Clips from Psalms

Psalms 102:16-17
Prayer of an Afflicted One for Mercy on himself and on Zion. A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before Jehovah

“For Jehovah has built up Zion; he has appeared in his glory. He has regarded the prayer of the destitute, and has not despised their prayer.”

The Love of God

Jeremiah chapters 2-3 depict God's relationship to Israel and Judah as being husband and wife. The Lord remembered with fondness the early days of the marriage when Israel humbly followed him through the wilderness of Sinai (Jeremiah 2:1-3). Imagine; however, having great love for a spouse yet that love is not reciprocated very long. Israel grieved God sorely with their spiritual adultery (see Psalms 78:40). Jeremiah writes, “1 They say, if a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man’s, will he return unto her again? Will not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, said Jehovah” (Jeremiah 3:1).

Israel had been put away by God due to her spiritual adultery (see Jeremiah 3:8). She went to other "lovers" such as idolatry and putting her trust in other nations. When these other "lovers" reject her she attempts to return to the Lord and he will have no part of her. She is like an adulterous wife that has been put away twice. Such a statement left Judah hopeless. Their hearts ought to have broken to hear these words. Jeremiah writes, “2 Lift up your eyes unto the bare heights, and see; where have you not been lain with? By the ways have you sat for them, as an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your whoredoms and with your wickedness” (Jeremiah 3:2).

As Judah participated in idolatry, the Lord referred to them as those who practiced "whoredoms." Jehovah uses graphic language to depict a nation that had figuratively acted as a harlot that permits any and all to sexually defile her. Judah is viewed as a whore who gives herself to others for their sexual gratification. The terms used illustrate their filthiness, lack of spiritual thinking, ungratefulness, and an unloving approach to their God. Jeremiah writes, “8 And I saw, when, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorcement, yet treacherous Judah her sister feared not; but she also went and played the harlot” (Jeremiah 3:8).

Jehovah did with Israel what any husband under the Mosaic Law would do with an adulterous wife. The Lord put her away with a "bill of divorcement" (Deuteronomy 24:1-5). Judah witnessed Israel’s spiritual adultery and knew the consequences thereof; however, she continued in sin, too. Judah was just as guilty as Israel if not more so. Judah had the advantage of watching Israel suffer the consequences of sins not repented of. Judah should have taken fearful note; however, she did the same thing her backsliding sister Israel did.
The prophet of God continues saying, “And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not returned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, said Jehovah” (Jeremiah 3:9-10). God’s people were delusional. Due to the reforms brought on by Josiah, the people confidently said, “I am innocent: surely his anger is turned away from me” (Jeremiah 2:35). While they spoke of their innocence, the Lord shamed them saying, “for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah” (Jeremiah 2:28). Their half hearted return to God was a violation of the Mosaic Laws of marriage.

“12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, said Jehovah; I will not look in anger upon you, for I am merciful, said Jehovah, I will not keep anger for ever. 13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against Jehovah your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice, said Jehovah” (Jeremiah 3:12-13).

Though the Mosaic Law of marriage revealed at Deuteronomy 24 called for a rejection of a woman who had been put away twice God would be merciful to her and receive her. There is an obvious difference between actual adultery and spiritual unfaithfulness. Within these words are found one of the grandest lessons in God’s word. The Lord has great love for his created beings. So much so that he offered up his Son to be a propitiation for man’s sins (1 John 2:2). Though Israel had committed spiritual adultery against Jehovah and grieved his Holy Spirit he would receive them back if they met his conditions. Jeremiah reveals God’s conditions for man to meet in order for him to take back his adulterous wife Israel. God demands that Israel “acknowledge” her sin of spiritual adultery. She had transgressed against Jehovah by leaving the Law of God and being spiritually defiled by idolatry and putting her trust in other nations. To “acknowledge” something wrong in life infers the individual’s recognition of the real situation. When one truly confesses their fault they display a change of heart. Israel’s heart was hardened in sin to the point that they had not recognized their error. Acknowledgment of their error would illustrate their submission to God’s divine will. Submission would only be manifest through a poor and mournful heart (see Matthew 5:3-5).

All God desired was to know that their hearts had been turned back to him. God wanted to be loved by Israel as he had always loved them. The illustration of marriage is powerful. If a man were to leave his wife for another woman the wife would be devastated. Her husband was the love of her physical life. He had always held a special place of trust in her heart. Now; however, he has cheated, lied, and violated that trust to the greatest degree by lying with another woman. The way only the innocent woman would take this man back would be if he illustrated a genuine heart of sorrow for his error and a disposition of honest love and longing for his original wife. The wife wants things to return to the way it was before the adultery. The wife wants her man’s heart to belong to her and her heart to him. God is the same way. His wife had cheated and violated their trust. The Lord just wants things to return to their original loving state. Such passages in God’s word illustrate the nature of God and his earnest love for man. The Lord said, “14 Return, O backsliding children, said Jehovah, for I am a husband unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion” (Jeremiah 3:14). May it never be that we, as God’s people, would grieve him through spiritual adultery. If we do, may it be that God’s people would open their eyes to his love and return to him before it’s everlasting too late.

John C Robertson

Psalms 28

The Lord Is My Strength and My Shield

1 To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. 2 Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary. 3 Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts. 4 Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; give to them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward. 5 Because they do not regard the works of the LORD or the work of his hands, he will tear them down and build them up no more. 6 Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. 7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. 8 The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. 9 Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

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