

From Judgement to Hope – Settle Down
Jeremiah 29:1-14
September 11, 2022
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It used to be that the best first aid treatment for a snakebite on the arm was a tourniquet. It makes sense; stop the poisoned blood flowing back to the heart. Now of course it's about bandaging the whole arm, a considerably different treatment. What they found was that when you released the tourniquet there was a big rush of blood that went straight to the heart. It is counter-intuitive to think that a bandage would work better than a tourniquet.

Now in a similar way, Jeremiah's advice to the Exiles in Babylon is also counter-intuitive. You would expect Jeremiah to tell them to resist the Babylonians and fight back against this pagan nation. But what does he say? Build houses, settle down, marry and have children.

Can you imagine their reaction: What? Settle without protest, amongst these destroyers of my homeland, my family, the temple? Pray for these cruel Babylonians? You want me to pray for them and their welfare?

Try and put yourself in the place of the Exiles. It would be strange to hear this message. It would sound like bad advice.

So far in the Book of Jeremiah we have been looking at the time before the exile, where Jeremiah is warning them about what is coming. Chapter 29 is set a short time after the downfall of Jerusalem in 597 BC. Babylonia has conquered Judah and the nobles and officials have been taken captive to Babylon.

Jeremiah is still in Jerusalem and he writes to the Exiles with a Word from the Lord. It is a counter-intuitive Word. A Word which needs spiritual perception to be received.

There were **other voices** which could be received as well. These were the false prophets who told the people to not settle down but to offer resistance because the exile would be short. v8,9 READ

One of these prophets was Hananiah. Look what he said to the people back in chapter 28: 2, 3. *"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says. "I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here."*

That must have sounded attractive - only two years. Jeremiah says 70 years (v10)
You live very differently if you know you're only in a place for two years compared to 70 years.

The people actually have three options here.

1. **Resist** the Babylonians and try and make themselves a tightknit little community of Jewish faith and culture separate from the Babylonians.
2. Give in to the Babylonians and **be assimilated** into their culture. After all Babylon was an impressive city which was highly prosperous, had stunning architectural features, and a vibrant, lively cultural life. It would have been very tempting to think, well Babylon's Gods must be more powerful than Yahweh so why not shift allegiance and be assimilated.

So

-the people could resist.

-the people could give in.

3. There is a third option however and this is the one Jeremiah is telling the people to follow. He's saying engage with the city and pray for its welfare but at the same time retain your distinct identity. This is a much more difficult path to follow.

How will they sing the Lord's song in a strange land? This is the question the Psalmist asks in Psalm 137. (Bibles)

This is a famous Psalm isn't it?

V1 *"By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion."*

What will the people do? They have suffered a devastating national defeat? Their future existence as a nation is in doubt. They are asking how can this be?

-Didn't God promise Abraham they would be a great nation?

-Didn't God rescue them from Egypt and lead them into the promised land?

-Didn't God give King David the promise of a dynasty that would last forever?

How will they respond in this crisis?

-Will they resist the Babylonians?

-Give in to the Babylonians?

-Or will they settle in the land but keep their own identity?

Psalm 137 gives us the answer in v5 & 6. READ

That sounds to me like they are seeking the Lord with all their heart. And that is the prophecy of Jeremiah in verses 12 and 13 of today's reading.

V12 *"Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

That sounds to me like, *"considering Jerusalem my highest joy."*

The people do end up taking Jeremiah's advice and settle down but keep their own identity. The challenge will be for Jerusalem to continue to be their highest joy when they are so far away from Jerusalem, [at least 1000 kilometres!] And there were no superhighways back then! They were being called to resist Babylonian idol worship and seek God with all their heart.

Remember what we've said before about idols. This is what Jeremiah has been hammering them about so many times. Now in exile they will have to resist idolatry like never before. They will have to put Yahweh first and worship only him. This is what *"considering Jerusalem their highest joy"* means."

So what does all this **mean for us today**?

In many ways we live in a time similar to the Exiles. No we haven't been literally invaded and taken to another country but in many ways we as Christians are now living in a foreign culture. Australia used to be considered a Christian country, (and let's be aware there is both good and problems with that), but now Australia is considered a secular country (which also can be good and bad) The problem is that in most of the media and in social settings talk about God is taboo. It is seen as an irrelevance and certainly not where 'the good life' is to be found.

