

A Painful Promise

Long Beach Alliance Church November 30, 2014 • Pastor Chris Lankford

And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

~Romans 15:12-13 (ESV)

1) **Unreachable Longings**

- A) The prophet Jeremiah’s words, “Behold, the days are coming...” captures the essence of the Advent season (Jeremiah 33:14). The words carry promise, hope, a focus toward something better. But...
- B) The promise to Jeremiah seemed preposterous, a vision of the future made impossibly remote because Israel was being led by a puppet king (Zedekiah) of the Babylonian Empire. Succumbing to pressure, Zedekiah unwisely chose to rebel against Babylon. Jeremiah warns King Zedekiah against his rebellion and prophetically predicts Zedekiah’s defeat, resulting in Jeremiah’s imprisonment by Zedekiah (Jeremiah 27-32).
- C) Further, the promise to God’s people (33:14-16) centered on the famed Davidic Kingdom (from 375-400 years earlier), which made it seem even more ridiculous. Davidic leadership reflects poorly in Jeremiah because of its exploitation and unfaithfulness to God.
- D) In Jeremiah, God’s people are lost sheep, the sad products of David’s selfishness and sin. The Davidic legacy is a spiritually lost people who violate the Covenant, lack justice, and live in a world gone mad with sin.
- E) Jeremiah’s prophetic words look to a future day. Despite all odds, God will bring redemption. There will be justice again, and David’s legacy will count again because God will accomplish His promises. Jerusalem, representing the presence of the Lord, will finally be called “righteousness,” a prophecy of a future Messiah’s righteous presence!

- F) Of course, before things get better, God allows King Nebuchadnezzar to crush Jerusalem, burning the city and Temple to the ground. The Temple is looted of its golden holy implements (cups, plates, etc., used for worship/sacrifices) and the people are exiled to far away Babylon.
- G) Jeremiah's words are swallowed up in death, destruction, and the humiliation of exile. Israel is suddenly the minority, overwhelmed, and serving Babylonian culture as slaves. Deep darkness falls on Israel, as the pain of sin is revealed among her people. But, "days are coming..."

2) Before Promise There Is Always Pain

- A) Southern California environment is relatively good. Pain and difficulty are very far from most of our hearts.
- B) Most of us are very comfortable. Our comfort doesn't come from complacency or from apathy. Rather, most of have worked very hard to achieve our creature comforts. "I'm good," we tell ourselves...
- C) But have you, like me, been watching our world? The world is going mad. ISIS, the Taliban, the Ebola virus, and racial tensions in Ferguson; the world spirals into chaos quickly and often.
- D) And in reality, you and I DO face a lot of pressures. Sure, we face first-world problems, but still, they really are problems! Typically, we face:
 - i) Financial issues. Average credit card debt is \$7K/household. Student Loan debt. Mortgage debt. Impending Christmas season, and the pressure to spend what we do not have in our consumption.
 - ii) Food Issues. One out of three people feed their anxieties, emotional/spiritual pain, and deeper desires with consumption of food. Obesity and overeating are rampant. We are like Adam & Eve, eating what we shouldn't because we don't want to miss one little thing in running our own lives our own way.
 - iii) Pornography Issues. Pornography consumption hooks kids at an average age of 11 years old. Yes, 5th-6th graders. Pornography use among Christians is shockingly high, making its greatest advances among women and teenagers. Worst sin epidemic in church history.
- E) How can we answer such a devastating depth of darkness? Indeed, once again we must cling to the Scriptures, "Behold, days are coming..." Advent begins with repentance, fasting, and sincere hope.