

**SEEING THE NEED****Jeremiah 29:4-14, 1 Peter 1:3-9**

**Intro:** In just 10 days we will be restarting our stalled LifeGroup/DinnerChurch ministry. The last time we met was early March of 2020 when COVID was still a nebulous disease that more and more people were talking about. That last meeting was the third of eight. It was a series that we planned to take us up to the week preceding Memorial Day which would culminate with a picnic provided by John Steiner, who, incidently, is providing our meal today. Little did we know that it would be our last meeting for 18 months. And how we have missed it!

Our study for that Winter/Spring Session of LifeGroups was GOSPEL IN LIFE by Timothy Keller which covers, as described in the book, “. . . *the Gospel and how it is lived out in all of life—first in your heart, then in your community, and then into the world.*” And don’t miss the sub-heading of the study which is Grace Changes Everything.

As I said, that last meeting was the third of eight, so, when LifeGroups came to a screeching halt, we had only covered the first three chapters/lessons in the book; and since it’s been 18 months, your LifeGroup leadership team has decided we need to review those first three sessions which we already had completed in February and March of last year. This is how we are going to do it: I will preach on the subject matter of session one today and session two next Sunday. And then on our first night of LifeGroups on September 8, which is just 10 days away, we will cover session three again. Now, don’t worry, it’s not going to be like the movie GROUNDHOG DAY where Bill Murray kept waking up on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. This session will be different enough, that, if your memory was actually good enough to recall March 11, 2020 you would find the most similar thing would be watching Tim Keller’s video for that session. The sermons for today and next week will be my perspective on the material but it will still be the best way to be prepared.

Now, to today’s talk: first, the text: **(Read Jeremiah 29:4-14)**

It’s almost 600 years before Christ and many of the inhabitants of what had been Israel have been forcibly deported across the desert to Babylon. For the Babylonians, it was a strategic way to dilute the population of a conquered people by taking anyone who was anyone from a vanquished country and moving them away from their homeland. The plan was, and it often worked, was that the exiles would become like their conquerors.

The Jewish people, who had often neglected to live for God, in fact, that was why they had been conquered in the first place according to our text, hoped to maintain their identity in this distant land. This proved to be a frustrating enterprise. The pressure to assimilate was strong. After all, when in Rome, living like the Romans do is the path of least resistance. Add to that the fact that children born in captivity knew nothing of the old life and they were becoming Babylonians in their own right. This was exactly according to the strategic plan of the Babylonians – conquer and then assimilate. If the conquered become like us, they will no longer be enemies but productive members of Babylonian culture.

Added to the Jewish frustration was false information. False prophets were promising that this Babylonian captivity would soon end and everyone would be able to return to their beloved homeland. So with the exile ending so soon, why get too comfortable in their surroundings. This is unfounded and Jeremiah is, again, the bearer of bad news which, as we see in verse 10 proclaims that the exile in Babylon will be 70 years. In other words, a long time.

And since it will be a long time, the prophecy, which we just read, is God’s word for them to settle in and bloom where they’re planted. Build houses. Plant gardens and crops. Establish businesses. