

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Lamentations 3:22-32 *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." ²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; ²⁹ let him put his mouth in the dust-- there may yet be hope; ³⁰ let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults. ³¹ For the Lord will not cast off forever, ³² but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*

In Christ Jesus, our Help in ages past and our Hope for years to come, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

"He who hesitates is lost."—So goes the old saying, and there's a lot of truth in it. A few years back my younger brother was shopping for a car, and we'd found one advertised at a good price at a Mazda dealership in town. We called ahead and told them we'd be coming in to see it. Well, a few hours later when we showed up, turns out it had just been driven off the lot by its new owner only 15 minutes prior.

Sometimes we wait, when we ought to act. But even more common, I think, is the opposite problem. All too often we rush into action, when it would have been much more prudent to wait! Sadly, this is all too true even of Christians. In our fast-paced world of the 2020's, many have lost the time-honored Christian skill of *waiting*. What is a Christian "waiter"? He's someone who waits for the Lord. He trusts in, and relies completely upon his God, even in the face of the most terrible trials in life. It's the kind of person each of us should be—and can be!—with the help of God. That's the kind of person the writer of Lamentations talks about in our text for today. So let's take a closer look at our text, and see how it answers the question—

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN WAITER?

He knows the meaning of Grace

He makes the Lord his portion

He humbly endures trials

He looks forward to God's deliverance

This Old Testament book of the Bible is called "Lamentations," because that's what it is: a lament. It's a poem of sorrow over the fate of Israel. It was written in the last half of the sixth century, BC and if you know what happened to the nation of Israel long about that time, it's easy to understand what they had to feel sorry about. This was the period during which King Nebuchadnezzar came down from Babylonia with his armies and conquered Judah. They besieged Jerusalem, destroyed it, and carried the people away into captivity in Babylonia. Lamentations was God's message to these captives. It was probably written by the prophet Jeremiah, although his name isn't mentioned. It is a song of sorrow—but it is also a song of hope. In the midst of their captivity, God wants these people to understand the reasons for this difficulty, *and* to look forward to His deliverance. He wants them to be believing "waiters." And when *we* face troubles in life, God wants the same attitude from us!

What is a Christian “waiter”? First of all, **he’s someone who knows the meaning of grace.** Our text begins, **“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases.”** The people of Jerusalem were in a bad situation, but not as bad as it might have been. They had been beaten, taken captive, and dragged off to another country, but most of them were still alive. They hadn’t been killed. Why not? Why weren’t they completely destroyed? Simply because of the Lord’s mercies!

The word “steadfast love” in our text has the same meaning as the word we know as “grace”. Grace is the undeserved love of God for sinners. And those people of Israel were sinners, alright! Again and again throughout their history, they had turned away from the Lord to worship idols. They had ignored his warnings, and gone right on their merry, sinful way. By rights, they deserved to be wiped off the face of the map! But although God had brought a severe punishment on them for their sins, they had not been completely consumed. There was still hope for them. But that hope lay, not in themselves, but in the grace of God.

If we want to be Christian “waiters”—if we want the ability to cope with sin, and with the other problems that assault us in this life—then we too must know the meaning of grace. We must realize that our hope for salvation and deliverance doesn’t lie in ourselves. We are sinners, and the wages of sin is death. That’s why, if God gave us what was *really coming* to us, we’d have nothing to look forward to but a lifetime of misery on earth, and an eternity of torment in hell! That’s why we have to put our trust in something outside of ourselves: in the grace and mercy of God for Jesus’ sake.

We couldn’t live a perfect life—we couldn’t even come close. So our Savior lived a perfect life in our place, and died on the cross to pay for our sins. He is our only hope for salvation. A Christian “waiter”, is someone who understands that. **He makes the Lord his portion**—and places his entire trust in Jesus! By the way, that’s one of the things that’s different about us Lutherans. I remember a conversation I had years back with a man who told me that Christianity and Islam were one and the same. I said that, first of all, we worship different Gods, but second of all, Muslim’s practice “works-righteousness”—that a persons good deeds contribute towards salvation. He said, “And isn’t that what Christians believe? Be a good person and you get to go to heaven?” Well, that is what the Roman Catholics teach, and that is even essentially what the Reformed churches teach—but it’s not what the Bible teaches! Isaiah says that **“...All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.”** (Is. 64:6) The Apostle Paul backs him up: **“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”** (Rom. 3:28)

You just can’t have it both ways. You can’t trust in Jesus *and* in yourself! So, as confessional Lutherans have made Christ *alone* our portion. Think of that old favorite hymn, “Rock of Ages.” What do we sing in those words? *“Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace!”*

