

I Recall to my Mind

Lamentations 3:21

“This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.”

This whole chapter is an acrostic in three parts with three verses allotted to each of the 22 letters of the Heb. alphabet. The prophet Jeremiah identifies himself with the chastened people, and in agony and distress, he pours out his heart to the Lord in faith. His laments recall Job’s exercise of soul before the Lord: verse 1 (Job 9:34); 2 (Job 19:8); 3 (Job 7:18); 4 (Job 7:5); 5 (Job 19:6, 12); 6 (Job 23:16–17); 7, 9 (Job 19:8); 8 (Job 30:20); 10–11 (Job 16:9); 12–13 (Job 16:12–13); 14 (Job 30:9); 15 (Job 9:18); 16–18 (Job 19:10; 30:19). We note that Jeremiah likely did not have a readable copy of the Book of Job, but he almost certainly knew of Job and likely was familiar with Job’s story and account that is there contained.

Our verse marks a change in the speaker’s attitude. The contentment he remembers renews the **hope** lost in v. 18. In view of vv. 22–23, 32, he may be reflecting on Ex. 34:6–7, which these verses echo.

⁶ And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6–7)

Jeremiah refers to what followed as he reviewed God’s character.

All the way through V33 the relentless sorrow over Judah’s judgment drove Jeremiah to consider the grace, mercy, and compassion of God. The tone of his thinking changed dramatically.

Notice in V22 the word mercies. This Heb. word, used about 250 times in the OT, and almost always refers to the exercise of God’s gracious love. It is a comprehensive term that encompasses love, grace, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, truth, compassion, and faithfulness.

Notice in 22 the phrase “His compassions fail not”. It is a verse that gave some content to the Christian hymn we know as “Great is Thy Faithfulness”. A man named Thomas O. Chisholm wrote that great hymn toward the end of his life in order to express the great sense he had of this wonderful truth.

As bleak as the situation of judgment had become, God’s covenant lovingkindness was always present (cf. vv. 31, 32), and His incredible faithfulness always endured so that Judah would not be destroyed forever (cf. Mal. 3:6).

3:23 Great is Your faithfulness. The bedrock of faith is the reality that God keeps all His promises according to His truthful, faithful character.

Great is Thy faithfulness,
O God my Father!
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not;
Thy compassions, they fail not:
As thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

This is exactly the thought that has soothed Jeremiah's heart here. God is faithful; He is our Father, He does not change under any circumstances and will always be true to His promises and covenant, no matter what the condition or behavior of His people. He will always have AND demonstrate compassion toward those who are His! He will EVER be as He is portrayed in His Word.

Sadly, memory is frequently the bond slave of despondency. Dispairing minds call to remembrance every dark foreboding in the past, and dilate upon every gloomy feature in the present; thus memory, clothed in sackcloth, presents to the mind a cup of mingled gall and wormwood. There is, however, no necessity for this. Wisdom can readily transform memory into an angel of comfort. That same recollection which in its left hand brings so many gloomy omens, may be trained to bear in its right a wealth of hopeful signs. She need not wear a crown of iron, she may encircle her brow with a fillet of gold, all spangled with stars. Thus it was in Jeremiah's experience: in the previous verse memory had brought him to deep humiliation of soul: "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me;" and now this same memory restored him to life and comfort. "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." Like a two-edged sword, his memory first killed his pride with one edge, and then slew his despair with the other. As a general principle, if we would exercise our memories more wisely, we might, in our very darkest distress, strike a match which would instantaneously kindle the lamp of comfort. There is no need for God to create a new thing upon the earth in order to restore believers to joy; if they would prayerfully rake the ashes of the past, they would find light for the present; and if they would turn to the book of truth and the throne of grace, their candle would soon shine as aforetime. Be it ours to remember the lovingkindness of the Lord, and to rehearse his deeds of grace. Let us open the volume of recollection which is so richly illuminated with memorials of mercy, and we shall soon be happy. Thus memory may be, as Coleridge calls it, "the bosom-spring of joy," and when the Divine Comforter bends it to his service, it may be chief among earthly comforters.

