



Jer. 14:19-22
Waiting for God

19 Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have You stricken us so that there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but there was no good; And for the time of healing, and there was trouble.

20 We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness And the iniquity of our fathers, For we have sinned against You.

21 Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake; Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember, do not break Your covenant with us.

22 Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are You not He, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait for You, Since You have made all these.

In Samuel Beckett's absurd nihilistic play, "Waiting for Godot" the two main characters Vladimir and Estragon are two bums who spend the whole time "Waiting for Godot." The problem is that Godot never comes; a boy comes to tell them that Godot will not come back that night, but will surely return the next night. The implication is that their faith is in vain, Godot will never come because he doesn't exist and their lives are pointless and without meaning. Beckett, an Irish atheist who preferred to live in France, meant for *Godot* to symbolize God, and Beckett did not believe God exists, therefore the lives not only of Vladimir and Estragon, who are supposed to symbolize believers, but of everyone else in the world were absurd and pointless. The only question was how to fill the boring and meaningless time between being born and dying.

Beckett, perhaps uncertain that people had gotten his point, tried to make it again even more bluntly in his play "Breath." Breath is only 35 seconds long, and had no actors at all. James Sire describes it this way: "*The Props consist of a pile of garbage on the stage lit by a light that begins dim, brightens (but never fully), and then recedes to dimness. There are no words, only a recorded cry opening the play, an inhaled breath, an exhaled breath, and an identical recorded cry closing the play.*" That was life to Beckett, we are born in pain, we live a short meaningless life consisting of unimportant garbage and then we die in despair. The end.

Now I know what you are probably thinking at this point: *people paid money to see those plays?* The answer is yes and they were tremendously important when they were written. People who were impressed by those plays and share Beckett's worldview teach in our colleges and high schools, and we wonder why the world is so messed up? But Beckett did understand something missed by most atheists today and indeed throughout history, namely that if God doesn't exist, life is indeed meaningless and absurd and human suffering is ultimately pointless. The apostle Paul knew that as

well, he knew that if, as Beckett believed, Christianity was just a myth, then it had no value, which is why he wrote in 1 Cor. 15:13-19:

1 Cor. 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

If all our faith is just faith in faith, a belief in a Christ who died, and didn't rise and can't help us, then we are most to be pitied for we have put our trust in a lie. Our hope would be in a God who doesn't hear us and can't help us. We would be like Vladimir and Estragon waiting on a God who isn't coming. That is why Paul spends so much time in the rest of the chapter explaining that the resurrection really did happen, that people did see the risen Christ, that he really did appear to over 500 in the flesh and that therefore our faith in His Return is certain is well-founded:

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:20)

This real faith in the real God who created everything can carry us through the most difficult of times. It was that faith in the God of Israel that sustained Jeremiah.

On the other hand, faith in an idol is pointless, as the psalmist makes clear in ***Psalms 135:15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, The work of men's hands.***

16 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see;

17 They have ears, but they do not hear; Nor is there any breath in their mouths.

18 Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.

The Gods of the Canaanites couldn't hear, they couldn't answer and they couldn't help. In times of drought they couldn't send rain. Jeremiah knew that and labored to bring that fact home to the people of Israel. The God of Israel, on the other hand really existed, He had made the world, He had visited his people, He had redeemed them from Egypt, He had brought them into the promised land and He had talked to them again and again. He had also done mighty deeds before them. The very fact that they existed as a nation and hadn't been swept away was entirely due to the fact of God's fatherly protection.

What a contrast that is with all of the nations of Canaan! They have all disappeared; the Philistines, the Moabites, the Amalekites, the Amorites, the Edomites, and all the other "ites" are gone along with their useless idols, Dagon, Chemosh, Baal, Ashtoreth. All of them are gone. That wasn't a coincidence, if it had not been for the protecting power of the only true God - the God who is there - then the Israelites would have disappeared as well.

The court chaplain of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, was asked by his royal master to prove the Bible really was the Word of God in a single word. He answered, with the word Juden – the Jews. And Frederick the Great understood immediately what he meant. If the Bible had not been true

then the Jews would never have been preserved. There would have been no family of David for Jesus to be born from. Long ago, they would all have perished.

