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What Really Counts: When God Challenges Us to Keep Eternity in Our Hearts

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He could have done better. The man whom everyone called “Blessed” just did not feel blessed. Baruch had gone to the best schools. He had been trained for one of the highest offices at the royal court. His brother served as the “quartermaster” (Jer. 51:59) of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. You can see a bulla, a clay seal fastened on a document, bearing his name and his father’s name in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.* His family had been part of the Jerusalem establishment. And yet, Baruch had not joined the court as one of the royal scribes. Baruch’s life took a different route—a route full of disappointments, persecution, pain, and the all-pervading “Word of the Lord.”

Life Choices

One day Baruch had met Jeremiah, the prophet, and somehow Jeremiah’s ministry had become his ministry. He had written down what Jeremiah had heard and seen (Jer. 36:4; 45:1). He had even gone to the Temple as Jeremiah’s spokesperson and had read God’s message when Jeremiah had been unable to do so himself (Jer. 36:5-10). Involvement with Jeremiah meant no lucrative palace appoint-

ment. It put Baruch, the blessed one, right into the scope of endless critique and relentless persecution. It meant living constantly on the edge. It ultimately led to forced immigration to Egypt (Jer. 43:1-7) and a death far away from home. Surely not an exciting epitaph.

However, more than 2,500 years after Baruch’s death we still remember him. Without his ministry, Jeremiah’s would not have been as pervasive as it was. Without his commitment to the Word, few words of Jeremiah would have reached us. We cannot forget Baruch—and neither did God.

Not Forgotten

It’s easy to wonder about one’s life choices when things are not going smoothly. Baruch surely did. He must have felt left alone quite often. From being the privileged insider, he had become an outsider whose association with God’s prophet did not, apparently, include any visible perks. Or so he thought.

A short chapter (Jer. 45), written around 605 B.C. during the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, is exclusively directed to Baruch. Just imagine for a moment: how would

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our hearts*



you feel if God would send a personal message directly to you? It would address you by name, would communicate about a particular issue only known to you, and would provide God's perspective on it. I imagine that Baruch must have felt overwhelmed. The year 605 B.C. marks the first time we hear of Baruch writing down Jeremiah's words (Jer. 36). It may have been the beginning of Jeremiah's and Baruch's friendship. In a world that is constantly looking for bigger, wider, stronger, longer—and more—we can learn valuable lessons from God's message to Baruch about what really counts.

1 God knows all about it: In moments of crisis we often feel isolated. We are hurting, we struggle to see beyond the issue that darkens our day, our vision is limited and inward looking. God knows that. "You said, 'Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest'" (Jer. 45:3).

2 God engages us: God not only knows how we are feeling and what we are mulling over, but He is eager to engage us and call us back to life. He knows, as much as we do in lucid moments, that a battle of cosmic dimensions is raging around us. At times we may feel as pawns in this battle. However, ultimately we can see that God is truly in control. "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up" (verse 4). His active engagement in this world and in the life of His children encourages trust.

3 God challenges us: When the going gets tough and we struggle to keep faith and hope and love, we often need to be challenged. Our heavenly Father, the master educator and chief counselor, knows this. "And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the Lord" (verse 5). *Look for what can make it into eternity*, we can hear God say, *don't focus on what will surely perish*.

4 God saves us: Baruch's special message did not end with a challenge. It concludes with a promise of salvation. Yes, life can be rough and we can feel its bruises and disappointment, but as children of a loving Father we can be assured that God wants to save us—from ourselves, from pain and hurt, from bad choices. "But I will give your life to you as a price in all places, wherever you go" (verse 5).

Eternity In Our Hearts

Baruch's story is a good reminder of the great controversy playing out in our lives. He had not been forgotten; God engaged him; God challenged him; and God saved him. He does the same for us. Baruch's story also challenges us to look at what really counts.

“There is a single question that I remember nearly every day.”

While studying at Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen in Austria nearly three decades ago, I was blessed by a Week of Prayer by one of Germany's premier public evangelists, Pastor Kurt Hasel. His sermons were well crafted, his illustrations spot on, his delivery gracious—but I have forgotten the sermons, most of the illustrations, and his delivery. Yet there is a single question that I remember nearly every day. In fact, I have shared this line many times with my teenage daughters as they travel the, at times, scary and often challenging road to adulthood. *Will what you do today make a difference in eternity?*

Baruch's quiet ministry did not secure him prime real estate in Jerusalem or a big paycheck from the royal treasury. In the face of an advancing Babylonian army he had realized that the things cluttering our lives are just that—things. One day, in the latter part of the seventh century B.C., Baruch had made a decision that made a difference for eternity. In spite of bruises, disappointments, and lingering questions he had stuck with that decision. His life challenges us to look at what really counts. His service reminds us that, in great or small ways, we too can make a difference. His decisions encourage us to listen carefully to the rhythm of eternity in our hearts. Faint, and yet audible, it tells us of a new morning without bruises, disease, disappointment, and pain. *Will what we do today make a difference in eternity?* ■

* The stamp on the bulla reads "Belonging to Berekyahu, son of Neriyahu, the scribe." Berekyahu and Neriyahu are longer forms of Baruch and Neriah. See Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities/Israel Exploration Society/Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 175, 176, bulla no. 417.



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