

Lamentations 3:19-26 Waiting

In-between my sophomore and junior years in high school, a group of runners from my cross country team went to Colorado with a collection of runners from other area schools to go backpacking in the Rocky Mountains. We hiked up above the tree line where the air is thin and were on the trail for five days in remote wilderness areas where there are no roads and where no one lives. One day as we were on the way we stared all day long at the snow melt in the mountains off in the distance. It looked like the horse shoe end of the Ohio St. Stadium only it was several miles across and the snow had melted in the shape of the United States of America. I took a picture, some of the youth might remember because it was a part of the scavenger hunt at the youth Christmas party last year.

On the last day at the end we came upon a very large pyramid like rock formation, twin peaks called the Maroon Bells because of what the light reflecting off of them does at different hours of the day and in different seasons. They are accessible on one side but the real beauty is in the back and to get to the best viewing areas one must hike for miles over rough terrain and high mountain passes. There is a lake that turns into a mirror and makes everything show up twice. It is a scene of heavenly beauty.

Lamentations

The Lamentations of Jeremiah envision the time in the history of Israel when the Kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and many of its people were taken into exile. If you really want to know how horrible it was, read the entire five chapters of Lamentations. The unthinkable had happened. Everything was lost. Everything was lost except hope and it was a struggle to find any of that. Even though the word “lament” refers to expressions of grief and sorrow, there is gospel in these pages. The chief “good news” discovery is that after the worst happens, whatever that is, God is still faithful. Nothing really important is lost. Hope is never lost. And right here in the middle of this book where this hope is expressed we learn that part of what hoping means is being willing to wait. The biblical theme of waiting reminds me of an old Tom Petty song called, “Waiting.” He says, “the waiting is the hardest part.”

Waiting

In the smaller, lower case sense, we are waiting for things to work out in our personal lives so that we can alleviate stress and experience inner peace. We want to have a sense of purpose because it helps us sleep better at night, not carry the weight of the world on our

shoulders. Because of our own bad decisions or those of others, that burden can be heavy. There is anxiety.

We are also waiting for things to work out in the world. We fear that some great harm might befall us like a war or some economic catastrophe that takes away our livelihood or breaks up the order of things that puts food at the grocers and clothes at the mall and cars at the dealers and gas at the station; money at the bank.

We are also waiting of the church to grow. There have been so many decades of decline in American Christianity, we are awaiting another awakening. The Church in the West is experiencing an ebb. We are waiting for it to grow again, and the forces that are holding it back are impervious to our designs. We are waiting for this ebb to end and get things flowing again.

In particular, we are waiting for more people to come here to FBC. I imagine that it has been quite some time since there has been an influx here, and even if there was one, it may not signal anything like a new awakening in our country. There are growing churches out there but very often they unwittingly take members from other churches and their growth masks a general decline. The Christian faith may be growing in other places, but by-and-large it is not growing here. The situation may not be as dire as some make it out to be, but we are waiting for it to change.

Larger Waiting

There is a great deal of stress associated with all this waiting and on the whole people are becoming less and less patient. This stress is a symptom of a larger waiting. This other kind of waiting is not affected by what happens in our lives or in the world.

This larger waiting is what the bible is all about, and it speaks to the deepest of all human needs, the need to be accepted and loved. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we see it spoken of as a journey that never ends in this life because it is like the kingdom that Jesus told Pilate he was the king of, not of this world. It is the Kingdom of heaven, it is the New Creation. We catch glimpses of it in this life but we are at a loss to pin it down. It can pin us down if we let it. That is what we are waiting for, for it to subdue us.

In the Park

I was walking on the asphalt track that encircles the soccer fields over by the YMCA the other day. The little children were playing soccer on one end, perhaps they were six-year-olds or so, and their practice was dismissed just as I was walking by. There was a man standing there and it was not hard to see that he was a parent of one of the small soccer players. As it turns out, he had a daughter with long brown hair. As I

walked by she came running over to him yelling, “Daddy, Daddy,” like she hadn’t seen him all day and she jumped into his arms. He was one of the reserved kind of fathers but I could still see the look on his face. It may as well have been Christmas to him. There isn’t much on this earth more beautiful than that sight and sound.

My guess at that point is that no matter who he had been earlier in his life and whatever he had done, he was going to wear his seat belt and drive the speed limit and show up to work on time and do his best so that he could take care of her and keep those Christmas like experiences happening as long as he could because the Lord knows she isn’t going to stay like that forever and the time is coming when she will turn into a teenager and then grow up and move away.

One does not have to be rich or powerful or handsome or educated to experience that glimpse. One does not have to hike for miles above the tree line to see it. It can happen to Republicans and to Democrats and no matter who wins in November. One would be willing to wait a whole lifetime for an experience like that and live off the memory of it for another life time. Moments like that are glimpses of heaven and it is hard to believe that anything that happens in heaven could be better. If Jesus told that story he would have put it in parable

form and said, “The Kingdom of heaven is like a little girl jumping up into her father’s arms yelling, “daddy.”

Babylon

When Judah was conquered by the Babylonians people like Jeremiah grieved and thought the world had reached its end. But even in exile they were able to have daughters, who, not knowing any better, got big enough to jump and yell, “daddy,” and in spite of the catastrophe they had their glimpse of heaven and not even the fall of a civilization could keep that from happening. Not even the Babylonian Exile could detract from the proclamation they made, one that doesn’t make sense to the scientific part of who we are. And that proclamation is that the universe is not really made from the elements on the periodic chart, but the goodness and beauty we catch glimpses of in mountain vista and running off of soccer fields at the end of practice. They called it love and insisted that it will make itself known to us and told us to wait for it,

“The Lord is good to the one who hopes in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

“Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions they never fail. They are new every morning.”

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