

Letter to the Exiles

Jeremiah 29

This is a letter. That means it is written to people in a particular situation. It is much like the **letters of Paul** that make up a part of the NT which we will get into this fall. This is a **“take your medicine”** kind of letter. They need to **swallow something bitter** at this time and take the medicine for a while before what God wants to do is finished.

We’ve just read the story of **Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego**. In that story, the Hebrew people in Babylon **demonstrate obedience to God by defying** what is expected of them in their new home. **They wouldn’t bow** to the statue Nebuchadnezzar built.

Now the prophet Jeremiah sends this letter that seems to say the exact opposite response to captivity.

⁴“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. This is 2 generations, time to have kids who marry and have kids. ⁷**But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you** into exile, and **pray to the Lord on its behalf**, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord. **If anyone tells you that you are going home soon**, you can know for sure that this message is not coming from God.

Focus on yourself and your part in this, no victim mindset.

Let me say right off that **there is a difference between being a victim and having a victim mindset**. If you have been a victim of a crime and that has caused you continued distress, this is not what I’m talking about.

They cannot view themselves as victims and do the things Jeremiah is saying.

More importantly, if they view themselves as victims, **they will never repent of their sins because it’s not their fault**. It’s **God**, it’s the **Babylonians**, it’s the **Egyptians**, it’s **those stupid kings**, it’s the **priests...** **They will never own that they were complicit in breaking the laws of Moses.**

When you take **the role of a victim, you are focused on yourself and what someone is doing to you**. What happens is **the next time something bad happens** you are already looking for who to blame. **This is a rut that is hard to get out of because it touches our broken humanness**. It sets off that **primal fight or flight response** in us. That is about self-preservation and **it’s hard to get to what God wants** when we are preoccupied with ourselves.

Pray for your enemies. This is **an antidote** for a victim mindset. Look at your part in this.

“Through prayer one can look at opponents as more than someone or something to be overcome. They can become also a means of education and sanctification, the agents through whom one finds growth in relationship with God.” J. Andrew Dearman

- Can we do this for our **opponents across** the aisle politically?
- Can we do this for that **bully at school**?
- Can we do this for the **Palestinians or the Israelis**?

Stop thinking you are a victim and Be where your feet are...be present.

They are so Jerusalem focused that they miss everything that is in front of them. Start acting like **Babylon is below** you.

Christians can be so heaven focused that you are no earthly good. This gets to a **bad theology** that we have in the American Church. **We view this world as a sinking ship** that we need to get as many people off as possible. Yes, **this world will be destroyed at some point** when Jesus returns. Don't hear what I'm not saying. But if we view this world as a sinking ship **then the kingdom of God becomes less** than it is. The kingdom of God or Heaven in scripture **is not simply the sweet by and by.** The kingdom of God is a **present reality and a future hope.** It is the **restoration of God's rule** over all things. Things being put right, as they were in Eden.

Do you remember the covenant that God made with Israel? They were to be his people and he was to be their God exclusively. He would make them a great nation and give them a homeland and they would be a blessing to all the nations. **They are supposed to be a blessing to the Babylonians living around them.**

When we have the sinking ship view of life, we also forget that we are to be a blessing to others, whether they join Jesus or not. **We start preaching a Gospel that is cheap,** it is to get conversions. It's a **forgiveness only gospel** that deals with a person's sin so that they can spend eternity in heaven. But that's not the whole gospel. **We are to learn to live and love like Jesus here and now and that means loving our enemies.**

But I don't want to be here. I want to be where I will be later.

- Treat the present like a **public restroom.**

Everything is an obstacle or an asset...

Now for the promise for those who do what Jeremiah is telling them to do. ¹⁰“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you

from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. Jeremiah 29:4-14

Trust God for what you can't see.

A relationship with Jesus that says you are my king, my allegiance is to you alone doesn't say to God, **"show me and I'll trust you."** That person submits to God when he says, "Trust me and I'll show you."

Get me out of this and then I'll trust you. Really, will you?

I knew a guy who prayed to God that if God **kept him alive through Vietnam**, he would give his life to Jesus. **God did and he didn't.** He became a negative bitter guy. Partially because in his heart **he knew that he didn't keep his end of the bargain.** But also, because he **didn't have Jesus with him to help him to be able to heal** from what he had experienced in war.

When we view ourselves a victim and our only goal is to get out of our present situation, then we will miss what God is doing right here, right now.

What would it mean for you to be where your feet are?

Let's have a prayer time where we are present here and now. Close your eyes and take note of what you hear. Then take note of what you smell. What do you feel physically happening around you? Now you are where your feet are right here and now where God wants to meet you and do something in your life.

Lord help me to be where my feet are, where you can use me. Help me to not be in such a hurry to get out of where I am right now, looking at how I want things to be that I miss the people around me whom you want to bless through my life.

Now pray for those around you right now, beside you, in front of you, behind you. Now allow the spirit to bring people to your mind who are also in this place with you. Pray for them.

Now Lord, we confess our sins to you. Not just those ways where we have "missed the mark," but also our tendency to be self-absorbed.