

Where's the Captain? (Lamentations 3:21-26)

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A story is told of passengers traveling on a cruise ship reserved exclusively for their pleasure. The captain of the ship would often be seen greeting the travelers, interacting with everyone to ensure the experience was all they had expected and more.

- The scenery along the shoreline was... breathtaking.
- The waters beneath the ship were ...calm.
- The sky was blue, absent of any clouds and... peaceful...until.

Without warning, visibility diminished as a gray fog rolled in. The water now churned beneath the hull. The blue sky turned black. The wind strengthened. The clouds swirled. And the rain began to pour. As the passengers sought cover, tossed about in terror, one question above all was on everyone's mind. WHERE'S THE CAPTAIN? During pleasant days he was often seen; yet, now, in the midst of the storm, he seemed nowhere to be found and so this one question echoed in the minds of all on board: "WHERE'S THE CAPTAIN"?

Storms at sea mirror some circumstances we endure in life, uninvited... beyond our control. Storms of the soul... these may be different. These storms often come because of a lack of control. Who among us has never known the reality of Lamentations chapter one, verse 20...; "See, LORD, how distressed I am! I am in torment; within my heart I am disturbed; I have been most rebellious". Whether uninvited by circumstances beyond our control or invited by choices we've made by a lack of control... the Bible calls this sin..., the question resounds in the minds of all who find themselves in the midst of a storm, regardless of its origin: "Where's the Captain? Where's God"?

Some might think such questions hopeless. I find them hopeful. Here's why. Fallen people – and that's who we are – find hope when crying out to God for mercy. Many are the scripture passages to which we could turn that remind us of that profound truth, but perhaps none greater than we find in Lamentations chapter three. Verses 1-20 describe the storm Israel endured because of their rebellion, sin...

Verse 1 says... "I have seen affliction"; In verse 3 Jeremiah cries... "He has turned His hand against me"; Verse 7 continues... "He has walled me in; I cannot escape"; Verse 17... "I have been deprived of peace..."; And verse 20...? "I well remember... my soul is downcast within me..."; on and on and on it goes... until...;

The tone begins to change in verse 21.... ²¹Yet... this I call to mind and therefore, I have hope. ²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His mercies never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great 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". Here we find two profound insights within Lamentations chapter three that give us hope when sunny skies darken without warning. Here's the first...

We have hope when we call to mind the Lord's mercies never fail. ²¹Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²²Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his mercies never fail". Lamentations chapter three verse 22 speaks to us a profound insight. Not only are WE NOT CONSUMED because the mercies of God never fail. HIS mercies never fail because THEY ARE NEVER CONSUMED. Do you know what that means? It means, no matter the storm through which you and I are passing, God's mercy flows like a fountain that never runs dry! How can we be certain this is true? Listen once again to verse 23. "They [meaning God's mercies] are new every morning"

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments.
Love is not love which alters
When it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark [ship],
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.*

The meaning of Shakespeare's 116th Sonnet is profound, and it will... well, preach. Love does not change when it find changes in the one whom it loves, and neither does God's mercy. His mercy has no end no matter our daily surroundings or every day shortcomings. Storms come at the most unexpected of times, and in the most unanticipated of ways; some uninvited..., (pause) others we invite. Yet, when our days grow dark and dreadful or our lives desperate "this [we] call to mind and therefore [we] have hope. Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed".

Read carefully Lamentations 3. There you will find the gospel of Christ woven like a thread throughout as in 2nd Corinthians chapter four, where our brother Paul wrote, ¹"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

Call THIS to mind whenever your days grow dark or your life becomes desperate. The Lord's mercies never fail. That's first. This follows.

We have hope when we call to mind the Lord is good to those who wait on Him. ²¹Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope... ²⁴I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him'. ²⁵The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks Him; ²⁶it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD".

How many of you like to wait? Seriously, be honest now. I don't like waiting. Waiting is really hard, especially when the future seems uncertain. In fact, waiting can be excruciatingly painful; but here's a great reason why waiting is good. Life often unfolds in such a way that we only see the goodness of God with time, in time, and over time; so much so that only over time, in time, and with time can we begin to grasp how good it was, "to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord".

I moved to Ukraine in July, 2016 to complete five years of research on Baptist life in the days of the Soviet Union. Having initially lived for a week in east central Ukraine, I found myself on a train traveling west where I would set up residence until returning home that fall. It first dawned on me aboard that train what I had done at age 62 – living in a city of 900,000 people in an apartment where for the first several weeks it was only me and the security guard – he spoke no English and I spoke neither Ukrainian or Russian. Home seemed a long way off; a lot of time yet to go. But that night paled in comparison to what I experienced the next week. Our daughter, Valarie, sent me a picture via text. I was holding her when she was 11 months old and the words beneath the picture read like this: “Dad will be home in [49] days; [12] hours; and [13] minutes”;

THE TEXT DIDN'T HELP. Time moved slower; the days grew longer; the distance seemed further. In time I looked forward to those texts. Much good happened in those 49 days, 12 hours and 13 minutes and the waiting; ...well waiting made the reunion with family all the more sweet when the waiting was no more.

My dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer when I was 23. My mom passed away when I was age 34. A passage of Scripture became a life verse for me in those days, and remains so today. “All things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose”, the word of the Lord, Romans 8:28... a promise that most often requires... waiting.

Maybe, for you time moves slowly today . Perhaps, this morning the days grow longer. Possibly, today...this morning... the distance seems further. But listen to me. Lamentations 3:26 tells us that “it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord”. So, what to do while we wait? We wait to see the goodness of God working together with our circumstances for our good.

Which is exactly where those passengers aboard the cruise ship found themselves as they tossed about violently. Some feared they would be thrown overboard. Others feared the ship would be destroyed...and, everywhere... everyone wondered... “Where’s the Captain”? One passenger decided to find out. Crawling on hands and knees he found his way to the bridge. There he saw the Captain, arms lashed to the wheel as he steered the ship away from the rocks along shallow water. Not a word passed between the two. Finding his way back to his fellow passengers, the man shouted above the storm for all to hear. “I have seen our Captain’s face...and, He smiled to me. All will be well”.

I want you to know something this morning. The raging storm of sin wages destruction on our souls and it consumes all in its path, but today... this morning we remember: Jesus was lashed to an old rugged cross at Calvary that sin’s devastation might be no more for those who believe Him.

Thus... “This [we] call to mind...Therefore [in this we have] hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed for his mercies never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ [And so we] say to [ourselves], ‘The LORD is [our] portion; therefore [we] will wait for him’. ²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the [ones] who seek him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD” ... for...

We have seen our Captain’s face; He is Jesus, the Christ... He has smiled on us...

- Faithful in mercy
- Full of goodness

And on the authority of His Word..., no matter our storms... ALL WILL BE WELL.

