

I Can Heartily Wait

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[0 : 00] you've probably never done this before, because you're all too busy. But there are movies that I have watched more than once.

Only the classics, of course. For instance, on multiple occasions, I have sat down and watched the groundbreaking hockey movie D2, The Mighty Ducks.

That was a way better response than I was expecting. If you've not seen it, this is when The Mighty Ducks represent the USA at the Junior Goodwill Games.

We learned quickly that the team from Iceland is heavily favored to win the entire tournament. After all, the Iceland team is bigger, stronger, they're faster, and they have more facial hair.

When the Ducks play against Iceland in their first matchup, it is hard to watch. Coach Bombay and the Ducks lose 12-1.

[1 : 13] 12-1. But that's not the end of the story. I won't spoil it for you. I won't say how it ends.

But I will just say that at the end of the movie, the Ducks sing, We Are the Champions, around a campfire. And I'll leave it at that. Every time I watch it, I am tempted to get caught up in the despair when the good guys are losing.

Because all hope seems lost. But then I remember, in the middle of the darkest times, I know how this story ends.

Sure, it seems hopeless, but I know that good does triumph over evil in the end. The good guys do win. So I can endure the moments when evil seems to have the upper hand because I know that that's temporary.

I know the ending, and it is glorious, and it is guaranteed. Hold on to that thought. Our passage this morning from Lamentations 3 is all too familiar to us, isn't it?

[2 : 30] It's a beautiful text, and it's worth repeating at the close of our Sunday worship every week. Verse 21.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. Let's pause there. What a great start to a hopeful declaration here.

But it would be misleading for us to study this passage without acknowledging the historical context. The devastation in Jerusalem at the time of Lamentations was no movie.

It is as real as can be, and their intense suffering persisted for years. They were in the depths of despair. Let's back up a few verses to show how unexpected verse 21 actually is.

Just four verses earlier, the poet is lamenting. Read verse 17. My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is.

[3 : 38] So I say, my endurance has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord. In a very real sense, he's walking in the shadow of death, and the lamenter admits, I have no strength left, and I have no hope.

I have no hope. That's what he says in verse 18. And his eyes are not deceiving him. Remember, as an eyewitness, he has been reporting the following.

Enemies have prospered and have overtaken the city. Women are carried off and treated horribly. The temple has been desecrated. God's people are mocked, killed, taken captive.

Weeping is constant. And as the poet looks around at his city, at his people, and at his place of worship, he sees that everything is gone.

And his hope seems to be gone with it. So he pours out his grief to God. Verses 19 and 20.

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.

[4 : 52] My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. Somewhat ironically, this should comfort us.

This can comfort us. Why do I say that? Well, just like the poet of Lamentations, we can be brutally honest with the Lord regarding our own suffering.

Some of you need to hear that this morning. We can be brutally honest with the Lord regarding our own suffering. because all of us have experienced or are currently experiencing suffering in some real form.

We don't have to deny the reality of our own suffering and we shouldn't. Let's be honest with God and with ourselves. Physical pain, ongoing medical issues, betrayal, death and loss, anxiety, injustice, which can be magnified by seeing the prosperity of the wicked.

And as this man looks around at the utter destruction of his people and his city, he tells the Lord, remember my affliction. Remember it, Lord, because I do.

[6 : 17] And then the Lamentor remembers something else. Verse 21, But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

Hear those thoughts again. I have no hope. It's gone. My soul is well aware of my affliction, but, oh, my soul, also remember the Lord.

My hope is in Him. Therefore, my hope is not dead and it will not die. The faithfulness of the Lord has revived my hope.

In the middle of our own suffering, we may be tempted to keep our eyes fixed on the hurt and our hope can seem lost. The voice of Lamentations has commanded his own soul to refocus.

[7 : 33] I have beheld all my suffering. And now I will behold the Lord. This is wisdom. He doesn't deny his suffering.

Neither should we. But after taking proper inventory of the absolute desolation of his world, he lifts his gaze to the Lord and so should we.

The poet remembers the steadfast love of the Lord. Mike illuminated this point for us. Steadfast love is not simply something that God does.

It is an expression of who God is. And the Lord will not betray his character. That's why we can sing we just did.

Thou changest not thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been thou forever will be. Great is thy faithfulness.

[8 : 38] Now don't miss this because at this point in Lamentations the darkness has not yet made way for the dawn. But it's as if the Lord has just stirred up a dormant truth within the man's soul.

God has awakened his hope essentially saying you think that all is lost but you still have my love and that means you still have everything.

You're walking through the valley of the shadow of death but I the Lord am with you. I'm not going to leave my people.

Now here's something to think about. While this devastation was raging on in Jerusalem do you know what else is happening at the same time over in the land of Babylon?

The events of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And the events of Daniel. And when we recount the lives of those men delivered from the furnace delivered from the lion's den how quick we are to praise the Lord's faithfulness.

[9 : 54] in here Jeremiah is at rock bottom but he doesn't forget who God is just because of his current state.

For those who call upon the name of the Lord some can experience desolation and others deliverance and together they can proclaim with one voice that the Lord is faithful.

The poet continues in verse 24. The Lord is my portion says my soul therefore I will hope in him.

Now did you catch that progression here? In absolute agony the voice of mourning says I have no endurance and I have no hope. Then he turns his eyes to almighty God and remembers his faithfulness this I call to mind and therefore I have hope and not only I have hope but now he says I will hope in him.

Why does this hope in the Lord persevere? God because it's become clear that Jerusalem is not his permanent home. His cherished inheritance!

[11 : 40] remembers that his hope is not rooted in this world. What about you? Will you call this truth to mind?

