

SERMON: WHEN THE SCOREBOARD AIN'T LOOKING GOOD

Lamentations 3:19-26

(19) Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. (20) My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. (21) This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. (22) It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassion fail not. (23) They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness. (24) The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. (25) The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. (26) It is good that a man should both hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Introduction

This is "Wear-Your-Jersey" Day. First, let me start with a disclaimer. I was born in Alabama, so I like the Crimson Tide. I lived in Mississippi for eleven years so, I like Ole Miss and Mississippi State. I lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, for several years, and I like the LSU Tigers. I have lived in Georgia since 1984, and I watch the Dawgs when time permits. Of course, I like all of the HBCUs. If I had to pick a favorite team, it would certainly be the Morehouse Maroon Tigers, who very rarely pull off a win. I am with them, win or lose; however, most of the time it is lose. (My mama didn't raise no fool; I don't want to make anybody mad. These universities have avid fans.)

In watching the game last Saturday between Georgia and Ole Miss, one of the commentators said several times, "If you are a Georgia fan, the scoreboard ain't looking good." During and after his comments, the cameras would show the sad dejected faces of the Dawg fans. Most people believed that the Bull Dawgs would have a decisive win over Ole Miss. However, the opposite was true; the final score was 28-10 in favor of Ole Miss.

The phrase, "The scoreboard ain't looking good," stuck in my head, and I thought about the prophet Jeremiah, the book of Lamentations, and about the challenges and disappointments of life itself. We have several scoreboards. Our bank account is a financial scoreboard. A medical report from your doctor is a physical scoreboard. The daily news reports are scoreboards of our contemporary society. Sometimes these scoreboards make us celebrate, and sometimes they make us depressed and even want to give up.

The book of Lamentations is a good guide on what to do when one or all of your scoreboards ain't looking good. This book laments the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC. They destroyed the temple and confiscated the sacred vessels, and out of pure arrogance used these vessels in pagan banquets. The Jews could not understand how or why God would let these evil people demolish His temple. If that was not enough, they carried many into exile and made them slaves.

Jeremiah had to balance realism with optimism. There were false prophets telling the Jews they would be delivered in a few weeks. Jeremiah had the burden of telling them it would be seventy years before they would return to their homeland. He spoke of the righteous judgement of God. He wept as he prophesied to them. Many did not want to hear the unvarnished truth and became angry with Jeremiah and threw him in a dry well. In addition to the conflict with his own people, many times he was at odds with the officials of Babylon.

Jeremiah said he was through preaching because nobody wanted to hear the truth. Once called, always called! His calling was like fire shut up in his bones, and he started preaching again with more conviction and fervor. Let's see what advice Jeremiah gives us in this text.

Exposition

1. Lament your Grief.

(Don't Fall Into Denial. Keep It Real.)

(Articulate Your Suffering And Disappointments – It Is Therapeutic.)

(Our Foreparents' Only Therapy Was To Come To Church And Shout.)

(There Is A Difference Between Lamenting And Having A Perpetual Pity Party.)

2. Lean On His Grace And Mercy.

(God's Grace Is Sufficient – 2nd Corinthians 12:9.)

(Grace Is Giving Us Something Good We Do Not Deserve.)

(God's Mercy Endures Forever. Psalm 106:1; 118:1.)

(Mercy Is Withholding Something Bad We Do Deserve.)

(Grace And Mercy Are Twin Siblings.)

3. Live Grounded In Expectations.

(God Will Work It Out In His Own Time, In His Own Way.)

(We Don't Have To Understand Everything To Have Hope.)

(The Final Score Is The Only One That Really Matters.)

(Faith In God Gives Us Hope.)

(Faith, Hope, and Love - 1st Corinthians 13:13.)

(Make Sure The Final Scoreboard Reads, "Well Done Thy Good And Faithful Servant.)

Closing Thoughts

James H. Cone wrote a classic entitled, *The Spirituals and the Blues*. Both genres express suffering and disappointment. However, he makes a clear distinction between the two important genres. The spirituals go further than the blues and always end on a positive hopeful note. I will close with a well-known spiritual:

"Trouble in my way;

I have to cry sometimes.

Trouble in my way;

I have to cry sometimes.

I lay awake at night,

But that's alright.

Jesus, He will fix it

After while."

Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

End Note

Wormwood is a perennial plant with a small yellow bloom. Its secretions are very, very bitter. It was added to the water supply when water was scarce. Therefore, people would only drink enough to stay alive. The taste was almost unbearable. When water was rationed, water blended with wormwood secretions was first given to slaves and prisoners. The elite were the last to be given the bitter water, if at all. The exiles on their way to Babylon were probably given water blended with wormwood. Wormwood has come to be used symbolically to describe sorrow, calamity, and even cruelty. (Ironically, the French have taken wormwood and made absinthe, which is one of their most popular aperitifs.)

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