

Sixth after Pentecost

June 28, 2015

Lamentations 3:22-33

The Silver Lining in the Clouds of Affliction

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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The prophet Jeremiah was witness to and victim of the fall of a once great nation. The nation, Israel, also was the visible church. God's civil, ceremonial and moral laws governed the people who chose to ignore those laws. Their disobedience and rebellion against the LORD their God brought swift and severe judgment.

Those who did love God and obey him got caught up in that judgment. They suffered as well. Thus, we have Jeremiah's lamentations amidst the ruins of Jerusalem. Still, the prophet saw **The Silver Lining in the Clouds of Affliction**. The LORD's compassions are new every morning. The LORD's compassions are constant every day.

You have heard people say about affliction, "Well, things could be worse." That would have been hard to say about Jerusalem in the last decade of the sixth century before Christ. The Babylonian army had besieged, dismantled, and carried away in pieces the Daughter of Zion. There was nothing left but an empty shell filled with poverty, grief, and starvation that led to cannibalism.

In the midst of those clouds of affliction, Jeremiah saw the silver lining. "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." V. 22, 23.

Jeremiah recognized God's great love and compassion. Those prevented God from consuming also the sinners' bodies and souls. Babylon had consumed and destroyed all the material possessions of the nation/church. Yet, God had spared these spiritual adulterers. Yes, their enemy had carried them off in chains to a strange land but their time of grace continued in the hope of their repentance.

The prophet recognized that it was not only the idolaters in Israel that deserved wrath and punishment. He and the faithful were no different. We all deserve God's judgment against our sin. The mercy and compassion of the LORD God that does not consume by unbelieving neighbor is the same mercy and compassion that does not consume me. It is God's mercy and compassion for us all in Jesus Christ.

"Every morning mercies new, fall as fresh as morning dew," the hymn writer noted. Were we to witness God's judgment against a nation, our nation for example, or against a visible church because of rebellion against his will and apostasy from his Word, we like Jeremiah would see the silver lining in the clouds of affliction. God does not consume us on account of our sins but gives us life in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is a misunderstanding to think God will punish a nation for evil as if he had been rewarding that nation for acting godly. The same is true with a visible church which we know is no longer the same thing as God's nation.

It is true that the nation is blessed whose God is the LORD, as David observed in Psalm 33... Yet that blessedness comes from God's daily mercy and compassion which never fail and are new every morning. That is the silver lining in the clouds of affliction we

Christians see out from under the crosses we must bear for the name of Christ. Rather than cower in fear and tremble in hopelessness when God's judgment falls, look for the silver lining. "I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'" V. 24

The silver lining in the clouds of affliction is also that the LORD's compassions are constant every day.

Jeremiah wrote, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young." V. 26, 27. It is good to learn early that affliction comes from God for our benefit and learning. It is discipline in the truest sense of the word disciple, which is student.

To that end the LORD's compassions are constant every day. How frustrating is inconsistent discipline? God does not love us and discipline us one day and then ignore us and let us go our merry way on the next day. As our crosses are with us daily so are his compassions. God's law as our guide does not change either. It is constant so we know exactly what to shun and what to embrace as his children today, tomorrow and the next day.

Jeremiah was faithful in his preaching of repentance even as he suffered disgrace and poverty for doing so. Many did not listen to him and finally faithfulness cost Jeremiah his life. Yet instead of fighting back, Jeremiah offered his other cheek for abuse. He buried his face in the dust but with hope in his heart.

This reminds us of our Savior, Jesus Christ, does it not? He suffered disgrace and shame on account of his message, even death on a cross. Yet Jesus remained faithful to his mission of saving us, of reconciling the world to God. Many mocked and rejected but Jesus was constant in his compassion for sinners. Jesus died with hope, the assurance his Father would receive him into heaven.

On this 4th of July weekend we might ask, Will God bring his harsh judgment down on our nation for ungodliness? Only God knows. If he does, he will take no pleasure in doing so. Jeremiah wrote, "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone." If he does, we know it is for discipline, for learning. In the midst of that affliction believers will see that silver lining. We will see the compassions our God displays even in the midst of judgment.

The LORD's compassions are new every morning and they are constant. We rely on God's compassion because of our sins and because of our salvation. Jeremiah lamented with tears of sorrow over sins and hoped with tears of joy over forgiveness in Christ. God's judgment fell on Jesus on the cross and God's love fell on Jesus by accepting his sacrifice and raising him from the dead.

Well done, Jeremiah. Well done, Jesus. Amen. <SDG>