It is profitable to look through the rest of the chapter, because, as we have said, it is what follows that Jeremiah has in mind when he makes the encouraging statement here in verse 21.

- Though we have much to warrant God's great wrath, we are NOT consumed by it because of God's great mercies, and that compassion WILL NOT fail. Notice that mercy is a plural word in this appearance - it is not referring to a single mercy or to mercy in general. Jeremiah is directing our attention to the MANY times that our sin has warranted God's wrath and chastening. No matter what the situation between us

and God, one thing is certain, God's compassion will never fail! (V22). Notice that, likewise, "compassions" is a plural word that is not talking about any single idea, either our need for it or God's character in general. Rather, it is speaking of the many times that this wonderful aspect of God's Being, is exercised on or behalf.

- God never tires of dealing with us, though we can look at His compassions as a quality that, if we were talking about a human being, would fail as the one we are speaking of tired of tired of expending, ran out of patience so to speak.

If we were to think of these three chapters of Lamentations, we might think of giving them the title: "When Tomorrows Become Yesterdays". Jeremiah, from the point of view of these last few verses is looking back upon the past. He had predicted the judgment that had come upon Jerusalem, and now, as he sits upon the rubble and wreckage that the Babylonians had left behind, we see him weeping as he writes this lamentation.

The Book of Lamentations consists of 5 sections or laments. The one in which we find the verse under consideration is the ONLY bright spot in all 5. "It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because compassions do not fail, especially those of the Lord God of all things. They are new every morning; great is "Thy" faithfulness! In spite of the severe judgment of God – and there were many who then thought, as I suspect that many, many today would think, that is that it was too severe, even underserved in it's severity. But even in this Jeremiah can see the merciful hand of God in at least a couple fashions:

1. First, Israel as a nation (not to mention the Northern Tribes) was not completely destroyed, but still, in some significant degree, remained.
2. It was clear that God was using what godly people there were as witness and to bring Him glory (Cf Daniel and his witness in Babylon).
3. He preserved those who had been taken while they were in captivity.
4. It was clear that God would return both Northern and Southern Kingdoms at some point.
5. God allowed Israel to continue to carry and be a demonstration of His Word as His representative.
6. God is using Israel and the account of her experience then and prior to the captivity to be the illustration of His Nature and Character.
7. Israel did not receive what they had actually deserved and to disappear from the earth.
8. God further used Israel as an illustration that the extending and working of His mercy did not and does not extend from anything contained in Israel herself.
9. He allowed Israel to the illustration of God's faithfulness by using them to the demonstration of His faithfulness to His promise to Abraham.

It is interesting that Jeremiah's mind turns, naturally, from the terrible truths of Israel's chastening at God's hand to the promises that God had made that

spoke to Israel's future and eventually delivery and blessing. This encouragement comes largely as he considers the things about God that are always true.

We might argue that though pressed to the point of despair (v. 19), Jeremiah had hope in the Lord's mercies (loyal love; see Hos. 2:19) and compassions (gentle, yet intense, concern, v. 22), which are new each morning and evidence of His great faithfulness (v. 23). It is the ***faithful love of the LORD*** which is the basis for the poet's recovery from deep depression. As with Jeremiah in the cistern (Jer 38:6–13) and Jonah in the stomach of the great fish (Jon 2:2–10), the Lord provided salvation from death.

- Note the phrase ***“The faithful love of the LORD never ends:*** As in the Syriac version; Hebrew reads *The faithful love of the LORD keeps us from destruction*. This is the basis for the poet's recovery from deep depression. As with Jeremiah in the cistern (Jer 38:6–13) and Jonah in the stomach of the great fish (Jon 2:2–10), the Lord provided salvation from death. At the moment of his deepest despair and as he recalled his bitter affliction, a remarkable transition in his attitude took place. His hopelessness expressed in vv. 18–20 turned to hope as he remembered the Lord.

