

PART 6 – DON'T WASTE YOUR ISOLATION

Comfort in Crisis

We have all been reminded from time to time that the future is uncertain; but the last few weeks have demonstrated that concept in ways that none of us could have imagined! Six months ago, terms like “Coronavirus” and “COVID-19” weren’t even a part of our vocabulary. Now they seem to dominate nearly every conversation. These days, many of us are worried – understandably so – as infection rates and death tolls continue to rise.

As believers, we find comfort in such times from God’s holy word, the Bible. The prophet Jeremiah lived in a time of great distress. He had witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and seen the devastating results of his countrymen being deported to Babylon. The book of Lamentations is a record of his grief as he contemplated the disaster that had befallen his people. His words are instructive for us today in the face of this global pandemic. I would urge you to read the entire book (only 5 chapters); but let me just draw out a few “snippets” that give us a sense of what was going through his mind.

Look at the opening words of the book:

“How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she who was great among the nations!” (Lam. 1:1)

Just yesterday, some friends who live in Seattle WA sent us photos of the empty sidewalks in their city. It was a bit eerie looking but would pale in comparison to what Jeremiah must have observed about Jerusalem during his day. For Jeremiah and for us, such events are stark reminders of the futility of placing our trust in the commerce, success and prosperity of the world in which we live.

In chapter 2, verse 14 we read:

“Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.”

False prophets are nothing new in our day. They existed in Jeremiah’s time and will continue their evil practices until the end of the age. Our duty in times like this is to guard ourselves and our fellow believers against those who peddle “false and misleading oracles.” Many social media posts focus on a “god” who

wants to protect all of us from the devastation of disease and financial calamity. Such ideas generally find their roots in what is commonly known as the “prosperity gospel.” The fallacy of such teaching should be glaringly evident to all during this current crisis. If their message were true, we would expect so-called “faith healers” to be converging on hospitals and healing those who are afflicted. But when a real pandemic strikes, they are nowhere to be found. They are hunkered down in isolation just like all the rest of us.

Other false teaching is not so obvious. Some folks seem to specialize in explaining God’s purpose in all of this and want to impress us with their insights. Beware of such teachers.

Jeremiah points our thoughts in the right direction with these words in chapter 3:

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (3:21-23)

“For the Lord will not cast off forever, but though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love...” (3:31-32)

When faced with calamity, Jeremiah called to remembrance the never ceasing love and covenant faithfulness of his God. We should do likewise.

Oh, by the way...I started out by mentioning the uncertainty of the future. That was a misleading statement. The future is absolutely certain. Not from our perspective, but from God’s. To us it doesn’t seem that way – but from the divine perspective the future is as certain as if it had already happened. Listen to the words of another Old Testament prophet, Isaiah:

“...I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.’” (Is. 46:9-11)

The Christian’s true comfort in times of crisis comes not from the false sense of a grandfatherly god who wants only comfort and ease for his people, or from trying to get the inside scoop regarding all his plans and purposes. Rather, it is rooted in a quiet confidence that the God of the universe is working all things after the

counsel of his own will. Our job is to simply give him the glory due to his name in every situation we find ourselves – even in the midst of a pandemic.

Steve Arnold