

Sermon for Sunday, November 23, 2025

Jeremiah 29:1 and 4-14

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There are three points to emphasize as we think about today's text. First is the context: just who is Jeremiah speaking to and where is his audience actually located. The second point is to expand our way of thinking about exile. Finally, what does it mean to be a child of God, claimed by God—whether as an ancient Israelite in exile or as a four month old baby.

Jeremiah was a prophet living about 600 years before Jesus. One of the pivotal events in ancient Israel's history was the year 586 BCE when an invading army from Babylon overran Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. This army forced all of the remaining Israelites to go into exile. Most of them ended up in and near the city of Babylon.

You may have noticed that I said the word "remaining." That's because there had been an earlier deportation when many of the political elites, artisans, and craftsmen from Jerusalem were sent to Babylon. These first exiles are the audience for this portion of Jeremiah's message. When Jeremiah writes this he is still in Jerusalem. The total destruction of the city has not yet occurred. He is writing to the first group of people that had been sent into exile.

Exile. To the ancient Israelites this meant being forced to leave their homes and possessions and the promised land. Going into exile was physically dangerous. There was only one way to travel: and that was on foot. To arrive in Babylon they would have to cross a great desert and unpredictable rivers with few bridges. Only the strongest would survive the journey.

Few, if any of us, have experienced exile in the Biblical sense. But many of us have experienced exiles of another sort. Think of the folks we know who have lived in a particular place for a long, long time. A health crisis occurs: a fall with a broken hip, a cancer diagnosis, a debilitating stroke, or one of the many other health challenges that you can imagine. Like it or not, things must change for that person and for their family. They can no longer live in their former home and must find new place to settle. And they grieve....they grieve the loss of their physical function, the loss of

their home, the loss of their former ways of living. They are forced into exile.

That's not to say that life ends: actually life does continue, but in a new place. We meet new people, we are exposed to new foods, and somehow we figure out how to continue. God knows that. That's why he says, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce." Building a house takes time. It takes time for a garden to grow so that the produce is mature enough to be eaten. God, through Jeremiah, is saying, "Settle down for the long haul. You are going to be here for a while." In fact you are going to be here so long that your children will grow up—make sure they get married and have families of their own. This exile is going to span generations.

That's the challenge of Jeremiah's message. There is going to be hardship, sorrow, and grieving. The exile is going to go on for a very long time. The good news is that God provides the exiles with a glimmer of light; a bit of hope. This glimmer comes in the treasured, cherished verse 11. "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." There's a promise in this passage; a promise that we need to claim for ourselves, just as God has claimed us and made promises to us.

God has plans for us. The passage uses the word "welfare" and that's not a negative....it's a positive. After all the word welfare is the joining of two smaller words: well and fare. "Fare" meaning how you get along in life. "Well" meaning good or positive. So God has a plan for us to get along in this life in a good or positive way, even when we are living in exile. Implicit in this encouragement is God's directive to build and to plant. We have to take action in order to thrive in our new home.

The last phrase of the verse is "to give you a future with hope." God's plan and intent is that every single one of us will have a future; not just an existence but a future filled with hope.

We teach many concepts about baptism. The one to emphasize on a day of baptism is that of adoption. When a person is baptized they are adopted into God's family. They are formally claimed by God. God acts and says, "I, the LORD, am giving you a future with hope."

Now I want nothing more than for baby Hazel, Cooper, and Krystin to have a good life. I want nothing more than for them and all of

you to “fare well.” But we all know that life doesn’t work that way and that difficult challenges occur in this world. As you all are well aware, recently the Anderson family walked together in a sort of exile with Dale as he came to the moment of his death. But they also knew that he too, even as he approached his final breath, had a future with hope. That’s what we have my friends. Each of us has a future with hope. On this day, when we give thanks to God for everything God has provided to us and done for us, that is the most important thing we can give thanks for: the gift of the promise of resurrection: a forever future with hope.

In conclusion, while God was using Jeremiah to bring a message to the ancient Israelites, God is also speaking to us. Whether or not we are in exile just now, we have a promise from God: that God has a plan for us and for our lives, that God is going to provide us with a hope filled future. Nothing, not even exile, can separate us from God and from God’s love. God’s intent is that we will “fare well” today and always. Amen.

Being conquered by an invading army wasn’t just a physical tragedy, it caused deep theological questions to arise. The exiles wondered if God had abandoned them. Were they going to be able to worship God in their new home? Would God even be there?