

July 8, 2018

St. Mark 5:35-43:

“Great Is His Faithfulness”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The book of Lamentations presents us with the attitude of a devout believer in the Lord as he sits amidst the rubble of what had once been the temple and the city of Jerusalem. He writes: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." These words from the book of Lamentations are words of faith and hope when surrounded by nothing but ruins. Considering the circumstances, it is rather hard to imagine writing such words as the people were to consider that glory of the Lord had departed from the temple, and that Jerusalem had been destroyed. At the time, it seemed as if the gracious presence of the Lord had left and that he was no longer going to protect his people. The author of Lamentations sees before his very eyes what appears to be the destruction of the Old Testament church.

But "not so!" says the prophet, "for the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." Jerusalem would rise again and the temple would be later rebuilt. They had turned against the Lord by embracing false teachers and adhering to false doctrines, but their exile would not last forever. God would bring his people back. He would once again dwell with them. But not in the same way.

Jerusalem would rise again. It would be resurrected. Dry bones would miraculously be brought back together again. And what was the central point to all of this was that the Savior would come. Resurrection was to come in the person and work of the Messiah. He is the compassion and steadfast love of God who has come to us in the flesh in order to establish everything new and build a kingdom that will last forever. So in the midst of the ruins of the temple and the city, the prophet takes this opportunity to proclaim our hope. The day of Lamentations was a very dark day, but a new day dawns in the coming of the Savior who proves God's love and mercy, his compassion and faithfulness.

Surrounded by the sinful nations as we are, plagued by our own sinful desires and temptations, it might appear that in our own day that God's Word and Sacraments are departing from the church and that the church is left in ruins. We have been warned that as we get closer to the coming of the Son of Man that things are not going to be well. These things have been written that we might know and recognize that such tribulations serve as a warning for us to avoid embracing false teachers and adhering to false doctrines. We are bid to live every day in repentance and faithfulness to God's Word. The book of Revelation teaches us that before the end comes, it will appear that Biblical Christianity will be dead - God's people will be considered gone. Things will be similar to the time of the book of Lamentations.

Nevertheless, **Great Is His Faithfulness!** It says in Lamentations 3:21-24: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" These are exceedingly powerful words. The steadfast love of the Lord is Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God, as John reminds us in his first epistle: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (4:10)." This love never ceases.

“Love never fails,” Paul writes. His mercies never end. We see this clearly when Jesus lived a perfect life for us and went to a cross to experience the punishment for all our sins so that we might be declared perfect in the sight of God and welcomed into his eternal kingdom to be one day made perfect.

Jeremiah’s statement that God’s mercies are “new every morning” is related to the statement that follows: “Great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:23).” God is unchanging, and His mercies toward Israel were unfaltering. Over and over again the Scriptures make it clear that it is impossible for any of us to overcome the ruins of sin and death and make it into the kingdom. God must do it all. He works within the parameters of a sinful humanity and deals with us on that level by putting sin to death and making us alive in Christ. This was the bright ray of hope that shone through the smoke of Jerusalem’s ruins. Even in the midst of the ruins, God is doing great things. What appears to be ruins and death in our walk down here give way to resurrection and life!

This is how God works to save us. He does not give life by failing to address sin. He does not save us by letting us continue in our sin, catering to our unloving desires, or by satisfying the desires of the sinful flesh. That is the way of this unbelieving world and not the way of the Lord. The way of the Lord is to give life from death. And so, God brings us low in order to raise us up. He makes us nothing to make us something. He kills our sin in order to make us alive. God does great things in the midst of what appears to be nothing but ruins and death in order to establish things that will never go away. He raises us from sin, death, and the devil through his one and only Son and proves that it is true: **Great Is His Faithfulness!**

In the raising of Jairus’ daughter in our Gospel lesson, Jesus gives us a picture of what He has come to do for each and everyone of us. We are the dead ones - “dead in our trespasses and sins” as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1. We are as dead as the ruins of temple and the city of Jerusalem during the time of Lamentations; as dead as a little girl whose heart stopped beating. We are spiritually dead and our body is doomed to physically die. We are all ruins. We are truly dead people toward God as our thoughts and desires are captive to sin and death.

Sometimes we think to ourselves that we can change all of this. Over and over again the Scriptures teach us that God must save. Only God can work in the ruins of this sinful humanity, and he works through death and resurrection. He touches us with his one and only Son so that we may die to sin and rise in newness of life. We must join the prophet in the rubble of the temple and Jerusalem, and the little girl on her death bed - this has to take place in our lives. To die to sin must happen that we may live in Christ. As Jesus went to the house of the synagogue ruler to do something about death, so has he come our house to do something about our death. Still, we must go through death to rise.

Jesus takes us by the hand and said “Rise! I forgive you of all your sins!” And by him alone, by his great faithfulness we arise and live again. He is able to take the rubble and build something new and perfect. He is able to touch us with himself as it say in our epistle lesson: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” And you are rich! To be rich in Christ means to be rich in life, to be rich in forgiveness, to be truly content in him and all that he gives.

When our Old Testament lesson for this morning says that “the Lord is our portion,” it cannot get any greater than that. To have the Lord is to have all that is. And when you have the Lord as your own, you have everything for life and godliness - everything for every morning and through out every day to help you through troubles, sins, and pains until we get to heaven. The book of Lamentations is filled with pain, misery, and the consequences of sin. Our Gospel lesson makes us feel the agony of death. Yet, breaking through all of this is a bright, shining gospel-hope that points to the sufficient, powerful, present, and faithful care of God. There is life in the midst of the ruins. There is life in the midst of death. For God’s people there is victory. Our portion is the presence of God and forever existence in true and unconquerable love.

In the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem we see how God can do great things in the midst of rubble. Even more, we know that the rubble was later rebuilt to herald the coming of Jesus. In the raising of Jairus’ daughter, Jesus gives us picture of what he has come to do for all of us. He really can touch death and bring resurrection. His compassion does not mean that we have to do it all for ourselves. He has done it for us. **Great Is His Faithfulness!** Despite how we make everything into a mess, and certainly if we were left to ourselves it would continue - despite this, he reaches out his hand to us as he did with Jairus’ daughter and raises us up. And as Jesus commands to give the girl something to eat, he tells us to eat as well. We eat the very body and blood of our Savior which makes perfect sense. The Lord is our portion. He is our everything.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott