



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

PUTTING PRAISE IN PERSPECTIVE

David Anguish

22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." - Lamentations 3:22-24, RSV

Since 1974, Amy Bessire's setting of Lamentations 3:22-24 has stirred the souls of worshipers singing it in heartfelt praise. I am glad Bessire used her talent so well. But, there is a depth to the song's Scripture text that I suspect most who sing so ardently have not appreciated. That is not a criticism of Bessire; there is only so much one chorus can accomplish. And that is the point: there is so much more to Lamentations 3 than three verses quoted in the song.

A book of lament poetry, Lamentations was likely used in prayers and songs by worshipers seeking forgiveness and restoration to full covenant relationship (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 1476). Traditionally attributed to Jeremiah (though the book names no author), its text expresses dizzying bewilderment over Jerusalem's fall.

Jeremiah's dismay is gut-wrenching. He had warned Judah that just having the temple would not save them (Jer. 7:1-15), but when the fall occurred, we see a man virtually numb with shock. With good reason: the "king of Babylon . . . burned the house of the LORD . . . [and] broke down all the walls around Jerusalem." The "captain of the guard carried away captive some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were in the city, . . . [leaving only] some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen" (Jer. 52:12-16, *ESV*). The mighty—and all they were to protect—had, indeed, fallen.

Lamentations 3 personalizes Jeremiah's pain. He depicts God as

a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver; I have become a laughingstock of all peoples, the objects of their taunts all day long. He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have

forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD" (Lam. 3:10-18).

Then comes an amazing prayer and praise. "Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; . . ." (Lam. 3:19-22a).

When things are well, it is good to remember that the LORD is our "portion" and "hope in him." It's also comparatively easy.

Maturing faith remembers it when the bottom falls out.

December 2011
www.davidanguish.com