

SRM14023

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“When God Weeps”
Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

People have many reasons for weeping: loss of loved ones, but also loss of financial security, of work, of health.

The prophet Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because he constantly proclaimed God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, and yet he was also a prophet of hope, proclaiming oracles of salvation.

One of the passages that give him this name is [text]. In it we discover for the weeping of a man that weeps for God, but also we discover what it is that makes God Himself weep.

1. We weep when it seems God is absent.

When we suffer a loss, we weep, and wonder why God has not prevented the loss.

One of the assumptions we make is that a good God will only allow pleasing things to happen.

The first reason this is wrong is that some good things cannot happen unless they are preceded by loss: healings, restorations, deliverances.

The story is told of the only survivor of a shipwreck who was washed up on a small uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forth coming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect himself from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

But one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. He was stunned with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

Some good things cannot happen unless they are preceded by a loss,

Remember, next time your little hut is burning to the ground, it just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

The second reason it wrong to say that a good God will only allow pleasing things to happen is that God's purpose in creation is that He desires to have

a love relationship with us, and love is experienced through pain as well as pleasure.

Having said that, it is true that weeping and sorrow are more acute when we are out of touch with God.

A. Jeremiah grieves over a time in the near future when the people of Judah and Jerusalem will be taken from their homes and from fellowship with God.

Jeremiah 8:18-19a (NKJV) I would comfort myself in sorrow; My heart is faint in me. Listen! The voice, The cry of the daughter of my people From a far country: "Is not the LORD in Zion? Is not her King in her?"

The problem was idolatry. There was an awareness that God was not active among them, but they were turning to substitutes for God.

With prophetic vision, Jeremiah sees the people in "a far country", and his heart is "faint". He feels this loss deeply.

Though his prophecies are true, Jeremiah has no joy in speaking them.

The cry of the people may reflect either despair that God seems to have let them down ("How could this happen?"), or a presumptuous confidence that God is still "in their corner". [unpack]

B. V. 20 seems to be an expression of impatience with God; that a couple of occasions have passed when they expected God to "come through", but He has failed to rescue them: "The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!"

The people feel alone, cut off from God. We weep when it seems God is absent.

In his commentary, Dennis Bratcher writes, "Both of these statements from the people further reveal the depth of the problem. Not only have they been unfaithful to God, they are so preoccupied with their own agendas that they are totally oblivious to the message of destruction brought by the prophet."

"It is this total lack of concern with the word of God and the looming consequences of their actions that evoke the depth of pathos here. It is one thing to sin against the living God. It is quite another to do so habitually, arrogantly, and senselessly while saying "we have not sinned" (2:35), totally heedless of the destruction swiftly approaching!"

This brings us to God's diagnosis.

2. When we forget God, we begin to serve our Work or our World. V. 19b

"Why have they provoked Me to anger With their carved images-- With foreign idols?"

To their question, “Where is God?”, God answers, “Where have YOU been?”.

A. God can be provoked to anger.

As the Israelites were about to enter Canaan, God had said in Deuteronomy 9:6-7 (NKJV) “Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people. “Remember. Do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.”

B. What provokes God in v. 19b? Two things.

1. “With their carved images”. Idolatry is taking something that God or man has made, and serving it as you would a God.

People do this whenever they serve their work or their things or people more than they serve God.

2. The other provocation is “foreign idols”.

“Foreign idols” are imitations of the religious beliefs and practices of the world in which we live.

God has revealed Himself to be what He is, and is not amused when we begin to define Him according to the various theories of the world.

Bratcher: “Jeremiah saw the signs of unfaithfulness all around him. For some, unfaithfulness to God was outright sin: oppression, corruption, idolatry, lust.

“For others, unfaithfulness was trusting in the security they could amass by their own power or trusting in gods they could fashion with their own hands rather than truly trusting in God the Creator and ruler of all the universe.

“For some, unfaithfulness was a shallow religion that allowed them to believe what they wanted to believe about God. They saw God existing only to fulfill their own selfish dreams and ambitions. And some of the prophets were the worst because they proclaimed to the people what they wanted to hear.

“For others, unfaithfulness was a superficial religion that saw in the worship of God a magic formula to success, prosperity, and security (7:4, 8-10).

“And some were faithless because they had grown cynically indifferent to the things of God and thought none of it really mattered (5:12).

“The people continued to go through the motions of religion thinking that God was on their side.

They thought that Yahweh still dwelt peaceably in the Temple, and that they were secure because of God's presence. They did not know, indeed refused to know, that their religious systems were empty.”

