

January 6, 2008

“God’s Plans for Our Places”
Jeremiah 29:1-14

FCF: Inability to engage in life where we are

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the good plans of God,
(magnet) we can really live right where we are.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

In 597 B.C., the Babylonian army took over Jerusalem and took thousands of its people on a trek, hundreds of miles across the desert, back to Babylon. Three years later, in 594 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to these exiles, a message they needed to hear – especially given the messages they had been hearing up to that point. False prophets had been telling them their time there would be short. Jeremiah set out to set the record straight and to encourage them to settle in to what would be a much longer stay.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Jeremiah 29:1-14](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

What is the core of Jeremiah’s message? God is in control. Yes, Nebuchadnezzar had taken them into exile (v.1), but it was the LORD who had sent them there (vv.4, 7, 14). God was in control. Despite how things looked, He had plans for His people. And He knew those plans – they might not but He did. And those plans were surely good. That’s the core of the message, the message for these exiles as they yearned for home, as they faced their disappointments, struggling with where they were – God was in control.

That’s the message for any of us when we find ourselves where we do not wish to be, when forced into something else – some other place or position. God is in control. Which is vital to consider as we reflect back on a year gone by and as we project forward to a year to come. In the midst of circumstances we might not have chosen, we must remember that, despite how it seems, God is in control, He has His plans, and His plans are good. Which then has this effect – the very thing Jeremiah is communicating in this letter. It frees us, it impels us, to really live right where we are. Here and now. Knowing God has His good plans for us, we can really live right where we are even now.

Look with me for a moment at this letter and let’s consider what we find.

I. BUILD HOUSES

([READ Jeremiah 29:4-5a](#)) What is Jeremiah saying? Times and places matter.

A) Message through Jeremiah

This is the message through the prophet, Jeremiah.

1. This time matters

Your time and place matters. It may not be what you chose. But faithfulness is lived out in the ordinary things. What happens now is every bit as important as whatever you’ve been looking back to or looking forwards towards. This time and this place matters.

2. Make a home

So make a home. Study Babylonian architecture. Dig the foundations. Build the house. Fill out the change of address form. Hang pictures. Build that house and make a home.

B) Message from False Prophets

Which was a message quite different than that from the false prophets.

1. This time doesn’t count

This time and place don’t count. This is all just an interval. An interruption.

2. Set up a tent

So just set up a tent. Don’t invest here. Don’t get settled here. It’s just Babylon.

Application:

Such a message might be what exiles want to hear but it is not what they need to hear – then or now. This time and this place – wherever God has you – matters. Let me speak especially to place. No few of us know something of the pain of moving. There's a reason it hurts. We weren't made for it. We were made for settledness, for roots. Read Genesis 1 and 2. And then read Genesis 3. And there you will see the first visible manifestation of the Fall was an exile, an extrusion from the Garden – a move.

That's why it hurts. But let me suggest something else. God can work through it. He can use it to enlarge your heart, to grow your capacity to love and serve. And to have an impact on those into whose midst He has placed you. God has you here for a reason. And whatever that might be, it is good. Which should free you and impel you to dig in.

II. PLANT GARDENS

Which brings us to this (**READ Jeremiah 29:4-5**). Places matter. So do customs.

A) Message through Jeremiah

Jeremiah told them to plant gardens and to eat the produce.

1. The customs matter

Customs, the ways even of strangers, matter. You might not have the market cornered on what is prim and proper. The right way to do things may be a little bigger than you think.

2. Plant and eat

So plant Babylonian seeds. Use Babylonian recipes. Taste, eat what a place has to give.

B) Message from False Prophets

Customs matter. Which, again was not what the false prophets were saying.

1. Don't get your hands dirty in that soil

Don't get your hands dirty in that soil. It's not worth the work.

2. Don't bother contributing anything to that place

Don't bother contributing anything to that place. This is all an accident.

Application:

This is all just an accident. Which, of course, makes for a convenient excuse in holding back. "*Plant gardens,*" Jeremiah said. "*Eat their produce.*" Customs matter.

What might that look like? There are no few possibilities! Support the local arts. Frequent the local restaurants. Buy a Titans sweatshirt. God has you here for a reason. And whatever that might be, it is good. Which should free and impel you to engage.

III. TAKE WIVES

Which brings us to this (**READ Jeremiah 29:4-6**). Places matter. Customs matter. People matter. Places matter. Customs matter. People matter.

A) Message through Jeremiah

Jeremiah told them to take wives, have children, engage in family life to the full.

1. Don't compromise

Now note he doesn't say intermarry with the Babylonians. They weren't to compromise.

2. But don't just play it safe

But neither were they just to play it safe. Life was to continue on in the social spheres.

B) Message from False Prophets

Again, all this was countering the message from the false prophets.

1. This is no place to start a family

Are you crazy? This is no place to start a family. Oh, to be back in Jerusalem!

2. These are not people you need to love

This is not the place, these are not the people you need to love. Pull back. Be aloof.

Application:

Oh, it's easier that way. But not healthier. How might Jeremiah's counsel be worked out here? Join one of the church community groups. Look for ways to serve. You will come to know and be known in ways you never have. Engage in the community. Invite people over. Start a book club. God has you here for a reason. And whatever that might be, it is good. Which should free and impel you to pour yourself out.

IV. SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CITY

Which brings us to this (**READ Jeremiah 29:4-7**). It all matters. It all matters.

A) Message through Jeremiah

Jeremiah's message was as simple as it was shocking to his listeners.

1. What

Seek the shalom – the peace, the wholeness, the beauty and depth of Babylon. Pray for the very people who dragged you away, who took you from everything you now long for.

2. Why

Seek their welfare and pray for them. Why? Because just as surely as the LORD had called Israel to be salt and light – distinct, different – He had made them one with the Babylonians – living side by side. Your future tied to theirs. They are now your people.

B) Message from False Prophets

Which was surely an enormous offense to the false prophets.

1. You are God's people!

You are God's people! You are not Babylonians! You are Israelites!

2. This is Babylon!

This is not Jerusalem! This isn't even Egypt! This is Babylon!

Application:

What do we do with this? Let me suggest this. You're a Clarksvillian. Embrace the place. Embrace the people. Get to know them that you might grow to love them. You're struggling with resentment as to being here? Consider this. You may have arrived as a captive but now you are a missionary. Pour yourself out. And pray. Pray.

CONCLUSION:

Jeremiah's words are a rebuke and a challenge – not just to exiles then but now. *“Quit sitting around feeling sorry for yourself. This is where you are being called to live out your faith. No, you're not where you want to be. Granted. Now what will you do about it? How will you respond? Wait it out faithlessly or dive in faithfully?”*

For those who heeded Jeremiah's call, it was a faith stretching experience. Flawed assumptions and preconceptions about themselves, God, and the world were broken apart and put back together. And they were made deeper for it. Which is what we're called to as well – to trust God, His promises to us and plans for us, following where He leads, and giving ourselves to Him. For He has His plans for our places.

All places. Now what I've said has immediate application to His plans for our physical places. But let me say this as we close. Trusting God with His plans – that He has them, knows them, and that they are good – goes beyond physical places. Listen. Your geography may be the same. But circumstances can still place you where you do not wish to be. What will you do? The opportunity is before you, before us every day, to trust the LORD, to live where we are, and let Him do His work (**READ Jeremiah 29:11**)

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