

The prophet Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, from which our Old Testament lesson is drawn today. And I’m willing to bet that Lamentations is not at the top of your list of inspiring reading material—after all, it is a book of lamenting—of crying! It’s a sad book. Jeremiah’s country, Judah, had just been destroyed by a foreign nation. His favorite city, Jerusalem, was ruined – now just a pile of rubble. Most of the people were either dead or had been taken prisoner, and Jeremiah was one of those prisoners.

What makes it doubly sad is the fact that God’s people—leaders and normal folks together—had brought it on themselves by ignoring God and doing their own thing. It’s not easy reading, in part because as you read, the less it sounds like history and the more it sounds like now, and like us. Yet having said all that, there is something inspiring here; something beautiful. Jeremiah is inspired to write, in the face of all the suffering, loss and grief that you could imagine, the following words: “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. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in Him.”” “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.” And a few verses later, “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; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.”

God’s people had been put in a situation where the only thing they could do was wait for the Lord to provide a solution. They had no power whatsoever. All they could do was trust that the Lord would deliver them. It is that thought that gives Jeremiah great hope and courage. Why? Because Jeremiah knows what the Lord is like. He knows the Lord’s personality. He knows that God longs for things to be good between himself and his creation. And because Jeremiah knows the Lord, he trusts that God will do the right thing.

And God did. He used the tragedy of Judah’s destruction to bring the survivors back to him—many of the survivors of Israel would repent of their sinful lives and come back to God. And years later, the survivors returned to Israel, and rebuilt the city, and eventually the Messiah was born right there in Bethlehem, just as God had promised. God never fails. But He works at His own speed. It is rarely the speed that we want him to work at, but it is the perfect speed. He gives us all the time we need to look in the mirror, to study that reflection, to see where the problem might be me and my sin. We are not to deny that sin or try to cover it up, but just confess it. Own it. Admit it. When you do that, then God can give you what His people waited so long to receive—the blessing of His Messiah. The full pardon and forgiveness created by Jesus’ death on the cross. Life the way it was meant to be lived that flows from our risen Lord Jesus. Those precious gifts can be yours today—no waiting necessary—by faith; by believing Jesus purchased these things and would give them to you. I have waited for things that just never came, and I’m sure you have too. But God never fails. He always has a plan. And when we are under adverse conditions, we don’t have to lose heart. Instead, we wait, and we wait confidently. Because we

know, just like the prophet Jeremiah, what the Lord is like. We know the Lord's personality. And because we know the Lord, we trust that He will do the right thing. If God sacrificed his Son for me, He will certainly take care of me as I go through whatever problems come my way.

Chances are, you are aware that this very passage from Lamentations forms the basis of the classic and beloved hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness." We sang that just moments ago. What I would like to share with you this morning is that the author of this great song didn't just write the words; he lived the truth of the words he set to paper.

His name was Thomas Obadiah Chisholm. He was born in a log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky in 1866. He went to a one-room schoolhouse as a child and in his late teens found himself teaching in that same one-room schoolhouse. His life was forever changed when an evangelist named Dr. Henry Clay Morrison came to town and set up a revival tent. Thomas Chisholm received Jesus as his Savior through Morrison's preaching. He was 27 years old. Dr. Morrison must've seen something in Thomas Chisholm, because he invited him to move to Louisville to become editor and business manager of Morrison's publishing endeavors. It was an exciting prospect, and Chisholm accepted. Big things were happening in his life, including his ordination as a pastor in 1903, the same year he married the love of his life, Catherine Vandervere. It was one blessing after another. And then came Thomas Chisholm's illness. He endured long stays in the hospital. And since it's pretty hard to do ministry from a hospital bed, his time as a pastor was over, six years after he had started. Chisholm was disappointed, to say the least, and once his health was somewhat restored, he and the family moved, first to Indiana, then to New Jersey. He could not leave behind his medical bills, so he found work selling insurance. But there was something still active in Thomas. He may not have been able to shepherd a congregation, but his faith remained vibrant, and he could still write. And boy, did he write. He wrote somewhere around 1200 poems, 800 of which were published, and in 1923, inspired by what he had read in Lamentations, reflecting on his own life, 14 years after his ministry had ended, he wrote, "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."

There's much more to the story of how this hymn gained popularity and wide use—for now, the simple fact is we're still singing it and talking about it 101 years after it was written. We can be thankful that Thomas Obadiah Chisholm learned, by God's Word and life experience, that it is good to wait quietly for the Lord, because we are waiting on someone who always shows up and always follows through in just the right way and at just the right time.

In humility, let us stand with Thomas Chisholm and receive "pardon for sins and a peace that endureth/God's own dear presence to cheer and to guide/strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow/blessings all ours with ten thousand beside."