The real tragedy was that Jeremiah never saw any sign of repentance or change of heart among the people during his entire 40-year ministry.”

C. How shall we understand God's attitude here?

Dennis Bratcher: “This is not anger because they have violated a law and now deserve to be prosecuted and punished for legal violation. This is anger because they have failed to establish the most basic of relationships between themselves and the one who had given them life and purpose in the world.

“The anger of the prophet (and God) does not stand alone here. It is not anger at legal transgression, but a profound anger that has deeper roots in sadness and grief. It is anger at the waste of a future created by God for these people, a future that they have squandered because they have refused to know God.

“While God may be provoked at their lack of knowledge, the result is profound grief and suffering because of the consequences of refusing to know.”

This brings us to the reason for God's weeping.

3. God weeps when we refuse His rescue. V. 22-9:1

A. God has offered healing for our lost condition: v. 22 “there no balm in Gilead, Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery For the health of the daughter of my people?”

“The people are portrayed as having a terminal disease that has ravaged and broken them, and yet they seek no cure and no physician. It is not that such help is unavailable. It is a rhetorical question.”

Howard Thurman: “The African American Spiritual changed that question mark to an exclamation mark, “there IS a Balm in Gilead!”

B. God weeps when we reject His remedy: Jer. 9:1 (NKJV) “Oh, that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people!”

Bratcher: “The despair and grief is clear in the jumble of emotive words and the striking metaphors associated with weeping. They intend to communicate profound anguish and sorrow. It is not so much the magnitude of the tragedy unfolding, as devastating as that would be. It is more the inevitability and finality of a tragedy that could have been avoided, of consequences that did not have to be, that evokes such pain.”

“The people have sinned, they have persistently refused to repent, and they will die because of their willfulness. And so the prophet weeps. And in doing so he reveals a God who also weeps.”

“The problems with which Jeremiah wrestled sound very up to date.

“We, as Christians, also carry a double message; death to sinners but hope in repentance through faith in Jesus Christ. We, too, see our message of hope largely ignored in our world, in our society and, yes sadly, in our churches as well. People reject God heedless of any consequences.”

It has been so since the Garden of Eden. “Indifference and non-involvement seem the order of the day in too many places.”

“But the real questions to ask ourselves as modern servants of God lie even beyond this. When our message is proclaimed and ignored, when we see the sin, the rejection of God and the unfaithfulness around us, do we weep with God? If it so hurt Jeremiah to offer hope and then see the people reject it; if it so hurt Jeremiah to realize that that rejection was a death sentence, should it not also hurt us? Do we weep with Jeremiah? Does God weep through us?”

“We find it easy to weep for the downtrodden and the oppressed, and we should. But do we weep for the oppressor?”

“If we, as Christians, as recipients of God's unmerited grace, we who claim to serve a God who defines himself as "love", if we do not weep for them, who will? There is an old proverb that says that only women, children, and fools, weep.

But Jesus wept! Luke 19:41-44 (NKJV) Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Why do I speak of all this weeping? When we come to Christ, the initial “joy turns to concern for others, and outward, outgoing love. And weeping. Real love must be shared, or it dies. But love hurts, because there is always a risk in loving.”

Bill Gaither captured this well in one of his songs:

There have been times when giving and loving brought pain;
And I promised I would never let it happen again.
But I found out that loving is well worth the risk;
And that even in losing you win!

Bratcher: “Our commission from Christ was not, "Follow me and be happy!" or "Follow me and be prosperous!" but "Take up your cross and follow me!" The cross was the ultimate symbol of what it meant to love. And love often hurts.”

“Oh, Jesus promised rest. “Come unto me all of you who labor and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” But notice, the promise is rest from labor. Not retirement, but rest; rest to carry another cross.

And what about joy? In John 15:11, after telling us to “remain in my love”, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

And he goes on in the next verse to say, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”

Bratcher: “The real joy comes through the sharing, through the suffering, through the bearing of other's burdens, through the weeping. Where there is weeping there is hope, because where there is weeping there is love going out to people in need. There is a sharing of pain and suffering.”

“Jeremiah lived to see his death sentence carried out. The nation, the people died because they did not return. But Jeremiah's faithfulness, his weeping, provided hope for the future. Later the people looked back and understood that the one who wept was the true servant of God, because that servant understood the hurt in the heart of God. Let us pray for the capacity to weep at the brokenness of our world.”

Action: Write down the name of someone you know who is in sorrow and out of touch with God.

Identify where you may be tempted to worship or serve your work or your world instead of God.

Pray every day this week (or more) for the person you know that is out of touch with God.