

God Causes Grief? Lamentations 3:22-25

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

Jubilate – make a joyful noise Sunday, and then we have a reading from Lamentations; boy that’s joyful. Our Epistles tells us that we will be persecuted. Jesus says they will weep while the world rejoices? Wow, Jubilate!

But the problem is that we have an American understanding of Christianity, that Christians are supposed to upbeat, always positive, always happy, because God gives them whatever they want. They are people who every atheist will want to follow into the closest church. Unfortunately, this ethos of “nice” is a testimony to all the perversions that have corrupted the church and tainted the possibilities of a pure proclamation of the Gospel. This “feel-good” theology has no real soul, no inner conviction, for it has no integrity.

It has no integrity for it has no answer or when the fecal material hits the oscillating device. And that will happen in every life.

When the church proclaims Christ in truth and purity, it does not do “nice.” When Christ is faithfully proclaimed, we cannot help but speak about affliction, yoke bearing, and grief. AND, we cannot help but speak about compassion, the steadfast love of God which never ceases, and about his mercies which never come to an end. The Gospel is a word about death and resurrection.

We want to be told how we are to live our lives, so that everything can be “nice.” We like that idea. But the message of the cross, the proclamation of death and resurrection is not nice. It is a message that is hard to swallow by those outside the church, and if truth be told, even by those inside the church.

The Gospel announces that to be raised up into the new creation, we don’t need to be nice, good, holy, smart, accountable or even faithful: we need only to be dead. The true Gospel not meets with resistance outside and inside churches which teach nothing but being “nice,” That church which teaches only about “being nice”, which does not teach about God suffering, dead, and raised from death does not find any value in the true Gospel.

We all want winners and to be winners. Christ is for suffering and people who are struggling within themselves and with others. Christ took to the cross to endure our punishment that we might be freed from pointless lives niceness for the sake of nice, so that we might be the children of God. Jesus comes to us in our suffering and tribulations, not to take them away, but to be with us – in death and in life.

But that is not the Savior we want. We would like to have a Superman, or at least a Batman to be our Savior. We want Superman to save us from burning buildings – but Jesus saves us from the eternal fires of hell. We’d like a physician to keep us from dying – Jesus saves us from eternal death. We would to be saved from discomfort, pain, sickness, economic insecurity – someone who will stop senseless murder over drugs and a measly \$200 – but Jesus saves us from the great deceiver, the liar, Lucifer, who causes all such things.

But the way He does it – as a rejected and *crucified* Jesus? That we do not want? That doesn’t sit well. Even the idea of a crucified and *resurrected* Jesus doesn’t sit too well. OK, the resurrected part is cool, but the crucified Jesus? Come on pastor, we’re in the Easter season. We want “He is risen!” He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” But he is risen from what? We want freedom from everything that seems ugly, freedom from anything that appears to deal with unhappiness, but Jesus brings us true joy.

God proclaims in our text, “though He cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men” Does this mean that God causes affliction? No! Afflictions are present in the world because of sinfulness – two evil men killed Matthew Pagel.

We see the results of sinfulness in the fact that there are diseases like cancer, and others which bring about death.

But we expect life to be perfect and God to answer our prayers as if He were a divine vending machine – if we put in the proper effort on our part, we will receive what we want. But we do not get to tell God who He is, and what He is to be about. He tells us. And His greatest concern is to be who He is, and who He is, is God for you.

In Luke 12, for example, Jesus says to His little flock, “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after these things do not have anything more to do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear the one who has authority, after the killing, to throw you into hell! Yes, I tell you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered! Do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge him before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

God knows all the hairs on your head. You are worth more than sparrows.

And dear friends, according to this passage from Lamentations, you are called to hope, to trust the promise, “The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in Him.”

The world wants a prosperity gospel, a promise that God will do what we want, if we only pray hard enough and are nice enough. God doesn't give us that promise, such preaching is a lie.

He does promise His steadfast love. He promises that our sorrow will be turned to joy. He promises to come to us and give us strength to face each new day and the trials and tribulations that do come upon us in this mortal strife.

You and I are called to be faithful to God, to the mystery of Jesus coming to give His life unto death and rising to new life. We are to be new creations. And that means we need to die first. As a seed needs to die before it can spring forth in new life. We need to die – daily putting to death the Old Adam in contrition and repentance, so that the new man can be raised to new life.

We are to be faithful to Christ coming to us in means that only appear weak and trivial by worldly standard. He is faithful to come to us through earthly words, through water, through bread and wine. His steadfast love comes to us in the simple means of His grace.

You and the world do not need to hear any bright ideas of Todd Jerabek, nor the bright ideas of anybody else for that matter – such things cannot save a single soul. What you need is only to receive Christ, to wait upon the Lord who has the keys over death.

Yes, we will be considered foolish by the world, maybe even weak, for relying upon God for every need of our body and soul. Our world is already drowning in ideas of how it can save itself by the right lifestyle.

Christians come at life bearing the yoke of the cross – trusting not in our wisdom, but the wisdom of God.

We are to come to the table singing, “the Lord is my portion.” This God, our God, sets out a heavenly feast every time the Church gathers in His name. It is not some gourmet meal, in fact, it is a meal that would get us kicked off the TV show Master Chef. But it is a nourishing meal! It is a life-giving meal. It is the right food at the right time, for it is the portion that our Lord Jesus Christ sets before us – and that portion is His own body and blood.

Christ's church is sent to deliver holy food, not the most glamorous plating to win contests. It is food that grants

strength in the face of affliction. It heals body and soul to life everlasting.

God has sent redemption to His people. And some day you may come to understand that in all trials, tribulations, and temptations – in all your grief – God did not allow you to be overwhelmed. Instead, you have been well fed – His mercies have come to you in the faithful Word of God, which is new every morning.

Therefore, “wait quietly and hope for the salvation of the LORD ... For the LORD will not cast off forever, but, though He cause grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love.” Amen.