

Just Wait, Good Things Are Coming!

A sermon based on Lamentations 3:22-33

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“The sun will come out tomorrow...bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow...there’ll be sun.” I’m sure many of you recognize those words. And little Annie continues, **“When I’m stuck with a day that’s grey and lonely, I just stick up my chin and grin and say, the sun will come out tomorrow so you gotta hang on ‘til tomorrow, come what may!”**

Now, I won’t break out into the final refrain (although I know you’re singing it in your heads!). But, you get the premise...Annie was living the hard knock life, at first, as an orphan, living in less than ideal conditions, seems there was a bit of child labor as well. But her tomorrows got better, meeting Daddy Warbucks, getting a taste of the life of the rich and famous, finally being adopted by him. Her tomorrow really did seem to be only a day away.

“The sun will come out tomorrow.” Is that a message you need reaffirmed in your life? As with Annie, affliction and bitterness and hardships and pain and suffering and guilt and shame often prevail in our lives. But a different Son has come for us. And he remains faithful, shows compassion. So great is his unfailing love...the darkness doesn’t matter, it doesn’t get us down. In the midst the storm, and the guilt, and the pain, and the garbage we have to wade through in this life, we wait and hang on in the gray because the Son comes. And that means good things are coming!

Maybe that’s hard for you to see. Are you the type of person who likes to remain optimistic? A “when one door closes, another door opens” sort of person? Your favorite team loses the game, but “Hey, there’s always next week!” Your hours at work get cut, but “At least I have a job...now I can spend more time with the family.” You fall off the ladder and bust up your elbow pretty good, but “Now I know I’m still young because there were no broken bones!”

Or, like a number of years ago, when the economy tanked, were you the person who stood out and said, “Now’s a good time to buy in because it can only go up from here”? Or, the day before this past presidential election, when Hilary was supposed to win or maybe you weren’t too excited about the prospect of Donald Trump pulling off an upset, I put up a graphic on our church’s Facebook page, “No matter who is president, Jesus is still king.” My Grandpa is going to pass away (his cancer has passed from his bladder, to his lungs and liver and now his bones, and he’s stopped all treatment), but when I talked to him a few weeks ago, he said, “You know, God’s blessed me with a lot of time here on earth.. I’ve gotten to see so much, do so much, live so much.” And I was able to respond, “Of course, we’re going to miss you here, but Jesus wants you more.”

I’m sure my wife will tell you, I’m not an eternal optimist. I want to be. I want to see the good, I want to have always hope, even in the midst of the fiercest storms. But I don’t always. Again, do you?

Jeremiah had absolutely no reason to be optimistic. It’s no coincidence this book is called Lamentations...it’s filled with his laments.

But think about the context for his writing. Jerusalem was in ruins. The majority of her people had been led away into humiliating exile. Those who were left were experiencing complete poverty and the maddening famine that could lead even to cannibalism. And Jeremiah was right in the middle of it.

Here, in chapter 3, before our verses, he shared his own experience, ***“I am a man who has seen affliction by the rod of [God’s] wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light...He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship...Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer...He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver...I say, “My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD.” I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.”***

Sounds like the tune of a beaten man, who had hit rock bottom, along with the rest of Jerusalem...a man, who couldn’t see the sun, who didn’t care about tomorrow, who shouldn’t have had any hope or expected anything good to be coming.

Does that sound more like you? Last week, we started talking about the storms you’re experiencing in your life. Again, every one of you has struggles in varying degrees. No matter how great or how small, you do. What’s your context? Whether it’s personal, your job, your health, a relationship, your financial health, a significant loss of some kind, what have you, every one of us has something negative we’re facing that could fill us with laments and shred any bit of hope or optimism we might have to pieces. And, if you’re like me, it’s probably more than one of those things I just listed that might be dragging you down...or threatening to drag you down.

And here’s the big question...why? Why me? Why us? Why do we, even as children of God, experience affliction and bitterness and gall?

Well, two reasons. One, in general, life stinks. From Adam and Eve’s fall in Eden til now, there’s sin all around rotting and decaying our world. Gone is perfection and perfect peace and harmony between God and man. And, what’s more, there’s consequence to sin. Much of human suffering is the direct result of sin, often the sins of others. Jeremiah endured the loss of everything because of the rebellion and stubborn unbelief of his own countrymen.

But also, sometimes life stinks because you sin. I’ve done marriage counselling before where the couple was on the verge of getting divorced (they would even call their relationship “toxic”), and it’s because both were being less than faithful and loving to each other. A person who’s arrested for a DUI is the one guilty of drinking more than they ought to have and then voluntarily and irresponsibly getting behind the wheel of the car. Kids get disciplined by parents or sent to detention by a teacher because they misbehaved.

