

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"The Lion Kings"

19:1-14

When Princess Diana died, Elton John adapted *Candle in the Wind* and performed it for her funeral. It was a lament for her untimely death.

Chapter nineteen of Ezekiel is a lament:

Ezekiel 19:1 "Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel,

Ezekiel 19:14 ... This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

The thing to bear in mind, that adds to our listening, is that this is God's lament. He spoke through Ezekiel, but it reveals His heart for His wayward, disobedient people.

Ezekiel 19:1 "Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel,

A "lament" is some verbal expression of great grief or sorrow. It should not surprise us that God can be grieved by the actions of His people.

Ephesians 4:30 tells us to not grieve the Holy Spirit, who is God. In the context of Ephesians chapter four, we grieve the Spirit by living like the pagans (4:17-19), by lying (4:25), by being angry (4:26-27), by stealing (4:28), by cursing (4:29), by being bitter (4:31), by being unforgiving (4:32), and by being sexually immoral (5:3-5).

To grieve God is to act out in a sinful manner, whether it is in thought only or in both thought and deed. God was grieved and was lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem.

It's predictive of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem in the New Testament:

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

Matthew 23:38 See! Your house is left to you desolate;

Matthew 23:39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'BLESSED is HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' "

I think it's important we understand that God laments. Sin is always awful, but I think sometimes we picture God as dispassionate in relation to sin. We might see Him as a judge in a courtroom who is supposed to keep himself under control, showing little or no emotion as he goes through the motions of meting out justice.

If I understand that my sin will grieve my Lord I may think more carefully about committing it. If I love Him, I will not want to grieve Him.

Laments often employ analogies - like a person's life being a candle in the wind. One thing I've been trying to do at funerals I officiate is to use the deceased's occupation as some sort of an analogy. It helps to communicate the Gospel with those who've gathered.

For example: Years ago we buried a dear sister who died young from cancer. She had been employed in a position with the County where she qualified applicants for certain benefits that were available. I spoke about what 'qualifies' or 'disqualifies' a person from the benefits of eternal life. It was something her co-workers could immediately relate to.

Someone in our fellowship told me about a funeral for a friend. The deceased was an auto-detailer. The pastor spoke about how he would meticulously rub-out the stains in the fabric of vehicles until they were gone. He applied it to Jesus rubbing-out the stain of human sin by shedding His blood on the Cross.

Analogies, figures, metaphors, examples - they can be very effective at sharing the Good News.

The lament in our text is given to Ezekiel in two figures. The first is that of a lioness and her cubs; the second, a vine and its rods.

Let's read about the lioness in verses two through nine.

Ezekiel 19:2 and say: 'What is your mother? A lioness: She lay down among the lions; Among the young lions she nourished her cubs.

Ezekiel 19:3 She brought up one of her cubs, And he became a young lion; He learned to catch prey, And he devoured men.

Ezekiel 19:4 The nations also heard of him; He was trapped in their pit, And they brought him with chains to the land of Egypt.

Ezekiel 19:5 'When she saw that she waited, that her hope was lost, She took another of her cubs and made him a young lion.

Ezekiel 19:6 He roved among the lions, And became a young lion; He learned to catch prey; He devoured men.

Ezekiel 19:7 He knew their desolate places, And laid waste their cities; The land with its fullness was desolated By the noise of his roaring.

Ezekiel 19:8 Then the nations set against him from the provinces on every side, And spread their net over him; He was trapped in their pit.

Ezekiel 19:9 They put him in a cage with chains, And brought him to the king of Babylon; They brought him in nets, That his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.

The "lioness" represents the tribe of Judah. Her "cubs" would therefore be the kings of Judah. Since we know the immediate history of Israel at the time Ezekiel was writing, we can identify the two "cubs" who became "young lions" in this analogy.

The first was Jehoahaz (also called Shallum or Jeconiah). Josiah's third son, he succeeded his father on the throne and reigned over Judah for three months. He fell into the idolatrous ways of his predecessors, was deposed by Pharaoh Necho from the throne, and carried away prisoner into Egypt, where he died in captivity.