A Christian “waiter” makes the Lord his portion. He clings only to the cross for forgiveness. He knows that God’s mercy, for Jesus’ sake, will never fail us. It’s a renewable resource that’s never used up. We can come back to the cross every day with our sins, and every day we’ll find full forgiveness there. As our text says, **“his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”**

Does that mean Lutherans don't do good works? I sure hope not! No, our lives are to be filled with good works, but we have to remember that they aren't the cause of our salvation—they're the *result* of it. They're the fruits of faith that flow naturally in the lives of people saved by Jesus. One of these fruits is the third thing that distinguishes a Christian "waiter": **the ability to humbly endure trials.**

Everyone has troubles in life; but not everyone has the ability to deal well with them. We should remember that this, too, is a gift from God. It's part of the faith that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. It's something we can ask God for—the ability to bear up patiently and hopefully when trouble comes our way. Maybe it's some constant small annoyance, like a troublesome co-worker on the job, or the pain of arthritis that comes back every day. Maybe it's something big, like a family crisis, a major illness, or the loss of a job. Whatever it is, our text tells us to wait hopefully for the Lord's solution!

But that can be so hard to do—even for believers. Several years ago I had a conversation with a man who was going through a severe family crisis. No matter what I said, he just wouldn't believe that God could provide a solution. It was hopeless, he said. All the prayers in the world wouldn't help the situation. Was this man an unbeliever? No—he was a Christian. In fact, he was a Christian *minister!* As it turned out, God did supply a solution for his problem, as He always does. But God's solves our problems according to *His* timetable, not ours! He wants us to remember that He is the Creator, and we are the creation, not the other way around.

You know the account of Job in the Old Testament: he lost his family, his money, and his health all at the same time. He still trusted in God, but after a while he began to lose hope that God would ever deliver him from his troubles. How did the Lord answer his complaint? He humbled Job with a simple question: ***"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"*** Wait for the Lord! Remember who's the creature and who's the Creator! The Lord is always ready and willing to help his beloved children, but He is justifiably angry when we try to tell Him how and when to do it! The Lord's ways are higher above our ways than the heavens are above the earth. He doesn't ask us to understand how He works in our lives, just to trust in His love and His omniscience. And enduring humbly under trials, that isn't a bad thing! In fact, it's something that God often uses for our good. Our text says, ***"It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."***

This is especially true for young people in our day. So many young people in America are brought up to expect that what they want, they get. They expect immediate gratification of all their desires, and a quick fix for all their troubles. But that's not always the Lord's way. It's good training, even at an early age, to wait humbly for the Lord—even if it means putting up with pain and injustice for a time. ***"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; let him put his mouth in the dust-- there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults."*** Parents, now is the time to instill in your children a humble attitude of faith and obedience to God's will. If they need an example, there is a wonderful one you can point them to—take them to the court of Pontius Pilate, and show them Jesus, bruised and bleeding, sentenced to death. Read to them from the Gospel of Matthew, ***"Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, 'Prophecy to us,***

Christ!” (Matt. 26:67-68) All this our Savior put up with, and death too—and for what? So that He might set *us* free from sin and death! How can we do anything other than accept with patience the trials that the Lord sees fit to lay upon us? The writer to the Hebrews urges us, **“Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”** (Heb. 12:3)

Finally, a Christian “waiter” is hopeful, because **he looks forward to God’s deliverance.** We’re not just lost here in the dark! We can have confidence, because we know that no matter what kind of trouble we find in life, deliverance is definitely on its way! Our text concludes, **“For the Lord will not cast off forever,³² but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.”** That meant a lot for the captive Israelites in Babylonia. It meant that one day the Lord would deliver them from their captors and let them go home to Palestine and rebuild Jerusalem. And the prophecy came true some seventy years later.

It means a lot for us, too. You’ve heard it said, “Everything will be alright.” They’re words that are used so often as empty words of comfort. People say that when they don’t know what else to say. But the promises of our God are not empty. And when He says, “Everything will be alright,” we can take Him at His Word. He knows all our grief; sometimes He’s the One who sends it—for the strengthening of our faith. And He is the One who will deliver us from it. Knowing that makes it so much easier to be Christian “waiters”, patiently waiting for the Lord’s will to be done in our lives!

So what is a Christian “waiter”? Someone who knows the meaning of Grace, who makes God his portion, who humbly endures trials and who looks forward to God’s deliverance. But we won’t be “waiters” forever. The Day is coming soon when all our waiting will be over, when the eternal joy that Jesus won for us will be ours. Then the words of the prophet Isaiah will come true, **“And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’”** (Is. 25:9) Even so, come, Lord Jesus! AMEN.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Amen.