

Modern Lamentations

It seems like there are several ways people adjust and cope with the social separation and shelter in place requirements of today's threat to our health. Psychologists make a large portion of their wealth by writing books to tell a worried population how to get through trying times. Others, and these are a small minority, claim that the Bible can tell us how to not only survive but live joyfully through hard times. Examples like Job, Joseph, Naomi and Ruth, Jeremiah, Esther, Peter and John, Paul and Silas, and many others, including a few in Hebrews 11. The only common attributes among these people are faith and trust in God. Let us look at a few of these examples.

Consider a time when The Lord (YHWH), had just demonstrated His power over the idols in the land. Elijah, the prophet of God, had killed the prophets and priests of Baal. Then, the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Ahab, and his wife Jezebel, set out to kill Elijah. His response was to run away. He told God, *"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away"* (1 Kings 19:14). The prophet tried to remove himself, but God gave him work to do (1 Kings 19:15-18). Elijah's spirits picked up, and his faith returned, as he accomplished the work he had to do.

Many dark times confronted God's people as one, and then another evil entered to cause them distress. A daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah, married a descendant of David and became queen of Judah. She took the crown for herself and set about killing all descendants of David. *"When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she rose and destroyed all the royal offspring"* (2 Kings 11:1). The assassination of all males in the line of David would mean the promises to Abraham and David could not come true, and Jesus would not be born. This could have caused the faithful to lose hope. But a loyal sister of Ahaziah hid his newborn son from Athaliah. He was nursed and raised in the house of the High Priest. After seven years, the son was brought out and crowned king. Athaliah and all the servants of idols that she brought to Judah, were put to death. *"Jehoash was seven years old when he became king"* (2 Kings 11:21). This is an excellent example of God's people doing what they could during a dark time to keep the kingdom safe.

When Jesus was arrested and taken before the High Priest, the disciples feared the Jews and deserted Him. When He was before Pilot, they still held back. When He was crucified and buried, they became discouraged and depressed. Few remained faithful in believing Him to be the Christ. Their hope was gone, and again, His followers lamented. The women who carried the oils and wrappings to finish preparing the body to stay in the tomb could not find the body. Jesus was risen from death to walk, talk, eat, and continue with His plan to build His church. Lament turned to great joy. All four gospels and the book of Acts tell of what seemed to be a great loss, being a great victory.

As the church began to grow, many hard times seemed to hinder the spread of the gospel. The Jews arrested Peter and John for teaching and healing in the name of Jesus (Acts 3-4). The apostles were placed in prison, but an angel freed them. They were next taken before the council and were to be killed. But one of the teachers of Israel, Gamaliel, convinced the Jewish leaders to release the apostles and, in essence, let God decide their fate (Acts 5:17-42). The followers of Jesus were strengthened, and the gospel spread rapidly through Judea, Samaria, and the world as Jesus said it should.

Today, in addition to those who would hinder the preaching of the gospel, we see concerns of health and safety disturbing the kingdom built by Jesus. There are arguments which say no danger is present and other arguments saying the danger is present with grave consequences. Can we accept both views? Or does it matter? In every instance we can find in scripture, those who respected God and His Christ, and obeyed as they could, succeeded. Some were beaten (Acts 22:19). Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:54-60). But the Church still stands, filled with faithful Christians.

The Hebrew writer concluded that all who suffered ill-treatment and the loss of all things because of their faithful service to God receive a great reward that is shared with us. *"And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect"* (Hebrews 11:32-40). Therefore, we today who are the adopted children of God because of faith, trust, and obedience, serve in the body of Christ, the church, as we are physically able. As Paul said, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14).