

The Power of Perhaps

It is good for a man that he should bear The yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent Since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, Perhaps there is hope. - Lamentations 3:27-29

- I. Most people don't** like the idea of uncertainty; depending on what is under consideration it can make people feel scared, or at the very least uncomfortable; what people crave is assurance.
- A.** If someone is considering changing their job, do you think that they would be willing to quit their current position without being certain they have a position somewhere else?
 - B.** When most people are looking to invest their money for retirement, what kind of stocks do they look for? Something that may or may not be around next week, or companies with a long standing, proven track record?
 - C.** I don't know about you, but if someone is suggesting that we try a new place to eat, maybe just isn't good enough! I want to know for *certain* that it is a good place to eat!
 - 1.** Wherever there is risk, if someone has a difficult decision and they must put themselves out there— people want certainty:
- II. There are exceptions to this:** what if someone wants something bad enough? What if someone desires something to the point that even the faintest glimmer of hope is enough to compel them to act despite how uncertain the outcome may seem?
- A.** The context of our reading from Lamentations is just such an occasion: circumstances were worse than they had ever been for God's people;
 - 1.** The best citizens that the nation had to offer were nothing but a memory. They had long since been taken away into captivity in the repeated waves as the Babylonians came back on multiple occasions, first to subdue Jerusalem, and then later to punish it further;
 - 2.** The Temple of the Lord had been completely destroyed; everything in it was either taken away or destroyed as well

3. At the time of Jeremiah's writing these words, Jerusalem itself had been destroyed; It was a time of despair and uncertainty;
 - a) And yet, Jeremiah says it is good to continue to bear this burden; the NIV reads vs 29 as *Let him bury his face in the dust— there may yet be hope.*

B. Exodus 32:30 comes to mind as well:

1. God had ordered Moses to come down off the mountain because the people had abandoned their commitment to their God and were worshipping the golden calf;
2. God's anger was burning greatly against the people that day, in verses 9 and 10 He was ready to destroy this obstinate people.
3. After Moses had thoroughly rebuked the Israelites he says to them: "*Dedicate yourselves today to the Lord—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.*" *On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."*
 - a) Moses had kept God's wrath at bay earlier; Once Moses saw it for himself he broke the tablets in anger; When he saw their dancing and worship of their idol, when he heard the pitiful excuses offered up by Aaron; he was furious;
 - b) I can imagine Moses thinking, "If I'm this angry at the people, I can't imagine what God is feeling right now"
 - (1) And yet, Moses exhorted the people to renew their commitment, *perhaps* I can make atonement for your sin.

C. Uncertainty has held many people back; People who looked ahead and because they were unsure of their outcome refused to press on; But there are many who have looked ahead at uncertainty and found hope; And because they wanted something enough, that hope however small it may have seemed was enough to push them forward.

1. In our study together, I want us to spend our time looking at a few examples of those who were able to take hold of hope and use it to do great things for the Lord:

III. Hezekiah and the Assyrian Army: 2 Kings 19:1-4

- A.** Hezekiah's circumstances were very dire: At the time of this chapter Sennacherib, King of Assyria, had conquered virtually every important city in Judah;
1. He had marched his army through taking every fortified town, and had imposed heavy taxes on the King— Chapter 18 tells us that Hezekiah had to empty out all of the gold and silver from his own house, and then had cut the gold off of the doors of the temple and the door posts.
 2. Now, he finds himself under siege as Jerusalem is surrounded; the King of Assyria had sent his personal messenger to demand a complete surrender of the city, and had openly taunted the people and defied God's ability to save them;
 3. At the end of chapter 18, Hezekiah's officers came and reported what the Assyrian messenger had said: **read 2 Kings 19:1-4**
- B. Is it fair to say that** Hezekiah was facing uncertainty?
1. Many of the people were still in rebellion against the Lord; while Hezekiah was a reformer, his father Ahaz had led the people into great wickedness and idolatry; Hezekiah seems to acknowledge in vs 4 that there is currently only a remnant of the people who are faithful;
 2. And Hezekiah himself is certainly not without fault; Although he has determined to come to the Lord now, it cannot be said that this was his first course of action:
 - a) *What is this confidence that you have? "You say (but they are only empty words), 'I have counsel and strength for the war.' Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me? "Now behold, you rely on the staff of this crushed reed, even on Egypt; on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. - 2 Kings 18:19b-21*
- C. Reason would say** to Hezekiah; surrender. Assyria has taken very city in your land, the people are wicked; and even you yourself have turned to another source of strength;
1. And yet; **perhaps.** Perhaps God will hear the words of this messenger and will deliver the remnant;
 2. Verses 6 and 7 tell us God's response:

