

Gloom, Doom and Hope

by Pastor Patrick Curley

Chapter 3: A Ray of Light Shines

Admittedly these past two chapters in Lamentations have been some of the hardest to hear in the whole of Holy Writ. Not so much because they are hard to understand but because of the way they so soberly deal with God's judgment on sin. But as is often the case, in the very midst of judgment God also sows in the promise of redemption. Chapter three offers such grace beautifully. It advises the sinner not to make excuses before the Lord but rather to make a full admission of guilt and appeal for mercy. God will then stand ready to forgive and begin anew the right relationship we can share with Him in blessedness.

Jeremiah now moves from the metaphor to the testimonial. He speaks first hand as a witness yet also as one that has shared in the devastation of God's wrath. He is after all a Jew himself. In v. 2 and 6 the prophet speaks as though he were dead before the Lord. Death is the ultimate darkness. It is to be forsaken of God which is why hell is often described as darkness (Matt. 8:12; Eph. 6:12). Jesus, conversely, is described as the light against such darkness (Luke 1:79; John 1:1-5). V. 4 talks about the physical toll of suffering over sin. There is not escape from this judgment. We cannot hide from the Lord though we certainly try as did the first sinners who jumped into the bushes when the Lord came after their fall into sin. Like a black hole, nothing escapes; not even prayers (v. 8). Once more, God is depicted as the aggressor against sinners: the bear, the lion, the archer lying in wait to attack (vv. 10-13). Once again, the world taunts adding to the suffering.

V. 15 makes a possible allusion to the suffering of Christ while hanging on the cross. Jesus was offered the bitter wormwood and gall (vv. 15, 19) on the cross (see Psalm 69:21) as Jeremiah here must drink. Still true to this harsh lament, Jeremiah uses such strong phrases as "forgetting what happiness is" and "my endurance has perished, so has my hope from the Lord." This is anguish and despair at its lowest.

Then, finally, a reprieve. V. 21 offers a ray of light in the darkness: hope. The only thing greater than God's anger over sin is His love that never ceases. This is a paradox, one of many in Scripture. Only faith can perceive it. Jeremiah's certainty of God's ultimate love is likened unto an inheritance in v. 24. He invites the sufferer to become the penitent. Then the advice follows to be quiet and wait. Salvation will come. This is not the time for explanations or warnings or pitifully stated regrets. Really what is there to say when we have sinned so grievously. "Sorry" seems too little in such times. Jeremiah would tell us to "wait quietly" and "sit alone in silence". Reflect, "test and examine" (v. 40) without excuse "for the Lord will not cast off forever" (v. 31).

Judgment is God's "foreign" nature. He doesn't take sadistic delight in man's suffering (v. 33). His truest nature is His compassion but with that must also be His justice (vv. 32-36). Understanding this explains why consequences to sin must play out. "Good and bad" (v. 38) interweave by God's gracious will to call man back to Him and away from sin and eternal darkness. It is not that God hates us one minute and loves us the next like some fickle child. It is good to "bear the yoke" (v. 27) of true

repentance to know God's true love. Then as we draw near on bended knee we hear God say again, "Do not fear!" (vv. 55-57) We are pulled out of the pit of despair. A new day will dawn in God's unending love, a day fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ, where the pit of suffering has been filled in and closed. Hopefully, we will be the more wiser for it.

For Our Further Discussion:

1. How can silence serve as part of our repentance and meditation before the Lord?
2. How does Jeremiah resolve the paradox between God's wrath and love in chapter three? How do we understand these two conflicting natures to be from one and the same God?
3. How is "sorry" best said and when is there ever a time to wait to say it?