One of the characteristics Jeremiah highlights in our verses is God’s faithfulness. ***“Great is your faithfulness,”*** he proclaims. But, how’s yours? I once received an email from another WELS pastor, whose members had joined us for worship. He started out by saying, “A couple of my “faithful” members recently visited you,’ and then he proceeded to tell me how they observed a sinful situation

here and were disturbed by it. The thing is, it was a complete misjudgment. They had assumed what they saw was sinful, when the reality was there was nothing wrong. And those are “faithful” members.

And not to rag on them. We’re not immune. Great...perfect is God’s faithfulness. Ours is not. Our faithfulness fails. And for that failure, there are consequences, some of which we feel in our lives, as we undergo pain and suffering and hardship and trials and tribulations. And they’re our fault.

Our faithfulness fails...it just does. And as miserable as Jeremiah’s life was, ours deserves to be ever worse. We deserve to spend an eternity lamenting our sinfulness as we languish in hell. Talk about a hard knock life!

I think we know what it’s like to be where Jeremiah was when he wrote Lamentations. There, how could anyone possibly quip, “Things could be worse”? How could anyone find a bright spot to ponder even for a moment? How could anyone hold out hope that things would get better...that the sun would come out tomorrow. Yet that’s exactly what Jeremiah did!

The transition verse between the context of the earlier part of chapter 3 and our verses today is this, **“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.”** And, like a flourishing and lush oasis in the middle of a parched, sun-scorched desert, these verses, and the rest of our sermon text from Lamentations 3 stand out from the rest of the book and all of Jeremiah’s laments.

The Lord had dealt compassionately with his people! He could have annihilated them instantly and consigned them directly to hell. He didn’t.

In our 2nd lesson, Paul wrote, **“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”** We are not consumed by God’s wrath and anger...we are not consumed by the guilt and shame and burden of our sins...we are not consumed by the pain and suffering and hardships we experience in this life...because of God’s great love, because his mercies are ever renewing, because his compassions never fail, because his great faithfulness never fails.

Jeremiah recognized that regardless of the sin that caused his misery...regardless of whose sin it was, suffering even to the point of death had the awesome benefit of clearing out the rubbish in the brain and focusing the Christian’s attention on what really matters. Every hurt, every burden, every loss, every disappointment in your life is meant to focus you on what matters....not the why this happens to me. No, what matters is what God is doing in the midst of it. What matters is grace and the sustaining promise of God’s abiding presence and his unfailing love expressed in the gospel.

Let’s talk about that love...the “LORD’s great love,” shown in the covenant faithfulness of the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace.

God’s love has shown itself in his actions again and again. For you and me, he can’t help himself. He promised long ago...before we ever were, long ago he promised to love us. His love fired his compassion

so out of his deep feeling for us, he was stirred to come to our rescue. Just as Israel's history was a record of God's faithful love and action on their behalf to save them, so is ours.

And our history is such because of Jesus, the God-man who knew much greater woes than Jeremiah and you and me put together. Jeremiah wrote, ***"For [God] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone."*** But he did willingly bring affliction on his Son, as Jesus suffered and died for us, although, oddly enough, Jesus never did anything to earn or deserve God's wrath and punishment. But Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection...that was God's plan for our rescue. That was God's faithful and covenant love and grace for us.

And because of that great love, all of the suffering in the world can't consume us. Because Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus rose, God's wrath will never consume us. Great is his faithfulness.

And you know what that faithfulness does? It produces patience, right? Just wait, good things are coming. Well, our salvation from sin and the burden of hell is already done. All praise to Jesus.

But our final salvation is still to come. Jesus coming back to take us from this world of sin and pain and suffering and hardship and trial and tribulation is still to come. And what can we do but wait and persevere and bear our burdens and continue to hope?

You know, as if stepping down the rungs of a ladder, Jeremiah outlines, the depths of disgrace and despair which a patient believer (you and I) may have to endure in the meantime. Ostracism may be our lot.. Humiliation may be heaped upon us as God's children. The phrase "Let him bury his face in the dust" tells us maybe even physical torture and disgrace may come our way. But it makes no difference! As God's child, you can endure every indignity with patience, as such suffering can even remind us of our Savior and his patient endurance for us.

Are you looking for his surpassing love and goodness? Are you waiting for it?

"It's only a day away" Little Annie could smile today because she looked forward to tomorrow, and tomorrow, she was certain things were looking up.

Good things are coming. Jesus, he may not be a day away. He may be the rest of your life away. But he loves you tomorrow. He loves you today. He will love you forever, no matter what you're going through, Jesus loves you.

And, now we wait for his final salvation, for the Son to come out and come down and take us home. And while we wait, take in all the good things that are already here!

With all that, we don't feel like we're barely hanging on. The Son shines every day. Don't forget that. Embrace it. Love it. Use the Son to look past this veil of tears and this rotten world of pain and suffering all around us, and see the glory that is yours now, here, and in heaven, forever. And that's enough for us to hang on til tomorrow., come what may. Amen.