

Scripture: Lamentations 3:19-26

Text: Lamentations 3:23

Message: Living Out of Love and Faithfulness

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New Years Day

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When, in our lives, do we tend to think about God's faithfulness? Probably at anniversaries and maybe birthdays. It's a time to look back and remember. As various events of life are brought to mind, there is the reminder of what God has done. God has been good.

At a time of death, the family may remember how the Lord was faithful to their loved one in his or her life.

In this moment in time of transition from one year to another, we pause and consider God's faithfulness. At the end of a year we may look back on the past twelve months and see how God was working in our lives. As we begin the new year, we trust in God's faithfulness to continue.

Great is your faithfulness. Remembering and celebrating God's faithfulness is a joyful, reassuring thing to do. It helps us to continue or to renew our trust in God.

Then those words of hope and promise in our text almost seem out of place, as we find them written in a book of lamentations. In Israel it was customary that a lamentation be sung in a house where someone had died. In this book in our Bible we have a collection of five lamentations. They deal with a death—the death of the daughter of Zion! They are lamentations about the destruction of the city and the temple.

Jerusalem was the spiritual centre of Israel. It was God's residence and also where the leaders lived, the king, the priest, and the prophet. In his rule over the people God made use of the temple and the officials in it to lead the people. Through these means, the covenant relationship was supposed to develop.

But now the enemy had come and destroyed everything. The work of the leaders in Jerusalem had come to a halt. And the temple did not exist after the radical destruction. It appeared that the covenant relationship with God had come to an end.

From the depths of this misery, complaints and lament arose. But these complaints also came along with confession. The people had sinned greatly and dishonoured God. Thus it would do no good to complain about the *consequences* of sin. Instead the people should lament their own sin and repent. Perhaps the Lord would then be gracious.

And he was and is. Through all the grief shines the awareness that the Lord remembers his covenant. The laments include this song of the abiding faithfulness of our covenant God. Restoration for the Jews meant the return from exile. But it also meant

genuine conversion, a renewal of the heart, a restoration of the covenant relationship.

As we begin this new year, it might be tempting to look at ourselves and how prepared we are for the unknown future. We might focus on our plans and ideas and strategies that we have in place.

But these verses celebrating God's faithfulness remind us to consider how it is that we have come as far as we have. It's not so much our own doing, as it is the Lord's faithfulness that has brought us this far. Too often we have sinned against God and deserved his punishment: when we fought with our neighbour rather than working together; when we spent more energy storing up our own treasures on earth rather than storing up treasures in heaven; when we have been depending on our own efforts instead of trusting in God; when we have been cutting corners and covering them up with white lies when we should have been honest with others.

Why should God be faithful? Have we earned it? Do we deserve God's blessings and care? Yes, we have lived in obedient trust in many ways, but not perfectly. God has a right to withhold his blessings from us as he did to Israel. Why should God be faithful?

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

Whatever happens in this coming year, it is by God's grace that we can trust this God of faithfulness and compassion. We might wonder about why we experience certain things. We might find ourselves asking "Why?" more than once. In those times of uncertainty, and in the times of overwhelming joy, we can trust God and put our hope in him. Not because we are so good, but because of God's great love which we know and believe in Jesus.

Listen to these words written by a young mother I knew, as she was dying of cancer. She was reflecting on these verses from Lamentations and wrote:

"I don't want my boys to grow up blaming God for my death. I hope that, even through this, we can praise God for unfailing love and faithfulness.

"I don't believe that God sent this cancer to me. Disease, illness and death is a consequence of the fall into sin. It's because we are not in perfect harmony anymore with God.

"Yes, bad things happen - to good people too. Death strikes unfairly - is anyone at any age ready to die? I prayed to God every day to heal me. But if you're reading this, he didn't. Should we blame God for not listening to my prayers? Should I blame myself for not having enough faith? The answer to each question is "no". Here's what I do know though:

“God is a God of love. Pure love. What he wants more than anything is to be in true communion with us. But because of our break from him, we are unable to be totally in community with him at this time. We can try. Meditation, praying, reading the Bible and getting to know the God of love are all ways.

“I believe God cried with me when I got my cancer diagnosis. I believe that he feels my pain when I cry out to him. I have come closer to God and Jesus during this time than I ever have in my life.”

This is the faithful God we can trust. He is a God of compassion and caring, a God of love. He is not some distant, cold, harsh dictator, out to see what kind of pain he can cause in people’s lives. “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed.”

“For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son.” It’s the Christmas story of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, who came to be human like us. Jesus lived a perfect life, which we could not do. Through his death and resurrection our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God is restored.

God loves us, even though we are imperfect. God loves us, even when we do wrong. God loves us, even when we cry out and lament and ask questions and complain about the hurts. God wants us to believe in him and trust him.

When we know this God and the wonder of his love, when we know this God who is faithful to care for us every day, then we know we can have hope and confidence for this new year.

His mercies are new every morning. Every day in this new year we live by his grace. Every day we live and work under his mercy. Every day we experience God’s blessing on what we do, because he is faithful, not because we deserve it.

Great is his faithfulness!

Let this be the foundation of trust for this new year. Not as an afterthought when things are great; not as a go-to when things are tough. Let this be a constant reminder to repent of sin, to trust God’s grace, to believe he is faithful.

Take a moment every day of this new year to remind yourself of that truth. Maybe paste this verse on your fridge and read it at some point each day. Because of God’s great love we are not consumed. His compassions never fail. Great is God’s faithfulness. We look forward to a wonderful year, as we live by his mercy and grace. As we trust in his faithfulness, we live to praise and to serve our God.

Amen.