The phrase *“But this I call to mind”* is treated by some translators as pointing back to what has already been said in the chapter. However, it seems more convincing that, instead of back, it is pointing forward to the thoughts of verses 22-25. TEV and some others make clear that the word ‘this’ points forward, by saying “When I remember **this** one thing...”. Most translations use a colon to show that the thought of verse 21 is carried forward into verse 22; however, punctuation is not always sufficient for hearers, and so clear a clear forward looking link should be made as a function of study or teaching. A good example is found in the Moffatt's Translation, who begins verse 22 with “that”: “But I will call to mind, to give me hope, (22) that the Eternal's love is lasting...”. We may also render it, for example, “I have hope when I remember (22) that the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases...”.

Further, we should note that the word “hope” in many languages is more related to wishing than to confidence. That is not the case here. Jeremiah, here, is stating his confidence in God's love and mercy, NOT merely wishing that it might be so. For example, we could legitimately express this as “I have confidence when I remember this:...” or “I put my trust in it when I remember this...”.

One of things that Jeremiah is seeking to portray to us is that his hope is parallel to that hope which Judah could be holding in the midst of their awful trial and chastening experience before the LORD. His outward affliction (v.19a; cf. vv. 1-4) as well as his inward turmoil resulting from that and other concerns (v. 19b; cf. vv. 5, 13, 15) which had pushed him toward intense sorrow and even despair (*my soul is downcast*. V. 20). But the thought we have been considering (**this I call to mind**) crowded out the hopelessness that had threatened to overwhelm him. He specifies for us that which had upheld him and served as

the “solution” to the blackness – **“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail.** Judah (and thus Jeremiah) was down, but not out! God was punishing Judah for her sin, but did not reject her as her as His Covenant people.

The word for “great love” is the Hebrew “hesed” which carries the idea of a loyal love. God was sticking by the people He had chosen. The Covenant (the Palestinian Covenant) made with Israel in Deut. 28 had not been cancelled in spite of Israel’s failure to live up to their responsibilities laid upon them by God numerous times. In fact, GOD’s loyal love could be seen in His faithfulness in carrying out the curses He had promised while at the same time preserving the remnant. Paradoxical, I’ll agree, but the clear demonstration shown in the Bible. Many people refuse to see this as a matter of God’s character, but nevertheless it is so. The judgment itself was a witness to the fact that God had not abandoned His people.

Note that Jeremiah speaks of “compassions” (from *rehem*) referring to often to the womb and in the plural it speaks of great intensity. It showed His gentle feeling of concern for those who belonged to Him. Going on in the subtext of all of this is the question – “Could Judah push God so far that He would finally abandon her forever? Was God’s supply of loyal love and compassion, albeit immense and far greater than the human parallels, limited?

Jeremiah’s answer is a firm and emphatic NO! He assured His people (Israel AND you and I) that GOD’s “loving-kindnesses” (NASB) “are new every morning”. God offered a fresh supply of loyal love every, single day, to His covenant people. Interestingly, this is much like the manna provided to Israel in the wilderness journey to the land from Egypt. That supply could NOT be exhausted. This exemplar truth caused Jeremiah to call out in praise, **Great Is Thy Faithfulness**”. He was take greatly aback by this limitless supply of God’s grace offered to him (and to Israel). Because of this Jeremiah resolved to **wait for** God to act, bringing about restoration and blessing. This, combined with God’s history with Israel nationally and personally, taught him that he could trust God despite the circumstances in which he found himself. This was because he has now come to the realization and understanding of just how inexhaustible was God’s supply of loyal love.

There is much for us to learn and to draw and rest upon for us here. Truly God’s grace and love for us is greater than anything we can look to in the human realm. It is wonderfully and dependably unquenchable. God has made His covenant with us when we entered into our position in Christ, thus being placed into the New Covenant with God through Jesus’ work. Nothing, nothing at all can exhaust or quench the love that this marvelous and blessed truth and cause us to be cast aside. It is a certainty that we stand assured in the presence of our Heavenly Father, certain and reassured that the position we have, not of our own work, but because of the sacrifice of God’s Perfect Lamb, will never needs be set aside, thus returning us to our unredeemed state. Of course, there is much more to the full understanding of this marvelous, but, even this basic and singular perception of it can bless us beyond any measure. Like Jeremiah, we

must learn to allow all that God has done for us and promised to we who are His children to assure and build hope in our hearts. He is completely reliable and has done a marvelous thing for us.