

GOD'S GOOD PROMISES**Jeremiah 29:1-14**

INTRO: After graduating from high school, Sheila attended Covenant Bible College near Quito, Ecuador, from September 2002 until May 2003. She and 40 other students from the States, Canada, Mexico, and Ecuador, were part of a 9-month immersive program of Bible and discipleship. Needless to say the students became good friends in that intensive year and they have had occasional gatherings over the years since. The most recent gathering was probably 5 years ago when some of them spent a long weekend together in Estes Park, Colorado.

Now if you know anything about that part of the Rocky Mountains, you know that Grizzly bears live there. And Grizzly/Human contact is always a possibility, and, as you can imagine, such meetings can be unpleasant, to say the least. Some people carry bear spray, a strong pepper spray, and it works, if you have good aim and you hit the bear in his face. Otherwise he just gets madder and you get, well The truth is, lots of people don't think about bears until they start seeing signs warning you to not feed them, because you don't want them to have you for dessert. And there are also signs and pamphlets that give you instructions what to do if you **DO** get attacked.

So when Sheila came home she brought this shirt for me. Now, I don't know what I'd do if a bear started looking hungrily in my direction. Playing dead might come to my mind for a second, but then I'd probably try to flee. I'm of the opinion that this poster is probably more accurate.

But that Keep Calm idea on my T-shirt has been a great advertising tool and a lot of people have gotten a lot of mileage out of a concept that came out of England as attack from Germany was looming as World War 2 was beginning. Keep Calm and Carry On was a propaganda poster produced by the British government in 1939 in preparation for that impending attack. It was intended to raise morale in the coming Battle of Britain, which had not yet begun but was expected, and, of course, dreaded.

I never knew this about that sign – it was almost never, actually used. Although nearly 2.5 million copies of the poster were printed, and the German attack did happen and it was as bad as expected, the poster was only rarely publicly displayed. It has only, relatively recently, become popular for advertising just about everything. And yet, that has only happened since one of two posters known to remain was discovered in a bookshop in England in 2000. It's still a picture of the stereotypical British stoicism prevalent at the time.

Keep Calm and Carry On. That was, essentially was Jeremiah was telling the Jewish exiles in Babylon in 597 BC. Let me read his letter to you and then we'll look at how they are good words for us today. (Read Jeremiah 29:1-14)

Now you've heard some words in there that are quite familiar. Verse 11 is especially prevalent, *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.* That verse is often quoted without context. I'm not saying they are quoted out of context, but where they come from and what the situation they were addressing is often left out. Let me talk about this a bit as I set it up and you'll see, as Jeremiah was promising for the exiles, there are often opportunities in what the world sees as obstacles because of God's good promises.

Some quick background: If you're familiar with the chapters leading up to our text, you'll know that Jeremiah has struggled to take the word of God to the people of Judah. He is God's prophet and nobody's listening; and when they do, they try to silence him by whatever means came to mind, whether it was putting him on trial or throwing him down a well. He has been speaking against false prophets who tell people what they want to hear rather than the truth. In the New Testament, Paul warns Timothy about a similar issue that people of God will always have to contend with when he wrote *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.* 2 Timothy 4:3. In Chapter 28, one of the false prophets, by the name of Hananiah has given a glowing prophecy that gets everyone's hope up – but it's just not true. God has plans for his people to learn from their situation and it's not the pie in the sky message of Hananiah. In the end, Hananiah pays for his false prophesy with his life.

Jeremiah proceeds with the truth, and he does it in a letter to the Jewish people in Babylon. The recipients of the letter were the cream of the crop and leadership of Judah who have been carried off, hundreds of miles to Babylon from Jerusalem. Their hope and desire, as you expect, is to go home. But Jeremiah says, *"Not so fast! Stay there and thrive. Watch what God is going to teach you and THEN, you'll come home."*

First, Jeremiah has . . .