IV. Jeremiah's Persistent Message *Jeremiah. 36:1-7*

A. Returning to Jeremiah for a moment, let's look at an example from earlier in his time as a prophet"

1. Jeremiah came to be a prophet during the time of Josiah: This would have seemed like a good time to be preaching God's message, except that there were a great many people who did not have their hearts into the King's reforms.
2. After Josiah was killed in battle, there was a quick succession of 3 kings, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin, who were all wicked, and very quickly plunged the nation back into idolatry and complete desertion of the Lord;
3. This text is dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which was around 605 BC; So at this point Jeremiah has been preaching God's word to Judah for 21 Years:

B. **It is very likely** the the occasion that spurred this was at this time Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian's had just finished defeating the Assyrians; All of Jeremiah's prophecies about Babylon taking them into captivity might not seem so far fetched now;

1. But what had Jeremiah's 21 years preaching been like up to this point?
 - a) While he is not facing the imprisonment and death threats that will come under Zedekiah's reign; it hasn't been easy;
 - b) The people have by and large ignored his message; The King's have rejected him, and instead the people have willingly gone to false prophets because they know that their message is more pleasant to listen to: Recall Jeremiah 5:31: *The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so!*
 - c) Jeremiah himself has been banned from even entering the temple; and yet, God commands him to write down the message that he has been preaching for the past 21 years; the same message that has been ignored again and again, and present it to the people:
 - (1) *Perhaps* they will listen; *Perhaps* they will repent.
 - (2) There were some who heard; Some received the message with fear; and hid away Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch to protect them from the King.

(3) There were others who didn't hear; the king himself took a pin knife and cut it into strips, line by line as he read the scroll and throw them in the fire;

(a) God's response to Jeremiah? Make another scroll.

V. Many Others Have Found Hope:

- A. Caleb in Joshua 14:12 requested permission to go and take the land promised to him, despite his old age and many of his contemporaries failing to drive the canaanites out of their land; *perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out as the Lord has spoken.*"
- B. Shadrach, Mishack, and Obednigo; when faced with the choice of bowing down to the golden image of the King said in Daniel 3:17-18; Our God *can* save us; but *even if He doesn't*, we still won't bow down;

VI. What are you letting uncertainty keep you from doing?

- A.** Have you thought about Evangelism? Have you had a desire to reach out into your community and teach others about the Lord? Bring them to a study or a class?
Maybe even teach a class?
 - i.** Have you let uncertainty keep you from doing it?
 - a)** It won't work
 - b)** They aren't interested
 - c)** I'm no good at this kind of thing?
 - (i)** Perhaps they will respond!
- B.** Have you felt the need to confront someone in error or edify someone who is struggling?
 - i.** What has uncertainty told you?
 - a)** They won't listen to me;
 - b)** They aren't going to like what I have to say;
 - c)** They'll be upset:
 - (i)** Perhaps you'll save a soul from death:

C. Have you been struggling with sin? Have you been lax in your service to the Lord?

i. What uncertainty do you feel?

a) It doesn't get any better than this;

b) I can't put this behind me;

c) I don't have anything else to offer;

(i) Find hope in God's promises!