Because let's be honest lasting hope cannot be found, cannot be rooted in this world. So there's a necessary shift from the here and now is all I can see and all that I can think about to I have a hope rooted in God and he will make all things right.

It's a valuable lesson for us. God has promised that a day is coming when pain, tears, sin, and death will be no more.

How can hope be lost when God has promised a perfect and glorious future for those who hope in Jesus? The Lord Jesus even said it himself in John 16, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

Listen to Jesus again. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, heart, I have overcome the world. Yes, you will have trouble, and you are not promised any immunity from it.

[13:21] Suffering is woven into the fabric of our very existence in this world, love, but take heart. You see what Jesus is saying?

This life will be full of pain and sadness, but just you wait. Just you wait. Your suffering won't last forever, and the love of the Lord will.

So don't lose heart. remember, neither life nor death nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So the darkest times have no power to rob us of our hope. Suffering is not a dead end for our hope. Even death itself is not the end of our story. Jesus has overcome the world. It's the victory of Jesus that has given hope to God's people throughout the generations.

[14:34] I want to share one example of that. It's from the 1500s. In the 1500s, there was a Protestant preacher by the name of John Bradford.

Though some of you may not know that name, many of you have perhaps heard the name John Fox. He was the famous record keeper of Christian martyrs.

And John Fox was a contemporary of John Bradford. And Fox described him in this way. Listen to how John Bradford is described.

He sharply reprov'd sin, he sweetly preach'd Christ crucified, pithily spoke against heresies and errors, and earnestly persuaded his people to live godly lives.

It's a pretty solid legacy, I would say. John Bradford's preaching was already well known when Mary I of England, whom we know as Bloody Mary, was crowned queen in 1555.

[15:45] And during the very first month of her reign as queen, she had Bradford arrested and sentenced to death for illegal preaching.

Bradford and his young friend, fellow Protestant, John Leaf, were both sentenced to be burned at the stake as heretics for their preaching of Christ.

He was persecuted for his faith, and he was facing a fast-approaching death, and John Bradford didn't despair. He could have seen all hope as being lost, after all his faith in Christ has caused him to be betrayed,!

arrested, slandered as a heretic, and sentenced to a painful death. But, he knew what was waiting at the end of his story, so he didn't despair.

As the fires were lit, John Bradford looked over at his young friend John Leaf, and this is what he said, Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night.

[17:03] That's a picture of waiting for the Lord in hope. If I can paraphrase, Bradford's message to his brother in the Lord was this, we will both suffer in this moment, but don't lose heart.

Just you wait. Our glorious eternity with Jesus is just on the other side of this. Just you wait. Now, there's a word we don't typically like to hear, isn't it?

Wait. kids, you may not like being told to wait. I'm going to tell you a secret though. Grownups don't like it either.

Being told to wait feels like you're being told to just fill your time and distract yourself until the good stuff comes along. And waiting is extra hard when you're going through dark times, and a bright future is still a ways off.

But waiting in the biblical sense is more meaningful than just filling your time. Waiting for the Lord. Waiting for the Lord means watching expectantly for the Lord.

[18:18] Waiting for the Lord means you are actively serving Him as you prepare for His plan to reach its fulfillment. As Psalm 130 says, I wait for the Lord.

My soul waits, and in His word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning. More than watchmen for the morning.

That's a good picture of waiting. Verse 25.

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him. To the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Isn't that an interesting clarifier? It's good to wait quietly for the Lord and for His salvation. But again, we must be thoughtful here.

[19 : 28] Does this mean that we're supposed to close our mouths to God and quietly wait in that sense? On the contrary, listen closely, we have the Lord's invitation throughout all of Scripture to pour out our hearts to God.

Pray without ceasing. make your requests known to Him. Cast all your burdens on Him for He cares for you.

We are told to come to the Lord in prayer. So that's not what being quiet in our waiting means. But being quiet in our waiting does mean that we ought to catch ourselves if we begin accusing God. for a lack of faithfulness.

To question His unsearchable wisdom. That's what it means to wait quietly in hope knowing that the Lord will do what is good and right and wise.

[20 : 37] The salvation of the Lord is promised and He is faithful to deliver. And this we call to mind and therefore we have hope. Because of the price that Jesus paid for His people salvation is ours.

I want to read from Isaiah 40. Here are these words. He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even youths shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted. But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. wait. That describes an ending worth waiting for.

Which brings us back to the movie that I mentioned earlier. Why do I not despair during the moments of pain and failure? Because I know the ending.

[21 : 55] I know the ending. I remember that there's a joyful victory still to come. And so it is in real life for those who are in Christ.

Take heart. Just you wait for the Lord. We know the end of the story and since Jesus is already victorious, we can wait in hope.

Hear these words again with fresh ears from the song we just got done singing. And let them take root in your heart.

This is what we sang this morning. Pardon for sin and the peace that endureth. Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide.

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Blessings all mine with 10,000 beside. Great is thy faithfulness. great is thy faithfulness.

[23 : 02] Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.

Can we pray together? Father, Father, we call this truth to mind.

Great is your faithfulness. That gives us hope. Lord, help us look not only at our current suffering, but what is beyond it.

Lord, we know that you have a purpose in our suffering and you know that you have promised an end to our suffering for those who are in Christ.

Lord, we hold to that promise. We look forward to seeing you face to face. We look forward when you will make all things right.

[24 : 02] And for now, in this world, we know we will have trouble, but we take heart because our Savior Jesus has overcome the world. Protect our hearts, Lord.

Help us to lean on your steadfast love, because that's who you are. And Lord, as we prepare for communion, help us understand what it means, what we are celebrating, what we are calling to mind, what Jesus endured, the suffering he endured, so that we can be with you forever.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.