Wisdom for the present

- Jeremiah tells the exiles to face the facts. *“You’re going to be there for while so make the best of it. Build houses. Plant fields and vineyards. Marry off the kids so they can have grandkids for you. Get into the wholesome parts of Babylonian culture. Pray for the Babylonians. Thrive!”* Where they were settled was in the worst part of the region, full of broken down irrigation canals and infested with malaria mosquitos. But God’s people knew how to make silk purses out of sow’s ears. They still do. Jeremiah is saying, keep calm, and carry on. Be God’s people – you’ve been good at it before, you can be good at it again.
- One person writes, *“God’s intentions for his people were not to be interpreted either by their present circumstances, drastic though they were, nor by the length of their exile, which was to be approximately 70 years, and the horizon limit. Actually God had plans for his people, plans which contemplated their welfare, and not their hurt. . . . Even in this strange land, amid sorrows, frustrations, and physical distress, God could be sought and found when his people would seek him with all their heart.”*
- I’m pretty certain, that by now you’ve noticed, we’re presently in an exile of sorts of our own. We haven’t been conquered by an invading army who has carried us off to a far-off land. But we have been exiled nevertheless – right here in our own land and in our own homes. What we are experiencing these days is unprecedented. We don’t know how to do this. Well, actually, we’re making do, and doing okay, but, WE DON’T LIKE IT!
- We want it to be okay! We want it to all go away and go back to what we had before this all happened. But what was that? And do we really want to go back to the status quo? Don’t we want to learn from this and come out better disciples on the other side? The answer for that is yes. I know you know that. We need to keep calm and carry on and learn what God is teaching us in our quarantine.
- There is . . .

A forecast for a great future

- Let’s go back to Jeremiah’s message. Faith in God’s tomorrow is the truth he is striving to drive home. In the words of one commentator, He is encouraging *“Patience with expectancy, not the inertness of despair or suicide of folly.”*
- 1. James Green writes, Jeremiah turns from the present to the future with, *“Although you will not return soon, as some of your prophets are saying, you are coming back after 70 years, God has plans for you, plans which he is making, plans for welfare that comes from rich harmonious relationships, and plans for a future of hope. Meanwhile you are not necessarily separated from him, for you can find him in an intimate personal relationship, in Babylon, just as you did in Jerusalem. That is if you seek him with all your heart. (the meaning of heart in the Hebrew word Jeremiah used is with all your intellect and not with your emotions). Then, and only then, in his own time, God will restore you and return you to where you belong. Are you going to learn from that?”*
- That was the bright future Jeremiah was forecasting for them in God’s plan. It was sure. It was guaranteed by Almighty God himself – it doesn’t get any more certain than that. His promise was, *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* (v. 13). You WILL seek me. And not only that, *I will be found by you.* (v. 14a). The one who seeks will find. Recently I told you about Gary Barnett, a student in a class I taught. Gary was from a Godless Jewish home. I mean the thought of God and religion, simply didn’t cross anyone’s mind. But it did cross Gary’s mind and he sought, and he found. If you seek you will find. That’s God’s good promise.
- We have an equally bright forecast in the midst of our exile. God still has plans for his people, and for all of humanity, for that matter. Whosoever will may come to him. The one who seeks him will find him. I think there are people who have never given God a second thought who are thinking long and hard about him now. Are you one of those people? Contact me ASAP! I can carefully assist you in that I won’t get pushy – talk to me.
- How about you Church? Do you know someone like that? They’re out there. Be ready. And be a picture of how Jesus would be under this kind of pressure – he made opportunities out of obstacles.
- And here is another question: What other things is God teaching us in this time of exile? Patience? Faith? Hope? Endurance? Peace? What are you learning? You are not alone in this. God is there for you as his Holy

Spirit ministers Shalom to you. Your brothers and sisters are here with you in the exile. God has a plan to prosper us in this. Not for our benefit as much as for the Kingdom. I see revival coming out of this mess.

- God's made promises and all his promises are good, What opportunities are you seeing in what the world sees as an obstacle? The promise is there. God is on the other side and he is bringing us through. Amen.