

The Resurrection of Our Lord

RESURRECTION: RESOUNDING HOPE FOR THE WAR TORN

Jeremiah 31:1-6

The Resurrection of Our Lord Analysis by Paul Jaster

At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

2Thus says the LORD:

*The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,*

3the LORD appeared to him from far away.

*I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.*

*4Again I will build you, and you shall be built,
O virgin Israel!*

*Again you shall take your tambourines,
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.*

*5Again you shall plant vineyards
on the mountains of Samaria;
the planters shall plant,
and shall enjoy the fruit.*

*6For there shall be a day when sentinels will call
in the hill country of Ephraim:*

*"Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the LORD our God."*

DIAGNOSIS: War Torn

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Divided, Displaced, Emasculated*

Such luck. In Jeremiah's day, those people who "survived the sword" (immediate death upon the invasion of foreign armies) were divided and displaced. Their families were torn apart, houses ruined, and fields given to others. Jeremiah visualizes the terror and the panic of it by men with pale faces, clenching their stomachs like women in labor (Jer. 30:5-6). In Jeremiah's time, this was the most grievous insult possible: likening male homeland defenders to "women."; the intention, of course, was to emasculate. Contemporary Americans are divided and displaced these days by wars overseas. And, echoing that age-old fear of emasculation, some still wonder if a woman could be a good "commander in chief." How would we respond if we experienced the ravages of war first hand in our own homeland?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Doubtful*

Jerusalem's desperate situation raised deep internal doubts for Jeremiah's contemporaries: Were they still God's people? Was God faithful to God's promises? Did God love them anymore? Strikingly, God can take those very same questions and turned them right around and ask them of us. Are we still God's people? Are we faithful in God's promises? Do we still love God? If we have our doubts and reservations about God, how much more must God have doubts about us?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Fatal Attraction: Punished by a Merciless Foe—a Jealous God*

The vast bulk of Jeremiah's message is that, through the Babylonians, God is waging war against God's own people because they chased after "other gods." And Jeremiah 30:12-14 is the

perfect summary of just how formidable a foe God is: “Your hurt is incurable, your wound is grievous. There is no one to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. ...For I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are so numerous.” God, wronged and injured, opposes us; and we are perishing and powerless to do anything about it. We are punished by a merciless foe. Anyone who has ever seen the film “Fatal Attraction” knows that “there is nothing worse than a lover scorned.” Now, in the role of Glenn Close, place God. Get the picture?!

PROGNOSIS: Resoundingly Rebuilt

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Natal Attraction: A Gracious God Appears*

But suddenly in Jeremiah 30-31, a whole series of exuberant and hopeful oracles featuring a gracious God appear. Grace is found in the wilderness. A faithful God comes from far away and continues to love with an everlasting love. God does a “new thing” which includes a role reversal that turns women into manly men (see Jeremiah 31:22!). Like the raised Jesus, these oracles just pop out of nowhere. Jeremiah offers no explanation for this great reversal of God turning from a merciless foe into a faithful and forgiving lover (from the likes of Glenn Close to Jesus crucified and raised). He does not explain how the “incurable” are “cured” or how the punished are given reprieve. He simply proclaims it and exclaims it, much like our shouts on Easter Day. “Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!” What else can we say? When you are a prisoner of war waiting to be rescued, you do not say to your liberator, “How did you get here? What were the logistics?” You simply say, “Boy, I am ever glad to see you. Get me out of here!”

Notably the message of good news “He has been raised!” was first

entrusted to several women who were brave enough to come to the tomb while the male, pale-faced disciples clutched their loins. These women turned into the first witnesses and evangelists that “the boys” were meant to be. And they were the first to learn that there is nothing better than a gracious lover arisen from the dead, especially when that lover is God. In Jesus, the manly strength of God the Father is expressed as motherly love, a continuation of that same love that gave us birth. God’s “natal attraction” to us, leads to a “rebirth” with all the new life and new roles that follow. What Jeremiah calls God’s “new thing,” we who follow Jesus call “resurrection.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Reversal, Reconnection, Rebuilding, Renewal (in short, Resurrection and Rebirth)*

Jeremiah foresaw reconnection, rebuilding, and renewal. God would be the God of ALL the families of Israel. The north and south would be reunited as the people of the Lord. Vineyards would be replanted on the hillsides of Samaria and the sentinels in Ephraim (the little that was left of the northern kingdom) would again summon northerners to join southerners in resounding worship in Jerusalem as they once did in the day of David.

What Jeremiah foresaw of Israel’s restoration, the death and resurrection of Jesus has accomplished. God does not treat us with doubts and reservations, but with resurrection. The risen Jesus reconnects us with God and one another and the world around us. He rebuilds our lives and renews us with the Holy Spirit. Like the reversal in God’s own self, Jesus turns us from battle-weary warriors into gracious lovers with a mighty maternal instinct that mimics and manifests God’s own fatherly love. What so many in our country long for, happens to those who see in Jesus the appearance of a faithful and gracious God coming to us from afar: Connections. A building up for peace. Spirited renewal. Not punishment, but productivity. For those

who cling in faith to Christ, this is both a present fact and an emerging reality, even though life continues to be a wilderness and a minefield. Jeremiah himself attested to finding grace " in the wilderness," not apart from it. This is the message of the cross, not a vacation from reality, but the experience of a new reality.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Resounding Praise

The oracle of Jeremiah ends with resounding worship; that is, with virgin Israel taking up the tambourine and doing the victory dance like Miriam and the women did back in Exodus after God's victory at the sea. Easter is the time to eat and drink and enjoy the fruit of faithful proclamation and shout the shout and dance the dance; for, in Jesus, God has wrought an even greater victory. God has revealed a love and a life that is faithful, close at hand, and everlasting. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing. Not even our faithless fears and warring attitudes. This is everything and more than either Jeremiah or we could have imaged. So give the kids a bunch of tambourines. Let them stomp and dance and whoop it up. For over this worn, torn earth, thunders the healing and unifying force of resounding praise. "Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!" Or, as some kids like to say, "Jesus rocks!"