

31-45

31-God thought of you long before your great-grandparents even thought that you were possible. That, to me, is the huge significance of Jeremiah 1:5. "Before I formed you in your mother's womb..." But, there are passages that even imply that you were in His mind "before the foundation of the world was laid." And, not only did He think of you, He considered you precious. Is there any better theology than that?

32-In honest contradictions to its name, Lamentations may provide the sweetest picture of Providential caring of all the Text. Have you given the book enough of a chance to actually discover that? Let me paraphrase and condense 3:18-24, *My hope is completely gone and all I know is bitterness. But, this crushing has caused me to remember there actually is a reason to choose to hope. If it weren't for the goodness of God I would have already been destroyed and this is because God just doesn't give up. Each and every day I can choose to see that He keeps trying and it's His incredible character that keeps me hanging on. Isn't that a pretty sweet "lament?"*

33-Daniel is the only major character of the Bible, other than Jesus, against whom there is recorded no sin. That is just amazing. But, though God didn't see fit for us to know his failings (compared to the large reporting against Moses or David or Peter or...), Daniel was such a good man that he openly wanted us to know that he was also only a product of grace. Look at Daniel 9:20ff and you'll find that he even accepts some responsibility for the failures of his nation. No wonder God found favor in him!

34-God seems to not favor the use of "holy talismans" in the Bible. There are a number of instances where God just ignored the assumption of the people that some religious object or person would somehow create a protective force field around them. You see that when the Ark of the Covenant was taken in I Samuel 4. You see it in Jeremiah where the people thought the temple would save them. (Jeremiah 7:4) You even see it in the life story of Jeremiah where people thought that God would protect them if they just used the prophet as a shield against attack even though he had told them they were going to be defeated. I wonder what silly assumptions I carry like that?

35-You know that there is honest and real persecution going on today in various segments of the world. In fact, some who track these kinds of things claim that there may have been more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in the Christian centuries that preceded it combined. I need to think of this when I tend to get too comfortable in a culture that generally doesn't abuse me for my faith. There is Smyrna in the church in every age. Whether it's physical threat or torture or the abuse of a non-believing spouse, I need to pray for those who are being crushed to produce sweet perfume. (Rev. 2:8-11)

36-The second most common female name in the Bible is Mary. (Curiously, the first is Maachah! There are seven of them and six Marys.) But, perhaps the most mysterious woman in the Bible is one of those Marys- the one with the sub title of "Magdalene." We really need to be careful about what we say about her because some of what most people believe is just not something you can support in the Text. She is, somewhat, a mystery woman in reality.

37-One way we can see God being gracious is that He really doesn't enjoy pointing out our failures. We certainly see that in one of the few stories that's told in all four of the Gospels. Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 7 all tell of a woman with a really embarrassing past. It isn't until the last Gospel is written that John actually "spills the beans" by giving the infamous woman a name- Mary. Most assume it's because by the time he writes that book the sweet old saint had died and it wouldn't bring her shame to have "the rest of the story" told. How gracious is that?

38-There have been tons of available "messiahs" in history. You can go from Judas and Theudas of Galilee in Acts 5 on to David Koresh or others in our own era. One of the most curious was a 5th century man named Moses of Crete. He had such a loyal following that when he announced that they should walk off the cliff into the ocean so that they might march in triumph to Jerusalem. A ton of people followed him like lemmings to their death in the sea.

39-Another man who garnered a lot of loyal followers was the self-proclaimed messiah named Sabbatai Zevi. In the 17th century he had such a loyal following that even his open "conversion" to Islam (in order to save his hide) did not deter them. Over a hundred years after his death there were still many who revered him as messiah. Astounding.

40-Most Christians really don't understand why most of Judaism will not accept Jesus as the Messiah. In my mind it actually boils down to two things. One is what Paul expresses in I Corinthians 1. "Cursed be he who hangs on a tree" is a huge part of our Christology, but it really is a "stumblingblock" to others. The other reason can be expressed in a simple concept- "When messiah comes, all will be made right. We are 2,000 years removed from Him and things still are not right." If you're a Christian you may not like that rationale, but it is real in the minds of many in Judaism.

41-Some branches of Judaism actually have historically looked for two parallel messiahs... Messiah ben David and Messiah ben Joseph. The son of David (in their minds) will rule as a conquering king but the son of Joseph will fulfill the demands of a suffering servant in the prophecies.

42-The inaugural "miracle" of Jesus in ministry had a lot more significance than most of us understand. I know I would have been tempted to raise every dead body in the cemetery just outside the wall of the Jerusalem temple if I was going to announce my arrival. But not Jesus. He chose to turn water to wine at a backwoods wedding in a podunk town named Cana in John 2. But, even in doing that Jesus was fulfilling a commonly held prophetic legend that pre-dated Him. It had long been said, "When Messiah comes even the waters will blush in His presence." How cool is that?

43-The ludicrous question of the disciples in John 9 may actually have some logical basis if we can believe what later Judaism taught. "Who did sin, this man or his parents?" Why would you ask if an unborn baby was responsible for his own birth defect? In the early middle ages we find that Judaism actually evolved an explanation for birth deformities. It was the natural result of an obstinate child who wanted to wrestle with an angel just before the moment of birth. (Supposedly a child in-utero knows everything there is to know about God but Heaven knows it's a privilege to actually learn these things so an angel is sent to touch the lips of the child just at the moment of birth to remove the knowledge.) If that were true, then birth defects could be the responsibility of the unborn child!

44-Matthew and Mark seem to be written for a predominantly Jewish audience. Luke and John seem to have been written later because the church was transitioning from a largely Jewish movement to a world movement. God is pretty gracious that way, I think.

45-One of the greatest frictions between Jesus and His disciples was just timing. After Jesus fed the mob in John chapter 6 the disciples were absolutely ready to proclaim Him the King. Curiously, isn't that a part of why Jesus came to earth? Wasn't the inevitable proclamation of His role as King part of the package? But Jesus shut the discussion down by ordering them to get in the boat and get across to the other side. (By the way, I believe they sat in the middle grumbling about Jesus' short-sightedness and that's why they were sitting ducks for the storm that night.) Jesus did not deny His Kingship. He just had a different agenda of timing.