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Grace and Peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The Word of God I would lay on your hearts today comes from...

ESV Lamentations 3:21-32 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² 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.

Dear Friends in Christ, Fellow Redeemed,

The old saying goes, "He who hesitates is lost." And there's a lot of truth to that. A few years ago, I found a bargain on a new vehicle at a big dealership in Minneapolis. The price was great. But instead of acting, I waited. Soon the sale was over, and it was too late.

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 wiser to wait! Sadly, this is all too true of Christians even. In our fast-paced, 21st century world, many have lost the time-honored Christian skill of *waiting*.

As a Christian, you are called to wait for the Lord, to trust in and rely completely upon God, even in the midst of the most terrible trials in life. It's a calling that you should – and can fulfill – with the help of God! So let's take a closer look at our text, as we consider the theme...

Wait for the LORD: He is Your Portion

- I. He strengthens us with His goodness and grace (21-27)
- II. He teaches us with His trials and tests (28-30)
- III. He encourages with His compassion (31-32)

I. He strengthens us with His goodness and grace (22-27)

The book of Lamentations is a unique book in the Old Testament that contains 5 poems from the prophet Jeremiah who survived and is reflecting back on the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and the destruction and exile that followed. It's called "Lamentations" because that's what it is: a lament, or a dirge. It's a mournful song over the fate of Israel.

The fall of Jerusalem and the exile was the most horrendous catastrophe in the history of Israel. Remember, God had given the promised land to Abraham, He had given victory to David to make Jerusalem Israel's capital and from David came the royal

line of kings. You had God's presence there in the temple, and that's where the priests maintained the rituals of Israel's worship.

And after 500 years of all this history, in the summer of 587BC, the city fell to Babylon. It was all decimated and gone. And so, the book of Lamentations, written by the prophet Jeremiah, is a memorial to the pain and confusion of the Israelites that followed this destruction. It's one of the saddest books of the Bible, but it is also a book of hope – a hope in the LORD who is our portion of miracle-food.

Verse 22-24 of our text tells us, **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."**

In the midst of their captivity, God wanted the people of Judah to understand the reason for this difficulty, and to look forward to deliverance. He wanted to strengthen them to wait for his goodness and grace... When we face troubles in life, God wants the same thing for us!

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 through 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. They deserved to be wiped off the face of the map!

But although God had brought an intense and brutal discipline upon 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.

Jeremiah pleads with his readers to wait, for **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.** Wait for the Lord: He is your portion! He strengthens us with his goodness and grace!

Like Israel, we realize that our hope for salvation and deliverance doesn't lie in ourselves. We are sinners, and the wages of sin is death. If God gave us what was really coming to us – if we really got what we deserved, 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 put our trust in something outside ourselves: we put our trust 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 the hope of our salvation! As Christian "waiters," we realize what we have waiting for us in eternity – a holy, eternal life – is a free gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

It's that Gospel truth that motivates us to wait on the LORD even when our daily burdens weigh us down. Verse 29 reads: **It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.**

If it seems that you are facing a lot of trouble in your young age, that's good. You can take it. The LORD

will sustain you. He is your portion. His Word sustains you and strengthens you to wait for his goodness and grace. Like his word from Colossians 3:11-12 which promises you that **you are strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.**

II. He teaches us with His trials and tests (28-30)

Wait for the LORD: He is your portion. And that means that not only are you strengthened to wait with His goodness and grace as you endure hardships and difficult times, it also means that you're going to learn a thing or two while you wait. Because the LORD is your portion, he's going to teach you with his trials and tests.

In Greek mythology, the greatest of all the heroes was Hercules. A son of Zeus, Hercules was known for his many adventures, which took him to the far reaches of the Greco-Roman world. One cycle of these adventures became canonical as the "Twelve Labours" or the "Twelves Trials." During his twelve years of service to King Eurystheus, Hercules had to complete these twelve incredible feats as part of his calling. Feats that included slaying the Nemean Lion and the nine-headed Lernaean Hydra, capturing the Cretan Bull and the guard dog of Hades, Cerberus, and stealing the mares of Diomedes and the apples of Hesperides. All tasks that would have been impossible for a mere man.

In real life, we may not face lions, hydras, and bulls on a daily basis, but we do face our own trials in this life.

Trials that God allows us to encounter, oftentimes for our own good – to teach us to trust in Him.

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. **James 1:2-3** tells us **Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.**

Guess what? When we experience trials of various kinds, it's doesn't taste very good! It doesn't taste like joy, it tastes like dust! Jeremiah tells us in our text, that when a yoke of trouble is placed on a Christian's back, **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.**

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 personal, like an insult to your intelligence or your reputation. 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.

Trials are sometimes sent by God for a wholesome purpose and should be borne with patient submission. Remember, God does not test us for his benefit, but rather for our own. He knows exactly how faithful, how trusting, how patient you are without having to put you

through a test or trial. He tests us so that we become stronger, so that we learn to trust him even more, so that we lean on and rely on his never-ending steadfast love and mercy more and more.

It is good to endure trials with endurance and grace and wait for the Lord to remove the trial. It is good to wait for the Lord. You see, the LORD is your portion and that means that through the hard times of life he is encouraging us to count on his compassion!

III. He encourages us with His compassion (31-33)

Several years ago, I had a conversation with a friend 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! Maybe you've had a similar experience with a friend or family member? As it turned out, God did supply a solution for his problem, as he always does. But God 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 ways around.

We can have absolute confidence in God's deliverance because we can count on His compassion! 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 Babylon. 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 seventy years later.

It means a whole lot for us too! The words, "Everything will be alright," are so often used as empty words of comfort. Lots of times, people will say that when they don't know what else to say. But the promises of God are not empty. When God 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. The Lord is Your portion. And knowing that makes it so much easier to be Christian "waiters," patiently waiting for the Lord's will to be done in our lives.

Because the Lord is our portion, we are able to wait for Him. He strengthens us with His goodness and grace, He teaches us with His trials and tests, He encourages us with His compassion. But we won't have to wait 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. **It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25:9)**

Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Amen.