

Lamentations: "O Jerusalem, Who Can Heal You?"

Great Is His Grace

Lamentations 3:31-42

Turn your eyes upon Jesus...

How difficult is that to do when your world around you is falling apart? Look at the utterly miserable condition of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the fall of that great city because of her incessant sins. Look at the total devastation of God's judgment brought about by a two-year siege that left the city resembling a WWII Nazi death camp.

How impossible is it to keep your eyes on God when your life is being turned upside down? Psalm 46 is beautiful Hebrew poetry, but is it even possible? "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way[?], though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea[?], ³though its waters roar and foam[?], though the mountains tremble at its swelling[?]."

Is that even possible? It depends on what is _____ to your being. It depends on what your treasure is. It is contingent upon what is your great trust. Those of us who have great faith in our gracious God know that in this bad place to live, the earth may give way at any moment. But God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in a time of trouble. We have some very precious treasures on earth, especially our relationships, but when God is our central treasure, then we will not fear. We may be knocked down, but we won't be knocked out.

Although Jeremiah's loss is great, he's still able to turn his eyes upward and depend on God's gracious character. He's still able to see God, and when he sees God, he sees hope. **He's still able to look up and cling to four truths that flow from God's grace.**

Because of God's gracious character:

1. He will have _____ (31-33).

Verses 31-32: God is the One causing the grief. He's the One bringing the pain and affliction. But He's only bringing it as a response to a obstinate people whom He has warned times without number. In fact,

He sent His faithful prophet Jeremiah to warn them for over forty years to repent of living life their way and turn back to their God and His way. But they wouldn't listen. They closed up their ears and refused to heed the warnings. This devastation is a consequence of their continued defiance against their gracious, merciful Savior.

Jeremiah recalls to mind God's infinite compassion. "The Lord will not cast off forever." One day the affliction will end, and restoration will begin, because of His gracious character! We see this in **verse 33**. The NIV: "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone." He doesn't take pleasure in causing His people pain. So even though the consequences of disobedience are great, the compassion of the Lord that flows out of His abundant love is abundantly _____!

So Jeremiah is looking away from his present circumstances, and to the Lord. And because of His gracious character, He will have compassion on His repentant people! But to us, believers in Christ, no matter how far we fall away, Our Father is still there, loving us still, "for His love never ceases, His mercies never fail, His faithfulness never ends."

2. He will expect _____ (34-36).

As Jeremiah continues to look on God, He recalls to mind this facet of God's gracious character: Namely, **God is _____**. The literal thought of verse 36 is that the Lord sees, and He doesn't approve. He always sees and He always disapproves. And God's disapproval of injustices is strong. It makes Him mad. The God who is just hates injustice! And when we are godly, in that we are God-like, it makes us mad, also!

If you look at the fallout of Jerusalem and think God is some kind of cosmic sadist, recall to mind what the Bible says. **God is just** and **He hates injustice of every kind!** It's only our defective human vision that makes it appear that God doesn't care about the cruelties of mankind.

3. He will be sovereignly _____ (37-39).

Verse 37-39—classic verses on the sovereignty of God: Verse 39 is the key to understanding verses 37 & 38. Jeremiah has God's just judgments in mind, a person's just penalty for his or her sins. Why should a sin-filled sinner complain when he or she gets what they deserve? Yes, the punishment is ordered out of the mouth of God. And from a human

perspective, it is bad, and it is indeed a catastrophe, but from a heavenly perspective, it is utterly _____, and wholly deserved!

The prophet recognizes that only the Most High God can accurately and justly declare what will come to pass. "Man proposes, God disposes!" In other words, people can make plans but whether or not they are successful depends on the sovereign just authority and power of God. Both prosperity and adversity ultimately come from God.

Job's acceptance of this truth gave him the ability to absorb one great loss after another. And his acceptance gave him the power to withstand his wife's counsel, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive adversity?" If an evil people receives evil, they deserve it. If godly people are faced with bad conditions, it is designed for our ultimate benefit. Because God is sovereign, we can expect justice and fairness. But in the end for the righteous, we receive much better than fairness, we receive grace, as hell is canceled and heaven is guaranteed. We receive much more than justice, for we have been justified in Christ forever!

4. He will delight in a _____ heart (40-42).

Verse 40: Let them question why they are being so severely judged. Let them ask God, "Why have You forsaken us to the Babylonians?" Let them test and examine their ways. Let them understand that all this calamity is their fault. And let them repent and turn back to their God!

Judah's afflictions were related to God's gracious character. He brought the trouble because He's a compassionate God who is faithful to His covenant. Only through judgment will Judah and Jerusalem turn back to God. It is only designed to force His wayward people to return to Him.

Verses 41-42: God will forgive. He will gladly forgive. He waits to forgive, for He delights in a contrite heart! Isn't that what King David discovered when he repented of his monstrous sin with Bathsheba? "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sins! ... Restore to me the joy of my salvation... For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The

sacrifices of God are broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:1-2, 12, 16-17). That's what God delights in: a broken, repentant, contrite heart! And with that He will forgive!

God doesn't judge us His children who are in Christ—He doesn't punish us. Jesus took on Himself the wrath that belonged to us. But as a loving Father, He does discipline us (Hebrews 12).

Are you in rebellion?

Are you harboring secret sins in your heart? Are you flat out disobeying God's Word and will for you? Do you have other treasures above God? Some Christians do an extremely dangerous thing. They put something or someone in the _____ of their life, where only Jesus Christ should be, and make that their treasure.

In that case, you won't be judged, but you will be disciplined, for you are not forgiven. God has not forgiven you. Now, don't get me wrong. You're saved. You can't lose your salvation. But you can remove yourself from fellowship with God and not be forgiven. Is that you? In that case, what is holding you back from turning back to God?

Turn to your ultimate treasure, and know that if you confess, *Help* will pull you up and out. Let's heed the example of David when He was stuck in sin. **Psalm 40:1-4:** I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. ²He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. ⁴Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust.

Like David and Christian, turn to our only Help.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus!