

General Topics :: The Necessity of an Experience of Exile

The Necessity of an Experience of Exile - posted by docs (), on: 2009/9/5 11:11

A friend's statements below got me thinking when he said,

"Agreed, I think that all traditions are going through a cleaning house action right now. Or perhaps I should say that secular society has forced the Christian church to either become secular or act like well Christians."

"Christianity in this country does not come without social or economic price tags anymore. I view that as an overall good thing."

Which reminded me of thoughts below from a book on my shelf.

The Necessity of an Experience of Exile

It was good for Israel to go into Exile in 597 and 587. Exile purged the corporate psyche of the idolatrous connection between God and Zion, God and temple, God and the Davidic dynasty. The Exile was a time for the liberation of God, for the awesome power and the holy heat of God's Goodness to shatter through all the limiting structures of Israel's religious conceptions and religious institutions.

Prophetic faith at its best is always anti-religious. Or to put it another way, its experience of God is so intense that religion is shattered from the inside out, and then reconstructed on a wider foundation. If God elected Israel, Zion, the Davidic line once again, in Babylon, after the wreckage, then this shows that His doing so has absolutely nothing to do with intrinsic merit. There is no natural basis for the relationship whatsoever.

Exile is a good experience for the community of believers in the United States. It purges them free from the idolatrous connection assumed to exist between Christianity and any of several visions of the "American way of life." In a state of exile the community of Christian believers realizes that it is blasphemy to identify the Body of Christ with the institutional church. God in Christ has no natural, necessary, or intrinsic connection with "churches." It is tremendously liberating to realize that God is in the whole arena of history and not just in churches. This means that believers in Christ can meet God anywhere: on the job, across a table on which a meal is spread, at the crossroads of brutal historical events. I think that this fundamentally means that human belief and God's initiative meet in unpredictable events more than in predetermined structures.

What is crucial is to realize that we have no institutional claims on God. Persons who take their Christianity with consistent seriousness will soon be cultural exiles within American society. Believers who are not ideologically pluralistic usually find themselves exiles within the churches. Exiled people are attractive to God. They know that the events of the past are a judgment. By that judgment they are stripped of facades. They are forced to be mobile, to travel light, to stand naked before God. They have no enduring worldly roots, no enduring worldly security. They are vulnerable. When God comes to these exiles, He is perceived in His Goodness. With them He has an open-ended future. No agenda binds Him. God loves exiles. They are ready to receive Him as He is. They are a good risk. He gives them the transforming power of His Spirit; He heals their broken and depleted humanity.

Let us be quite specific as to why exile is good, necessary for believers.

1) Adversity is accepted. We learn not to expect winds of change always to blow in our favor. Reversals do not drive us to despair. In all things we confess God as Lord.

2) An exile has to learn that God's love is not absent when events speak of judgment. One learns to see God present as much in judgment as in times when things go favorably.

3) Everything which is tragic and a source of self-pity in exile from a human point of view is a source of freedom and celebration from God's point of view. The dominant role in Second Isaiah (the second division of Isaiah) is hymnic, and that is very appropriate. It is the time both of exile and its resolution. That is not the time of the exaltation of Israel, but the time of the exaltation of God.

4) We learn that God's love stands as much outside what we consider rational, what falls within our conception of religious logic, as His judgment. The unpredictability and power of God's love are an awesome thing. God's love is a kind of judgment. It creates where we thought nothing could be created. It gives life where we thought we had seen the finality of death. It refuses to give up on us when we had given up on ourselves.

5) Judgment (justice) gives deliverance (love) its integrity. Our condemnation is that we must die to all rebelliousness and to all notions of the efficacy of past human initiatives at doing "religion." Our salvation is in God's hands and subject to His initiative alone. God may create a deliverance for reasons that dwarf those that motivate our pleas and prayers. He may turn around our minds with a new self-revelation, may inaugurate a new era and plan, may buy freedom for an open-minded future for Himself and for us. Exile is the cradle for theodicy and eschatology, death and resurrection, a trusting end and a new beginning. It is the vacuum that precedes a second era of creation, a deeper construction out of faith elements that existed previously. The possibility of authentic faith is once again put in front of man. This possibility is his, but not to grasp with his hands. And so, amidst painful change, there is rejoicing for the opening to the future which God had created.

Thomas Raitt, A Theology of Exile - Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Pg 228-230.

Re: The Necessity of an Experience of Exile, on: 2009/9/5 12:22

"Exile is a good experience for the community of believers in the United States. It purges them free from the idolatrous connection assumed to exist between Christianity and any of several visions of the "American way of life."

"An exile has to learn that God's love is not absent when events speak of judgment."

Good post, the second point quoted above is often missed by many believers.....Frank

Re: - posted by White_Stone (), on: 2009/9/5 13:01

Excellent thread! Thank you for posting this.

Just last night I was studying the 23rd Psalm, "Thy rod and Thy staff. ." The commentary I was reading suggested we consider a diamond, how deeply it must be cut, and how often the cut is necessary to bring forth the brilliance. Not that we are of worth BUT that God sees worth in us. A gardener prunes a bush that brings forth good fruit. A bush that does not get burned.

Give me the rod, Lord. Help me to understand the lesson you are teaching.

white stone

Re: The Necessity of an Experience of Exile - posted by Leo_Grace, on: 2009/9/5 14:40

Dt 8:5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

Pr 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Heb 12:5-11 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Nice thread. We all need to be reminded of these teachings often.