



GOD IS NOT DONE *With You*

by David Petersen

A voice is heard in Bethlehem. It is not the shepherds rejoicing; it is Rachel. She is weeping for her children. She says, “They are no more” (JER. 31:15). Herod killed those boys in his rage. It wasn’t really a strategic attempt to cast a net big enough to catch God, but it was Herod proving to God that he was powerful and could exact revenge.

God escaped in the night. He was exiled to Egypt, the land of slavery and infanticide. And the women of Bethlehem, not God, felt Herod’s rage as their darling little boys were snatched from their arms (MATT. 2:16–18). And so we ask, “Why God? Why didn’t you warn their husbands as you warned Joseph? Why would you plant a life inside a womb and then take it away?” That is why Rachel refuses comfort. She is mad at God. Who can blame her?

There are no human words that can take away the pain suffered by grieving mothers. For now, the best we can hope for is some way to endure. God, in His mercy, has provided a way: “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth” (IS. 25:8).

That is how we endure. Our sadness is real, but it is also temporary. We endure in hope, in eager expectation of what is to come, the swallowing up of death and the wiping away of tears. Jesus Christ has died for us, but He is not dead. He lives. So, too, do our children

who have departed with the sign of faith, who heard the Word of God in their mothers’ wombs and who benefited from the prayers of their faithful parents. For now our comfort is tainted by our sin. It is not fully enjoyed. It is comfort not in what is now for us, but in what is now for them and what will be for us with them in the future.

God is gentle with Rachel. She refused comfort but He doesn’t stop. He says: “Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded” (JER. 31:16 NKJV).

Why would Rachel refuse that? She is angry with God, deeply hurt, afraid and lonely, but also desperate for His comfort and promise. So it is for all those who abide in this dying life, still infected with original and actual sin, but blessed with faith.

God’s promise to Rachel is explicit: “Your children shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future. . . Your children shall come back to their own border” (JER. 31:17 NKJV). If you have lost a child, do not mourn as those who have no hope. What God takes away, God restores. Yes, there is sadness now. Your mourning is just. It is real. You are a victim in many ways. Our sins, both in what we do wrong and also the sin we have inherited from Adam, have awful consequences, even as do the sins committed against us. But we do not mourn as those who have no hope. We have hope.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not stay in Egypt. He came out of the land of slavery. He crossed the Jordan with the sign of the dove and the opening of heaven. He went to the cross. He rose from the dead.

That is your hope. Your God is not the god of the dead. Abraham lives. So do Moses, Elijah, Malachi and Zacchaeus. So do the boys from Bethlehem slaughtered while Jesus escaped in the night. So do the babes snatched from their mother's wombs. They live because Jesus lives.

I know you are sad. I know you are hurting. But do not think that the forgiveness of sins you have received, that your Baptism, that God's promises are insignificant or too small for your problems, sins and suffering. Do not say, "What good is it if God loves me but my child is no more?"

The forgiveness of sins does not yet remove all your aches and pains, all your sadness, doubts, fears and selfish desires. Not yet. But you have hope. God is not yet done with you. He will bring it to completion in the Day of Jesus Christ. Thus are you called to live by faith, not by what you see or feel or think, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The boys from Bethlehem died that night that Jesus escaped and would return to die for them. His martyrdom liberated them out of this living death and relieved them early of their burdens. It was not, as it may have appeared, that their lives were exchanged for His. His life was given in exchange for theirs. They seemed to die, but they really lived. What Herod meant for evil, God meant for good. Herod delivered them to heaven, peace and joy without measure. They praised God not by speaking but by dying. Their lives were emptied of themselves and filled with Him. They had no complaint. It was their mothers who were the victims.

This is also your life in Christ. You are the victim. You are suffering in sadness. Yet the life Christ lived and the death He died, He lived and died also for you. And the resurrection to which He rose, He rose for you. Do not mourn, do not live, do not sleep, do not eat, do not move as those who have no hope.

You have hope. The boys of Bethlehem were not abandoned. Your baby was not taken to the land of the enemy. You won't be either. There is hope in your future. Jesus lives. ☩

.....
The Rev. David Petersen (prdhpetersen@gmail.com) is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Ind., and the author of *Thy Kingdom Come*.