated even when we are most unaware of His presence.'

Reading from the second half of **Lamentations 3:23 to verse 26:**

²³ 'Great [Oh Lord] is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'

²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

Jeremiah then starts talking to himself! Have you done that? It's not a bad idea! He writes: **'I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."**' He sees *the Lord* as his portion – the means by which *his life is sustained*. It's *the Lord* who enables him to keep on keeping on. In the midst of suffering and despair, Jeremiah shows us the importance of **putting God first**. That's what matters *most* to Jeremiah. Is **our** relationship with the Lord the thing that matters *most* to us?

The one who is *dependent on the Lord* to keep on keeping on is truly blessed because God's *'compassion does not fail'* and His **faithfulness** is, indeed, great. Therefore, the one who is *dependent on the Lord* can place his or her *hope* in God and *be assured* that Almighty God will provide.

²⁵ *The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.'* (NKJ)

Prayer: Thank You Lord that You are a faithful God; faithful to all the promises in Your Word. We can count on You; we can trust in You; we can rest in You. Today we put our hope in You and we wait for You to work in our lives, in our circumstances and in the lives of our loved ones, for 'it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.' In Jesus' Name. Amen. **David Parker**

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