

Lk 2:22-34; Lam 3:16-26 - Are We Waiting for the Right Thing?

First Sunday after Christmas - 27 December 2020

TEXT

Lam 3:16 [The Lord] has broken my teeth with gravel;

he has trampled me in the dust.

¹⁷I have been deprived of peace;

I have forgotten what prosperity is.

¹⁸So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."

¹⁹I remember my affliction and my wandering,

the bitterness and the gall.

²⁰I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

²¹Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

²²Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,

for his compassions never fail.

²³They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

²⁴I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

²⁵The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,

to the one who seeks him;

²⁶it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

Luk 2:22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him [Jesus] to

Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

³³The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against.

Introduction

It's almost over. The year 2020. Many people have been waiting for this year to be over. It seems they will heave a sigh of relief rather than celebrate on New Year's Eve. Indeed this past year has been filled with tragedy and death, from a pandemic, from racial injustice and reactions to it, from super storms and fires. And yet what changes when we flip the calendar page? (Does anyone do that anymore?) When 2021 comes, the Covid-19 virus will still be around, storms and fires will still come, angry, vindictive, and violent people will still attack. And we all will still have a sinful nature which can and will act out.

So what are we waiting for? Are we waiting for the right thing? What should we be waiting for? The men in our two texts give us direction in what

we should be looking for. So let's see what they were anticipating and what we can wait for that is truly certain and good.

ARE WE WAITING FOR THE RIGHT THING?

I.

Two Men Waiting for Salvation

Today we hear about two men in two very different times and situations. Jeremiah, almost certainly the writer of the book of Lamentations, was in or near Jerusalem after the Babylonians had destroyed the city, including the temple, and taken most people into exile, over 500 years before Jesus was born. Simeon was in Jerusalem, in the courts of the temple rebuilt twice since that destruction. Jeremiah concludes, "*It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.*" Simeon "*was waiting for the consolation of Israel*" and from his lips we hear, "*You [Lord] may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation.*" Jeremiah and Simeon were waiting for salvation.

Salvation is one of those words we Christians use a lot. Others may not understand what we mean, and we ourselves may not stop to consider what it all includes. In its basic sense it is "the act of saving or protecting from harm, risk, loss, destruction, etc." Waiting for salvation means recognizing that you are facing harm and destruction, and implies that you can't get out of it yourself. Jeremiah, while a believer himself, lamented how Jerusalem had been destroyed because most of its people refused to listen to God, who was calling them to repentance. They were offered, many times, the opportunity to turn away from their evil and be saved from the coming destruction, but they would not. Now they were languishing in exile hundreds of miles away. Simeon, also a devout believer, was looking for salvation, which implies he recognized his situation of being less than holy and separated from God because of his sins. Like all people, he faced destruction, which he couldn't avoid on his own. So he waited for salvation because he knew he was facing destruction by a holy God without it.

What about Us?

As we wait for the end of 2020, are we waiting for salvation because we recognize our lost condition? Why do we fear getting sick with Covid and dying from it or fear being caught in a flood or hurricane and dying? We know we can't face our holy Maker in our present condition. Some will try to claim there is no God to give answer to, but only a fool says that. Our conscience tells us otherwise, the universe tells us otherwise.

The best way to face the new year is with a repentant heart, a heart that recognizes we have sinned, but a heart that waits quietly for God's salvation.

II.

Two Men Seeing Salvation

Unlike Jeremiah and Simeon, we don't have to wait like they did; we can look up and clearly see how God's salvation has come. We celebrate how that story began at Christmas. Now we just look up. What is that in the front of our church? Even our children know, that is a cross. It is in fact a place of death, the place where God's Savior died for us, to save us. The cross stands there as an instrument of execution, like a guillotine or a gallows, and an execution did take place there, but it is empty, it is done. The God man who died there has come back to life. Sin has been paid for. Death has been overcome. These are the main problems, the overriding malady, of the human race.

