

Finding Hope in Times of Sorrow

Intro: When I was a boy Jimmy Thomas had a children's class with us and we used to play a Bible game called "Who am I?" He would describe a Biblical character and we would try to guess who the character was from the clues. I still remember this clue to one of the prophets, "He is called the weeping prophet;" and we knew from that clue that the answer was Jeremiah; but to tell you the truth most of us kids didn't have a clue why.

Later I would learn more about Jeremiah's life. His would be a life of great personal sorrow for two reasons:

First he experienced great mistreatment by his fellow-Israelites for his prophetic work in foretelling the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. His message of Israel's sin and impending judgment was not popular with either Israel's leadership or the masses. Consequently they treated him with great hostility.

Second he suffered greatly in seeing the devastation of his people and the city that he loved when the enemy invaders came to fulfill God's promised judgment.

All of this was enough to make any grown man cry. Jeremiah's sorrow is expressed in a five moving acrostic poems that together make up the book of Lamentations. Undoubtedly it is from the five elegies of this book that Jeremiah got the designation "the weeping prophet." He was literally. In the third elegy he wrote:

"My eyes run down with streams of water because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes pour down unceasingly, without stopping, until the LORD looks down and sees from heaven. My eyes bring pain to my soul because of all the daughters of my city." (Lamentations 3:48-51)

Weeping prophet indeed!

But the prophet who wept was also the prophet who found a way through sorrow through his great faith; and in his third lament (chapter 3) we can read one of the most stirring and reflective responses to sorrow and suffering in the entire Bible. What Jeremiah wrote has comforted many suffering people through the ages; and it will comfort you in your time of pain as well. Let's consider it together as study the lesson, "Finding Hope in Times of Sorrow."

Jeremiah's Sorrow and Response

Jeremiah begins the third lament with a moving description of his sufferings and sorrow that came from his mistreatment by his fellow Jews. In poignant phrases he describes his suffering. You may hear him say things that you also have thought in the darkest moments of life.

Jeremiah wrote:

*He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.
(Lamentations 3:2)*

He regarded his circumstances as a prison from which there was no escape:

He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy. (Lamentations 3:7)

He seems to search in vain for relief with no hope of recovery.

And my soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, "My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord." (Lamentations 3:17-18)

Yet in spite of all these painful feelings, Jeremiah was able to look past his pain and find hope again.

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. (Lamentations 3:21)

For Jeremiah real comfort and consolation were not found merely in venting feelings, but in spiritual remembrance. But what was it that gave Jeremiah hope in suffering?

Yet Jeremiah found hope in the character of God. The key that unlocked Jeremiah's prison of pain was the remembrance of who God was. He found hope:

In the lovingkindness of God

The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease (Lam. 3:22)

In the compassion of God

For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; (Lamentations 3:22-23)

In the faithfulness of God

Great is Thy faithfulness. (Lam. 3:23)

In the provision of God

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him." (Lamentations 3:24)

In the goodness and salvation of God

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. (Lam. 3:25-26)

In the discipline of God

It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is hope. Let him give his cheek to the smiter; Let him be filled with reproach. (Lamentations 3:27-30)

In the turning of God

For the Lord will not reject forever; for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the sons of men. (Lamentations 3:31-33)

Our Sorrow and Response

What Jeremiah wrote can give us a path out of our sorrow as well. We too may have times in life when we feel the same way Jeremiah did.

Could you relate to those words of sorrow? Sorrow can affect us

physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We may at times feel imprisoned in darkness with no escape, so overwhelmed with grief we may wonder if there will ever be a happy day again. What does Jeremiah's experience teach us?

Keep focusing on the character of God

Though our circumstances may be different from Jeremiah's, our God is the same unchanging God. He is gracious, compassionate, faithful and good. He never enjoys seeing His people suffer; but He may use it to accomplish greater purposes.

Learn the lessons of the experience of suffering.

I was particularly struck by the statement, "It is good that a man bear the yoke in his youth." Why does a young person in particular need to "bear the yoke"? Jeremiah apparently thought that young people would find an advantage in going through adversity early in life as a life-lesson for the whole of their lives.

Suffering teaches us!

...that our actions do have consequences.

...not to take so much for granted.

...to seize the blessings and opportunities of every day.

...to value what is good around us and be thankful for it.

...how to sympathize with and console others.

Be patient and wait on the salvation of God

There is a saying, "time heals all wounds". Maybe, but could I take the liberty to change that a little bit? "God heals all wounds in time". Jeremiah repeatedly commended three actions. We need to:

Seek Him!

Wait on Him!

Hope in Him!

Conclusion: One of our songs has put into words many verses of this part of Jeremiah's third lament: "Great is Thy Faithfulness". Let's sing it together.

Life has many sorrows; but there is hope for those who trust in God. Do you have such a relationship with Him?