Jeremiah knows God is there, that he hears, and answers and that, sinful as they are, Judah was still His people. Sometimes that can create a situation for believers that is even more confusing than if there were no God. I mean if there is no God, there is no more reason why good things should happen than bad things. Rain or drought, war or peace, sickness or health, it was all utterly by chance. So asking “Why do these things happen?” would not help. There could be no reason.

But if we know there is a God, often we find ourselves crying out to Him “WHY?” Why are these things happening? Why, asks Jeremiah, is there no relief from the calamities that are befalling us? In the past, yes we experienced chastening for our sins, but then there was a time of relief, but not this time. As Matthew Henry put it: ***“They were smitten, and their wounds were multiplied, but there was no healing for them; they looked for peace, because after a storm there usually comes a calm and fair weather, after a long fit of wet; but there was no good, things went still worse and worse. They looked for a healing time, but could not gain so much as a breathing time.”***

Jeremiah’s problem is more acute in one sense than that of an unbeliever. You see, the unbeliever doesn’t think he deserves wrath but Jeremiah knows that they do. But Jeremiah also knows God to be a God of love and mercy. Yes, He chastens, but He also relents and sends times of revival, refreshing, reformation, and relief. But not this time. This time it’s nothing but drought, famine, pestilence, and war again and again. So Jeremiah asks God, “have you finally rejected us?”

And then he intercedes for them, and he begins with repentance. Unlike the unregenerate individual, Jeremiah doesn’t come before God with pride in his heart saying something like ***“I don’t deserve this, I’m not as bad as other people, stop treating me like I’m Hitler. I’ve prayed, now God do your part and take these problems away!”*** Instead he repents for himself and the people, “we have sinned”, and not just us our fathers before us. And then he throws himself on God’s mercy. He prays very much like Moses in interceding for the people at Sinai in reminding God of His Covenant Promises to Israel, reminding Him also that the nations might see and conclude that God was not strong enough to save His people. Also, Jeremiah asks God not to disgrace His throne. That was a reference to the Temple, which was intended to be a picture of God’s throne room in heaven. It was at the Temple that the Lord heard the supplications of his people, and received their sacrifices.

Finally, Jeremiah confesses that there is no other to whom they can go for relief, no other God, no other source. All they can hope in is HIS mercy. Therefore they must wait to hear His answer. They will wait on the Lord. As David had cried out in Psalm 27:13-14 ***“I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.***

14 Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!”

Applications:

- 1) In times of trial, this is the right thing to do, we have no cause to despair while there is a God in heaven who hears us and who will answer us for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ.

“It is then the same as though the Prophet had said, “We, O Lord, do now flee to thy mercy, for no one but thou alone can help us, as thou art he

who has punished our sins. Since then thou hast been our Judge, thou also canst alone deliver us now from our calamities; and no one can resist thee, since the highest power is thine alone. Let all the gods of the heathens unite, yea, all the elements and all creatures, for the purpose of serving us, yet what will all that they can do avail us? As then thou hast made all these things, that is, as these things have not happened to us by chance, but are the effects of thy just vengeance — as thou hast been judge in inflicting these punishments, be now our Physician and Father; as thou hast heavily afflicted us, so now bring comfort and heal those evils which we justly suffer, and indeed through thy judgment.” We now understand the real meaning of the Prophet.

And hence may be learned a useful doctrine, — that there is no reason why punishments, which are signs of God’s wrath, should discourage us so as to prevent us from venturing to seek pardon from him; but, on the contrary, a form of prayer is here prescribed for us; for if we are convinced that we have been chastised by God’s hand, we are on this very account encouraged to hope for salvation; for it belongs to him who wounds to heal.” — Calvin

2) In times of trouble, we must not seek to bargain with God, but to go to him in repentance, acknowledging our sins, and wrestling with him in prayer. We must not give up. We must wait upon His answer and we must heed the advice of Christ to be importunate in our prayers – keep asking.

There is no other who can help us, certainly not idols or creations of our own hands, or the idols our culture is awash with today. We can forget this and trust entirely in worldly means, I often fall into that trap. We can trust in money or strength or power or technology or politics or medicine or armies, Judah was a testimony to the fact that without God, none of these things will avail. Western society tells the same story. We are society like Estragon and Vladimir waiting for Godot, only in this case Godot is the Utopia that the Materialists assure us will come in time via Science and Progress and Evolution. Men have trusted to long in modern science and supposed societal evolution to cure their ills. These idols can no more save a nation than Baal or Chemosh. We must wait on God. Nothing else will avail.