

THE BAPTIST HOUR

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The Eternal Love

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THE ETERNAL LOVE

TEXT—*“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”*—Jeremiah 31:3

One of America's leading citizens recently raised the question as to whether or not God is through with our nation. It may be that He is. But if so, it will be through no arbitrary decision on His part. It is a decision which you and I must make.

A recent news item tells of a leading figure in the entertainment world who announced that he would go into court and declare himself bankrupt. During his career he has earned over twelve million dollars. Had he squandered it? Did he make bad investments? At any rate he stood on the brink of desperation or else a reasoned admission of failure.

But the story did not end there. The next day it was reported that friends had rushed to his aid, saying that they would not permit him to take this action. With their resources, guidance, and love they would put him on his feet again. Whether he fails or succeeds is his decision, not that of his friends.

But I want to tell you a more wonderful story than that. It is a story of national disaster and divine love. Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Judah and taken her choice people into captivity. Truly the fortunes of the nation chosen of God seemed buried in the dust. But out of the darkness of despair came the clear notes of the prophet's song. *“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”* Then followed the promise of restoration, a new hope, and a new covenant.

I would apply this text to our own condition. Judah had plunged into disaster. Still God loved her with an everlasting love. Our nation stands on the brink. We have not yet plunged. God's everlasting love would draw us

back from oblivion. But we must be willing to be drawn.

The parallel between the nation Israel and our own nation never ceases to amaze me. For this reason the promise of God's everlasting love is most assuring in the dark hours which have come upon us.

Therefore, let us consider this wonderful word from God's Word as we note, first, the condition; second, the compassion; third, the consequence.

Dire days had come upon the people of God. Israel long since had been swallowed up by the Assyrian wolf. And now Judah has been beaten to her knees by the Babylonians. The cream of her people is captive in a strange land. Soon the Holy City will be in ruins and the land denuded.

What a tragic end to a glorious beginning. Redeemed from Egyptian bondage a nation was born amid high hopes and deep dedication. Israel was to be a priest-nation to the rest of the earth. But this dream soon became a nightmare of worldly ambition and idolatrous living. From the day of Israel's entrance into her promised home, the base of her spiritual ministry to surrounding nations, her history had been one of sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance.

Generation after generation this cycle had been repeated. Judges, prophets, and kings had called her back to her mission to no avail. She continued to pursue her worldly aims, listen to false prophets, and turn a deaf ear to God. When it became evident that she would not heed, God gave her up to a punishment designed to purify. First it was Israel. And now Judah. They did not learn the lesson of history.

Nor have we learned this lesson. From an inconsequential people seeking God rather than gold, we too have become a mighty nation. It is my conviction that God proposes to use this nation as He designed to use Israel. When a tired Europe had spent itself in war, economic and political exploitation, and religious persecution, God chose a remnant with

which to build a nation unlike any the world had ever seen. He placed it in what has become the center of the modern world. He gave it a spiritual dynamic and idealism unparalleled in history. He has blessed it beyond man's fondest dreams. Generation after generation God has sent His modern prophets to call this nation to spiritual conquest. Spasmodically it has responded, only to plunge once again into the pursuit of worldly aims and ideals.

And now at a moment in history when civilization is groggy on the ropes, yea, it is down for the count of nine, what do we find? A nation bowing before the goddess of sex in the worst moral breakdown in modern history. According to Doctor Pitirim A. Sorokin, sociologist of Harvard University, we live in an atmosphere of sex anarchy. Premarital and extramarital sex experience no longer shocks us. We read more pornographic literature than Bibles. The flaunting of sex is the theme of the entertainment world. A current Hollywood movie which may never be completed, and good riddance if it is not, depicts its heroine in the nude. Of the ten big-money Hollywood productions of 1960, six had a prostitute as the heroine.

We groan under the heaviest tax burden in our history, largely to pay for wars past, present, and future, and to stimulate a false economy for our selfish gratification. Like a frenzied mob we seek to escape our drab selves through excitement in gambling, sports, narcotics, and revelry. We build high our armaments as we rot on the inside. And all the while we pay lip service to our churches and other character-building institutions.

It is no wonder, then, that a recent writer tells us that the handwriting of Divine Judgment is on the walls of five continents. Or that Doctor Arnold J. Toynbee recently said that "the stable characteristics of the past 6,000 years of civilized history are being changed and are falling apart."

Well may the question be asked as

to whether or not God is through with America. For the evidences of the decay of empires appears as a death rattle in our national throat.