After Jehoahaz the next "cub" referenced seems to be Jehoiachin (also called Coniah). He was carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, along with the flower of the nobility, all the leading men in Jerusalem, and a great body of the general population, some thirteen thousand in all. He remained a prisoner for thirty-seven years, after which he was released.

An interesting historical note: Deposed kings were often caged, chained in the cage, and left on display for some time. They were literally treated as if they were wild beasts.

Here were the kings of Judah. God intended them to rule in majesty, as lions among men. Instead they acted more like jackals. So the Lord dealt with them on a very visceral level, treating them like the beasts they had become.

Jehoiachin was the last king of Judah. From that time til the coming of Jesus the Jews had no monarch. Then they rejected the Lord at His first coming. For more than twenty-five hundred years Israel's throne has been vacant, awaiting the second coming of the Son of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Some suggest that the outward failure of the succession of kings contradicts the promise of Genesis 49:10, which says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be."

The solution seems to be that the promise in Genesis is not of an unbroken succession of kings seated on a throne in Jerusalem but a promise that the true King will be from the tribe of Judah. The Hebrew word *shiloh* can be rendered, "whose it is," meaning the scepter would not depart from the line of Judah, "whose it is."

The second lament uses a second analogy.

Ezekiel 19:10 'Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline, Planted by the waters, Fruitful and full of branches Because of many waters.

Ezekiel 19:11 She had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick branches, And was seen in her height amid the dense foliage.

Ezekiel 19:12 But she was plucked up in fury, She was cast down to the ground, And the east wind dried her fruit. Her strong branches were broken and withered; The fire consumed them.

Ezekiel 19:13 And now she is planted in the wilderness, In a dry and thirsty land.

Ezekiel 19:14 Fire has come out from a rod of her branches And devoured her fruit, So that she has no strong branch - a scepter for ruling.' " This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

The nation is pictured as a “vine” producing a “bloodline” of fruitful “branches for scepters of rulers.” Certainly David and Solomon come to mind - the kings who brought Israel to her greatest fruitfulness.

But after the death of Solomon, the kingdom split in two and God had now “planted” them in the “wilderness” of Babylon.

Israel had everything she needed to prosper. Speaking of the privileged position of the Jews, the apostle Paul said (in Romans 9) “to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises, of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came...”

It was an amazing foundation upon which to build a walk with the Lord. Instead, the people, and here especially the kings, grieved the Lord.

I’m reminded that, in the New Testament, Christians are promised all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. We are told we have all we need for life and godliness. The Holy Spirit insists that all of our enemies been defeated at the Cross of Jesus Christ.

- Sin was defeated at the Cross when Jesus said, “It is finished!” He paid a debt He did not owe because you and I owed a debt we could not pay.
- Hell was defeated at the Cross. Afterward, when Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth to lead the souls in Hades home to Heaven. We are saved from Hell for Heaven for eternity.
- Death is defeated in that to be absent from the body is to be immediately present with the Lord. If the worst thing that can happen to me is that I die, I am in a quandary because death is preferable to life. Nevertheless, my life belongs to the Lord so I wait upon Him to take me home.

These laments... It was as if a funeral was taking place. Was there no hope?

Not for deliverance from Babylon. God had decreed they would go *through* the seventy years of captivity. He would not keep them *from* it.

Such powerful images were necessary because the people were holding out hope that the current ruler, the appointed governor, Zedekiah, would somehow get them free of Babylon.

These laments utilized a different literary genre to say what we read in Psalm 146:3-6.

Psalms 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.

Psalms 146:4 His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.

Psalms 146:5 Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the Lord his God,

Psalms 146:6 Who made heaven and earth, The sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever,

It's a good psalm for us to bear in mind. We are in some pretty tough times right now. I'm feeling it; the church, corporately, is feeling it. Maybe you are, too.

Maybe things will improve; ***maybe they won't!***

We have God for our help. He may deliver us *from* these hard times, or He may lead us *through* them.

Either way, may we be "happy" He is our "help" and look to no other person or source.