

Fresh Start
[Lamentations 3:19-32](#),
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Every year around this time, people start making plans for the new year ahead, because at some point in the past, we decided that this transition from December to January is the moment we move from one year to another, that this this is a fresh start, a new beginning with infinite possibilities stretching out into the future before us, but when you think about it, it doesn't really make sense. Just because we've all traded one calendar for another, doesn't mean that the world has really changed. Just because we're writing a five today where we wrote a four a few days ago, doesn't mean that things are substantially different. The line between December and January that marks one year moving into the next, it's just arbitrary. A lot of people won't celebrate the new year until the end of the month, when we move from the year of the dragon to the year of the snake, and honestly, that makes just as much sense as anything. We had to pick a moment where years change from one to another, and it could've been April, or August, or mid-October – but whatever date we pick, we give all this weight to that moment, that change, all this importance and substance to the changing of the year, we choose to believe that a new calendar means a new beginning, a fresh start, even though the evidence shows that this is rarely the case. We want to believe that a new year will bring an opportunity to leave the bad old year behind and start something new, but most of the time, that doesn't happen. The new year

ends up being not that different from the old, because there's nothing really all that different between the two.

And even though we all know that this is true – even though we all recognize that the transition from December 31st and January 1st is no different from the transition from July 12 to July 13th – we still want it to be different. We want it to mean something. We want a fresh start. We make resolutions promising that we're going to exercise more, eat healthier, be better with our money, more generous with our time, finish that book we always meant to write, learn to speak Spanish or crochet socks or bake croissants. January 1st gives us enough of an illusion of a new beginning that it makes a convenient time for us to try something new, to try doing the things we really should've been doing all along. And sometimes those things work, and sometimes they don't – usually those resolutions run out of steam somewhere around mid-February, and then we tell ourselves we need to wait around for another new year before we try any more drastic changes. But even when those decisions pay off – even when we do make a difference in our own lives, even when we use the beginning of a new year for a fresh start, there's only so many things we can control. There's only so many resolutions we can make that will actually bring something new into the world. I can resolve that I'm going to worry less this year, but I can't resolve that there will be less reason to worry. I can decide how I'm going to feel about the world around me, but there's not a lot I can do about the world as it is. I can't stop climate change by making sure to sort my recycling properly. I can't do anything about tyrannical governments and poverty and hunger and injustice around the world. I can't bring Jimmy Carter back from

the dead. Even if all my resolutions are successful, even if I change myself in all the ways I feel are necessary, there is still so much outside of my control, so much that I just can't change, so much keeping me from having a truly fresh start.

And that's probably how the author of our Old Testament reading, the book of Lamentations, felt. Lamentations was written at the single worst moment in the entire history of the people of Israel, immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the kingdom of Judah. For the first time since the exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel ceased to exist as an independent nation – after thousands of years of God leading the people through all manner of trials and challenges, establishing them in the promised land and giving them a kingdom led by David and his descendants, all of a sudden they have lost everything. The kingdom is gone. The temple is gone. The ark of the covenant, the sign of God's power and presence among the people, destroyed. Everything that established their identity as a people distinct from the world around, it's all gone. And so the book of Lamentations describes the deep grief and pain that the people are feeling in that moment, the hopelessness for their situation. There is nothing they can do to fix what has gone wrong, to reverse the damage and restore the kingdom to Jerusalem. There is no hope for a fresh start.

And yet, in the middle of this long poem of despair, there is one brief moment of hope, one faint glimmer of something more than the mess and destruction and death that seems all around. The poet says that "I still dare to hope when I remember this: the faithful love of the Lord never ends. His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness – his mercies begin afresh each

morning.” The poet knows that there is no hope for Judah, no hope for Jerusalem, no hope for a fresh start for their kingdom and the wealth and independence they once enjoyed to begin again. But the poet also knows that each and every single day, God gives the people a fresh start, a new outpouring of mercy and grace and love. Each and every day, the relationship between God and God’s people starts fresh. Each and every day, God erases everything that has gone before, all the broken promises and broken commandments, all the failures and faults and foolishness that human beings have committed the day before, and each and every day offers the people a fresh start, a new beginning, a slate wiped clean of everything that could keep humanity from moving closer and closer to our creator and king. God’s mercies are new every morning, every morning, God resets the calendar, starts our relationship over anew, extends all the infinite mercy and grace and love that we desperately need, gives it all to us, to all God’s children. Each and every day, the relationship between God and humanity is given a fresh start. And we usually waste it. We usually just keep going in our old habits, our old ways, we usually spend each day making the same mistakes that we made the day before. But when the next day begins, the faithful love of the Lord is still there. God’s mercies are still there. The slate is wiped clean again, and once again God offers us a fresh start, a new beginning, a way forward out of despair and hopelessness into abundant, infinite love.

There is so much in this world that we cannot control. There are so many problems we can’t fix, so many fears we cannot calm. And once a year we give ourselves the illusion of a fresh start for all these troubles, once a

year we think that this is the moment that things are going to be different, and then when it all falls apart we just live with the mess and the trouble for another year because we think there's no other way. But each and every day, our God offers us a fresh start in our relationship with our creator. Each and every day, God extends mercy and grace and infinite love, all that we need to face the troubles of this world because we will not face them alone. And when we fail, when we fail to accept that offer, when we reject God's mercy and live another day focused only on ourselves, we don't have to wait for a new year to get a fresh start. God's mercies start afresh each and every morning. Each and every morning, all our mistakes, all our sin, all our brokenness, God sets all that aside, and decides to love us as if today was the first day of our lives, to love us as if we had never rebelled against God's will or broken God's heart. Each and every day, God gives us a fresh start. Even in the midst of our trouble, even in the midst of our pain, we have a friend and savior and king who sees us and loves us for who we were always meant to be, who gives us the opportunity, each and every day to become the people we were created to be. We are not defined by our trouble. We are not defined by our past. We are not defined by our brokenness. The only thing that defines our future is the mercy of our God, the infinite love of Jesus Christ, poured out afresh for us each and every morning, giving us a fresh start to begin again. And that means that today, we can start to love God as we have been loved. Today, we can start to change the one thing in the world we can actually change – ourselves, our own hearts, our own behaviour, our own lives. Today we can choose to live as God's people, to share his love and represent his word and his identity in how we live in this world. We can

choose kindness over selfishness, love over hate, we can turn our hearts and minds towards giving God's glory in what we say and do. And when we fail to do all the things we say we want to do, God's mercies will still begin again tomorrow, refreshed, renewed, ready to call us back to be the people God always wanted us to be, the people God knows we will one day become. Today, we have a fresh start to serve and love Jesus Christ with all we say and do. Today, and every day, may we take hold of that mercy with all our heart and strength and mind, and may we live lives defined by the grace of Jesus Christ, the one who is faithful, yesterday, today, and forevermore. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.