So holding a Christian worldview where God is at the centre and Jesus Christ is Lord is to be very much in the minority. It can feel like being in exile even in our own land.

We face the same challenge the Exiles faced in 597BC.

-How can we pray for the peace and prosperity of the city yet resist it's idolatry?

-How can we retain our Christian distinctiveness in a culture with many temptations?

We are called to be a **holy people**. Holy means being set apart for God. 1 Peter 2:9 sums it up well, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."*

But my friends we are not called to pull up the drawbridge and retreat into some monastic like community and tell the world to take a running jump.

-We are called to engage.

-We are called to seek the welfare of the city.

We here at Noosa Anglican do try and work for the well-being of our community. Our **Samaritan Care** ministry provides for many people in need. We prayed for Samaritan Care last Sunday. Let me read you a piece in the latest report from Max and Val.

Some examples of the assistance given in the last few weeks include:

Pharmaceutical assistance via Pharmacy Gift Cards.

Purchase of Telstra Pre Paid vouchers.

Purchase and distribution of donated groceries.

Delivery of home cooked meals, biscuits and fresh fruit and vegetables.

Thanks to Parishioners who have donated clothing, shoes and other miscellaneous items, which they no longer able to use.

A BIG THANK YOU to everyone who blesses this Ministry.

♥'We are Blessed to be a Blessing' ♥

The Samaritan Care ministry is one way we bless our community and work for its welfare.

Another wonderful ministry is our support of **Chaplaincy** across all the schools in our district. Of particular note are the Breakfast Club ministries that take place in all our Schools. I've just joined the Sunshine Beach High School team and had a great cooking and buttering toast a few weeks ago. We financially support the Chappies through our mission giving and the sale of eggs. And offer practical support in many other ways as well.

At St Marys Tewanin we have an outreach to young families through Play Time which meets on a Thursday morning. This is providing a lovely service for Mums and Dads, and grandparents who bring their children along and find connexion with other young families in the community and a lot of love and support.

On October 30th we have the opportunity to serve our community by assisting at the **Noosa Triathlon**. We offer hospitality at one of the parking stations for the shuttle bus. You may like to cook sausages, serve refreshments, play live music, or just meet and greet. Please see Ian Jobling if you would like to engage with the community in this way.

Yes we are seeking to bless and prosper our community but there is **so much more we could do**. Parish Council has been considering for some time the whole issue of homelessness and it's on our Agenda again this week. If you have any ideas or input please let us know. In **Vision 26** we also

identified the areas of mental health, poverty, loneliness, family breakdown and the needs of the elderly. Maybe the message of Jeremiah is prompting you to do something in one of these areas. Please come and talk to me about any ideas you might have. We want to be a church that blesses our community.

Probably the most often quoted verse in the whole 52 chapters of Jeremiah is v11 in today's reading. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Have you heard of that one?

It is usually a verse quoted to help people through a crisis, to bring reassurance that God is with them and there are still good times ahead. I'm sure God has used the passage to bring exactly that sort of encouragement to many.

I hope from this morning you will now understand more fully the context in which it is given. It's about the people of God returning from exile in Babylon back into the promised land. In the immediate term they are to settle in Babylon and make the most of their situation by blessing Babylon. But they're not to lose sight of the long term goal of the promised land and of Jerusalem as their chief joy.

My friends for us this is a picture of our final destination in the promised land - the new heavens and the new earth. Only then will all suffering and sickness and heartache be overcome. Only then will verse 11 of Jeremiah 29 be truly fulfilled. I'd like to be able to tell you that God's plan is to prosper you in this life and that it is about health and material prosperity; But that is not what this verse is teaching. How long were the exiles in Babylon? It was 70 years, yet God gave them hope.

There are no guarantees in this life except the hope of the Gospel. The hope that, whatever assails us, we have a promised land that is safe and secure, a treasure stored up in heaven waiting for those who love the Lord Jesus and long for his coming.

But my friends in the meantime what are we called to do? I believe it is the same as the Israelites in the 6th century.

1. We're not called to be a holy huddle sheltering ourselves from that nasty pagan world out there.
2. We are not called to merge with our society by accepting its values and standards; and compromise our sole allegiance to God.
3. We are called to seek the peace and prosperity of the city by humbly serving in a way that points people to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are to wait patiently for that final deliverance from exile when our Saviour returns. Amen.