

Matthew 1:6b-11
(2 Kings 20:16-19; 2 Chronicles 33:1-13; 1 Peter 2:9-12)
“Disappointment with God: Broken Nations”

Introduction

This Advent season we have been trying to understand how God uses the broken things of life to accomplish his deepest purposes. In Jesus' own family tree, we find ourselves, our friends, our enemies and our times, all illustrated in the lives and times of Jesus' ancestors.

We looked two weeks ago at the two great figures who lead the list, Abraham and David, as examples of those who are given great promises by God, but then must live through difficult times and great reversals before they begin to see those promises fulfilled. They represent all the times and places in our lives that we are tempted to think that God has broken his promises to us.

Last week, we looked at the lives of the women in this genealogy, finding in their stories a rich and layered composite of the ways that life can break our heart, compromise our body and destroy our reputation, until we are convinced that God can never do anything significant and wonderful through us. Yet, these were the very women through whose bodies God brought salvation to the world.

This morning, we will focus on the times in which we live, and on our own inability to evaluate or explain them from the inside out. We are truly blessed by God to live in a land that still offers such freedom for worship, education, work and personal growth. Yet, that freedom becomes a double-edged sword to those who turn freedom into license to live off the land, to do as they please, to pursue nothing more significant than their own pleasure or prosperity. The very ease so many of us find living in such a place at such a time can be our undoing, if it lulls us into passing our years living for nothing but ourselves.

On the other hand, those who live in times and places where nothing can be taken for granted – where every opportunity must be earned through hard labor, every moment seized before it vanishes, where dreams must be carefully nurtured, and where virtue and integrity are crucial to survival – such people may in the end far outstrip those who are born into freedom and affluence. Those who have the great privilege of strong spiritual heritage can too easily squander it, while those who hunger and thirst for truth and righteousness and the freedom to pursue their dreams, may treasure it when found.

All this, and more, we find in the contrast between the days of Hezekiah and those of his son, Manasseh. Look with me at the stories of these two kings of Judah, and then note how they serve as pictures of both the people of God and the nations of the world.

Body

1. The Breaking of Two Kings:

Hezekiah

Note how Hezekiah's great blessings and early obedience led at last to his proud display of wealth and power to the envoys from Babylon, to his cynical response to the judgment pronounced on his arrogance: "As long as it does not happen in my lifetime."

Manasseh

Note how the years of wickedness and arrogance brought God's judgment on his head, even the humiliation of being dragged away into captivity by the Assyrians. Yet in his trouble, he cried to the Lord for mercy and was delivered, and realized that the Lord is God.

In other words, at the end of the day, Manasseh's troubles were better for Manasseh than Hezekiah's blessings were for Hezekiah.

2. The Breaking of the Nations:

Nation of Israel

The entire history of the people of Israel, as well as the history of the church that followed, is one of beginning fervor and delight in the Lord, under the most difficult circumstances. God hears the cry of his people and delivers them. Their response, at first, is to treasure their salvation and to walk in fellowship with God and one another. Through diligence and integrity, they create a safe place for their children to live and serve the Lord. The next generation continues in the paths that they were taught, but generally without the deep gratitude of those who had been delivered from bondage. Freedom is all they have known, and they see it as their right.

But their children begin to question it all, to see only the dark side of life, and in their cynicism to turn to the pursuit of pleasure and ease, to question the values and the work that gave them their inheritance, and to question the God of their parents. In the end, they seek freedom from the God who gave them their freedom, and who protects them from their enemies, and so begin to collapse from within, and find themselves at last in bondage, crying out for the Lord to deliver them.

The Nations

This is, in fact, the human story. The tale of the nations is both glorious and tragic: such nobility and such depravity, such hope and such cynicism; a weary cycle of gratitude and growth giving way to entitlement and decline.

Conclusion

What are we to do with all this at our particular moment in history? We see those nations that are broken by oppression, poverty and war, and yearn for them to enjoy our freedoms. Yet, some of the greatest stories of nobility, some of the greatest souls, come from the crucible of just such brokenness. It took captivity to produce a Moses, the agonies of Israel's apostasy to produce her greatest prophets, the personal collapse of Simon Peter to produce the pillar apostle, Paul's crisis on the Damascus Road to produce the great missionary to the gentiles, the collapse of the Roman Empire to move Augustine to write *The City of God*, and in our day, the brokenness of the nations to produce the likes of Gandhi, Solzhenitsyn, and M.L. King.

All of this is simply to say that God in mercy sometimes breaks in order to heal. God is working through, not only the freedom, but the bondage and pain of this world – through broken people and broken nations – to bring his salvation to those “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” And so, when the foundations of this world are shaken, it should remind us that “here we have no continuing city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14).

Our hope quite simply is not here, but rather in what we have not yet seen save with the eye of faith: what God has prepared for those who love him, who await his advent with hope and gratitude, who worship him with reverence and awe.

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