Now, note the compassion. Despite the fallen condition of Judah, God says, "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love . . .*" And He is saying this to us today. Even as Judah went through her purging punishment, God was loving her with this everlasting love. And as we stumble blindly about the arena of modern history His love envelopes us. God is not angry with the emotional anger of a man. His wrath is but the retribution of our violation of His moral and spiritual laws which are the foundation stones of an orderly historical process.

Now how may we understand this everlasting love? Can you comprehend this word "everlasting"? If so, then your comprehension is greater than mine. Think back to the beginning of recorded history, to the creation record in Genesis. But that is not "everlasting." Then think forward to the farthest end of history, to the second coming of Christ. But that is not "everlasting." Think of the highest height and the deepest depth. That is not "everlasting." Let your imagination leap forward and back, up and down, until it becomes infinity; let these imaginary lines converge somewhere in eternity to form an eternal circle which embraces the universe, and that will give you some small concept of the word "everlasting."

Paul expresses it when he says, "*That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.*" (Eph. 3:17-19)

Let us look at this word "love." It was not some special word coined to express the idea of divine love. It was the ordinary Hebrew word with which these ancient people were familiar. It was the everyday word for

the love a husband and wife had for each other, that parents and children felt in the family relationship. God is saying, "Do you know how a parent loves a child, or a bridegroom loves his bride? That is how I love you. Only my love is an everlasting love. It cannot be changed or killed by circumstance. It is an everlasting love."

But there is one feature of this love worthy of note. God says, "*I have loved thee.*" But with what kind of love? The noun "love" used with "everlasting" is a feminine word. It is "mother-love." God says, "*I have loved thee with an everlasting mother-love.*" Thus He takes the love that is most enduring, the tenderest and toughest of all human loves, and says that He loves with that love to an everlasting degree. You cannot make love any stronger than that!

Isaiah expresses it in poetic beauty. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.*" (49:15)

Many years ago an unwed mother asked me to arrange for someone to adopt her child, promising that she would never try to see the child thereafter. After the arrangements had been made I went to the hospital. The Catholic sister told me that the plan could not be carried out. When I inquired why, she said, "We gave orders that the mother was not to see the child, for we have learned that if they do not they can give them up. But a new nurse on the hall this morning mistakenly gave the child to its mother at feeding time. We have also learned from experience that if a mother ever holds her child and nurses it, there is no power on earth that can break her tie of love to it."

That is what God is saying. "Imagine that such a mother might forget, as impossible as it is. But I will not forget. My love is an everlasting mother-love."

Oh, beloved America! Oh, beloved world! That is the love that God has

for you. You may sin, you may rebel against Him, you may ignore Him. But He loves you still. You are standing on the brink of oblivion. But God loves you. And even if you take the fatal plunge, God's love will follow you still. While there is still time, while there is yet hope, turn back! turn back! that God may enfold you in His arms and to His heart!

So consider the consequence. God says to us as to Judah, ". . . . *therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.*" Through fire and sword, through good times and bad, He has drawn us to Himself with an everlasting love.

How God has shed His grace upon us! Every field of waving grain, every wooded hill, every mountain bursting with wealth, every beneficence of His grace, is God saying, ". . . . *with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*" In every trial, every disaster, His enduring grace says, ". . . . *with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*" Every international crisis averted when nations turn back from some demand short of war is God saying, ". . . . *with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*"

How long will God forbear? His arm is not shortened that it cannot enfold us. Nor weakened that it cannot uphold us. His purpose has not failed that He cannot use us. With an everlasting love He loves us. With lovingkindness He draws us to Himself.

But we must respond. For eight hundred years, from Moses to Jeremiah, God with lovingkindness drew His people to Himself. But they did not respond to His love. Even in captivity He draws them, if only they will be drawn. A remnant will do so, and God will give them another chance.

For almost two hundred years God has endeavored to use us. He has drawn us with His lovingkindness. But we must will to be drawn to Him, to fit into His will and purpose. Captivity has not yet come. Destruction has been stayed from our shores. God's blessings still abound. But the

goodness of God is designed to bring us to repentance. (Rom. 2:4) God still loves us with an everlasting love. But for His love to be effectual for us it must be met with the response of our love.

The thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah closes with the promise of a new covenant, a covenant which was fulfilled in Christ. He is the full expression of God's everlasting love. In Him God would draw us unto Himself. Jesus said, "*Now is the judgment of this world*" Literally, "*Now is the crisis of this world system and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" (John 12:31-32) Christ was lifted up from the earth when He was nailed to the cross. Here we see the depth of man's sin and the height of God's everlasting love. And in that love is our peace.

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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