

Devotion 28:

Our Father Sometimes Seems Like Our Enemy

Lamentations 1--5

Lamentations is the lowest point in the history of the children of Israel. They have hit rock bottom. Picture one like the prophet Jeremiah walking through the streets of Jerusalem after the Babylonians have razed the temple and the city's walls to the ground. The strong have been either killed by the sword or carried off as slaves. A few weak and poor are left, dying of starvation to the point of cannibalism. The city is eerily desolate, quiet except for weeping, and in ruin. And where is our Father?

“The Lord is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds. He has multiplied mourning and lamentation for the Daughter of Judah.” 2:5

Have you ever felt as though your earthly father was your enemy? Have you ever felt as though he hated you? Have you ever felt so alone that no one could comfort you? Have you ever felt this way toward our heavenly Father? The children of Israel felt exactly this way during the 70 years of Babylonian captivity. It was a devastating feeling and it must have felt like death. In fact, those that died were the fortunate ones:

“Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from the field. With their own hands compassionate women cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.” 4:9-10

I remember this feeling, that God must be my enemy if He existed at all, when I was experiencing divorce as an adult. Looking back now, I see that I was going through deep woe due to my and my wife's sin. The consequences of our sin were not pleasant and some of those consequences still reverberate in our lives today. But two things stand out for me from those devastating days: no one on earth could comfort me and our Father was the only comfort I had. And those two things are repeated throughout Lamentations too.

It might seem odd to some who have yet to experience a dark night of the soul, when all comfort has vanished and it seems that God Himself has left us. It is then that it becomes quite apparent that He and He alone is our only hope. As I write this, I look around the environment surrounding my desk. I see only two Bible passages in decorations. One is the hope from Isaiah 40:31: *“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.”* And the other is from Lamentations 3:19-23:

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: 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.”

I would like to add the following verses now:

“I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” 3:24-26

This is where God’s children are and where our Father is in the midst of deep agony. Far from being an enemy, it is during those times He clearly is seen as our only friend.

“For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.” 3:31-33

Are you suffering deeply now? Are you feeling that our Father has forsaken you? Has it been a long time since you felt His presence, His blessing? If so, reread Lamentations 3:24-26, 31-33 again. You will not be cast off from the Lord forever. Though He has allowed your present grief, He will show you compassion for His unfailing love for you is great. He takes no pleasure in your present pain.

You might recall that the tribe of Levi, as our Father’s priests and temple servants, did not have any Promised Land parceled out to them. They were to live off the gifts given to the Lord. Likewise, according to Lamentations 3:24, the Lord is our portion. Our “portion” isn’t great land or stellar health or outstanding wealth or numerous friends or growing ministries or close family. Our portion is the Lord.

Imagine being in a foreign prison camp. You have one set of filthy, torn clothing. You eat only meager rations of barely edible food. You eat only when given permission. Your freedom to move and communicate is severely restricted. Your family and friends are either killed or removed from your presence. Your “house” is a tiny, cold, dirty box and it offers no privacy whatsoever. You really have nothing, except one thing: the Lord is your portion. And you are longing, pining, waiting for His salvation. He is your only friend, your only hope.

Brothers and sisters, that is our spiritual condition today.