Even while Jeremiah was lamenting over the rubble and desolation of Jerusalem, he knew that God had plans to bring his people back to this city in 70 years and rebuild it and rebuild the temple. He waited for that, he knew for certain it was going to happen, even though he never got to see it. It was a picture of the salvation Jesus would bring. And we know it happened that way, just as God had said. Just as the people of Judah were held in hostage by the Babylonians, the human race is held hostage by sin, death, and the devil. Even as the people were finally saved from that exile to return to their home country, the human race has been saved from sin, death and, the evil. And even not all of the people of Judah chose to return to Palestine, not all people turn away from sin to the forgiveness God has for them.

Simeon looked ahead to the crucifixion of Jesus, which would take place some thirty years after he spoke these words in the temple. He knew there would be people who would stumble because of Jesus, reject him, execute him. Others would believe him and follow him and be saved. It would be a sorrowful time for his mother, but as one who believed in him, she would accept it. In her own special song, she had rejoiced in God her Savior, who carried out his saving act for us through sacrificing his Son on this cross. Simeon probably did not know all the exact details of how this would be carried out, but he quietly waited for God's salvation, and was ready to depart just having seen the baby who would grow up and carry out this salvation.

What about Us?

While we can look back and see how this salvation was carried out, we still do wait for the culmination of God's salvation, when Jesus returns to raise us from the dead and take us to heaven to live with him there in total joy and bliss. No more pandemics, no more floods and hurricanes, no more devastating fires, no more murders or robberies, no more evil people. Yes, we ourselves will be stripped our sinful nature and confirmed in holiness.

So we can go into 2021 quietly waiting for the culmination of our salvation. We can go through much suffering on our way. But that doesn't mean we ignore this world and its problems. God has work for us to do here. Jeremiah faced much suffering. He was ridiculed and mocked for predicting that

Jerusalem would be destroyed. His preaching of repentance fell on mostly deaf ears. He was thrown in a cistern to die, and rescued from it to sit in prison until the king of Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem. His life was spared, but he had to witness the destruction of his city and temple and see its desolation. He had work to do. He continued to call people to repentance, to faith, to waiting for God's salvation. As in Elijah's, when there were still 7000 believers though God's cause looked lost, there were certainly some who listened to Jeremiah, but for the most part he didn't know them. And in any case, God has long since carried him off to heaven where he enjoys the salvation he waited for.

In the new year we will continue to face restrictions and economic problems because of the novel corona virus, there will be more storms and fires, there will be murders and evil all around. We will face the death of loved ones. We ourselves may face death this year. But if we are waiting for God's salvation, we will welcome it, though it is terrible to go through.

In the meantime, we will carry out the work God has placed before us. We may have a family to provide for or care for. There are young to be taught, things to be made for this life, business to conduct so this life can go on smoothly.

But especially there is the need to focus on waiting for God's salvation, the need to remind ourselves that we are sinners, to bask in the news that Jesus was born, lived a perfect life for us, paid the price for our sins, conquered death so that it is no longer fearful for us. And as we get refreshed in our faith, we will be like Jeremiah and Simeon, telling others about God's salvation, even when it means suffering and opposition. Others need this news in our present world, though many will reject it.

CONCLUSION

But it is good to remember that a large part of our life as believers in Jesus is waiting, quietly waiting for his salvation. This doesn't mean doing nothing. Knowing that faith comes from hearing the word of Jesus, in the new year we drink in God's through which God saves us, coming together when we can to hear it, sitting at home hearing it, letting it work in our hearts, waiting for it to change and strengthen our hearts, waiting for it to change our attitude and lives. Then we will put that change to work in our lives because God saves and changes us, seeking ways to do good and tell others of Jesus and his word. We continue to live in a sin-ravaged world, and we will continue to face suffering and persecution. But we have joy and peace in our hearts, knowing our sins are forgiven, our guilt is removed, and we are eternally part of God's holy family. Wait patiently for the culmination of his salvation when he comes to take us home. We repeat Jeremiah's words, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." Amen.