

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A WORD FOR BARUCH AND FOR US ALL

(Chap. 45)

This beautiful though brief chapter of just five verses is pregnant with instruction for the children of God in all ages, and particularly for any who essay to serve the Lord in any public or official capacity.

Chronologically, it follows chapter 36, as the first verse makes plain: **“The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah.”**

The expression **“these words”** refers to the words penned by Baruch, at the prophet’s dictation, in the roll that was read before the king and his counselors, only to be contemptuously cast into the fire. Another copy, with added words, was then written by the same scribe.

Baruch had thus been an instrument, used of God to communicate His mind to others. His own soul must not be neglected, however; hence the message given him, as narrated in this portion of the Scriptures. It is of the greatest moment that those who minister to others be in a right state of soul themselves. Nothing is more dangerous than to go on giving out the truth of God, as suited to saint or sinner, while the heart is set upon self-seeking, or the private life of the servant is accompanied with unholiness and lack of humility before the Lord. It is this that leads to what another has most solemnly denounced as “trafficking in unfelt truth.” Only as the truth has power over one’s own heart and conscience can it be safely ministered to others.

In Baruch’s case, it would seem that he felt the king’s rejection of the Word of God as an insult aimed at himself and his master, rather than at the Lord who inspired the writing that was in the roll. The result was sore discouragement.

Therefore the prophet’s message: **“Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch: Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest”** (vers. 2, 3).

It was quite right that the son of Neriah should feel, and feel keenly, the wretched state of his people, and their departure from holiness and truth. Every godly soul must of necessity have thus felt. Jeremiah did, as we know; and Ezekiel, in vision, saw a mark placed upon the foreheads of the men who sighed and cried because of Jerusalem's abominations (Ezekiel 9). This was pleasing to God, and indicated a chastened spirit and divine sensibilities.

But the grief of Baruch is more personal, like that which threatened to consume the prophet himself, in chapter 15. It was prompted in large measure by disappointment. He had not received the recognition as the Lord's servant and the amanuensis of Jeremiah that he looked for. Hence he faints in the day of adversity, because his strength is small. He has not yet learned to deny himself, which is quite another thing to merely being self-denying. This latter thing he knew: the former he has not yet reached. Perhaps almost unknown to himself, and unseen heretofore even by Jeremiah, Baruch was seeking a measure of recognition from man.

It is so easy to slip into this, especially if one is serving the Lord in the gospel, or in teaching the children of God. There is the secret desire, often, to be accorded a place, with the corresponding grief when that place is refused and one's ministry is unacknowledged. Frequently this may be mistaken for sorrow because of the rejection of the Word of God; but in that case the soul finds refuge in the Author of that Word; and though tried, is not cast down, knowing that when the truth is proclaimed **"we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life"** (II Corinthians 2:15, 16).

It was not in this way that Baruch seemed to be affected. He felt the personal slight, the setting at naught, the despising of his ministry -always so hard for a sensitive soul to bear, if out of the presence of God. Therefore he fainted, and could find no rest.

But the Lord has been graciously considering his case, and has for him a needed word, both of admonition and of comfort. His is no harsh, unkind rebuke; no hard and severe scourging. Knowing full well that Baruch was, after all, seeking to honor Him, however he might have, well-nigh unconsciously, permitted self to have a place, He ministers a needed word in tenderness and love.

"Thus shalt thou say unto him," He says to Jeremiah, **"The Lord saith thus: Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land"** (ver. 4).

Surely, when all was so obnoxious to God, it was a specially improper scene for personal ambition. When the times were so evil, it was a specially improper season for self-seeking. One is reminded of Elisha's words to Gehazi after he had profited in a material way by his deception of Naaman: **"Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?"** (II Kings 5:26). Poor, wretched Gehazi had been planning for his own comfort in a day when judgment, like a destroying angel, was stalking through the land. How awful to be so engaged at such a time! In a similar way the apostle Paul also speaks to the Corinthians when he writes:

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (I Corinthians 7:29-31).

This was what, in his measure, Baruch needed to learn. God was about to bring the then present order of things to an end in judgment, as He will soon bring the age in which we live to a close by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him, to be followed by the opening of the seven-sealed book of His indignation, when wrath to the uttermost must fall on apostate Christendom.

For Baruch it was no time to be occupied with self-seeking, or to be troubled because he failed to gain the respect of a people who had so grievously departed from their God. And what shall be thought of a professed servant of Christ, sent to testify against the unspeakable corruptions of this age, expecting to be honored by the unspiritual for so doing? Such an one has quite failed to appreciate the call of God, and the condition of the world fast ripening for the judgment about to fall upon it. But the Lord goes on to give His servant a watchword that may well be kept in mind by all who endeavor in any way to contend for the faith once delivered. **“And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not”** (ver. 5).

A suited motto this for each of us. How apt is the heart to crave “great things;” but in doing so, how unlike the servant becomes to the Master who “pleased not Himself,” but could say, **“I do always those things that please Him;”** and again, **“I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.”** And does not the position He took when down here determine our only proper one? What was it, then, as to the world? Alas, He was ever the Rejected One!

For Him there was **“no room in the inn”** at His birth; no place among the great in His life; and when dead, only room in a borrowed tomb. He was always the outside One - always getting wrongs instead of His rights; as one has said, always in a different path from that of the **“dwellers on the earth”** in His day of humiliation. And yet it might have been so different - if one dare allow the thought. He need not have taken the place of rejection they gave Him. He could justly have claimed and acted upon the rights that were truly His. Had there been in Him an atom of self-seeking (which there was not, for He was the Holy One of the Father), He might have claimed a place among the mighty here, as others did. All the kingdoms of earth and the glory of them were offered Him; but on what conditions? Conditions which involved some violation of the Word of God. How utterly abhorrent, this, to the Holy One of God! (Oh that we were more like Him)! And so, faithfulness to God kept Him ever the Rejected One, till at last He suffered outside the gate. Let us ever remind ourselves that this is the One to whom we owe everything for eternity, whose loving-kindness is better than life, and who **“also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to ‘sin,’ should live unto righteousness”** (I Peter 2:21-24).

Do we, then, desire a place where He had none? Can we desire it so much that we will have it despite the fact that we must disobey His Word and grieve His Holy Spirit to get it; and knowing that if, like Him, we seek only to be faithful to God, we never can obtain it? Is it really worth so much to be thought well of by sinful men and foolish saints? Will it appear so when we stand at His judgment-seat and gaze upon His face? Ah, better, far better, to be poor and despised here and have His approval than to seek great things for ourselves and lose His smile of approbation! Our “great things” are coming by and by. Let our faith lay firm hold of these. Till then may we have grace to truly say,

“We’d not have joy where He had woe,
Be rich where He was poor.”

If tempted to turn aside from the narrow path of subjection to the truth for an easier path, or to be better thought of in a world like this, let us remember these words to Baruch; if “great things” attract and would lure us on, remember the words - “Seek them not.”

The Lord adds, **“For, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh; . . . but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest”** (ver. 5). No harm could come to Baruch, let men rage as they might, while God was His protector. Famine, sword and pestilence may destroy, but he should be preserved. He lived in a dispensation when temporal blessing was a sign of the divine favor. With us, in this spiritual dispensation, our blessings are of a different character. Precious it is to know that even though the body might be destroyed, yet nothing can touch the eternal life of the Christian; and even as to the body,

“Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of love sees fit.”

He who bids us not to seek great things for ourselves undertakes to carry us on, and has declared, **“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”** So that we may boldly say, **“I will trust and not be afraid.”**

~ end of chapter 23 ~

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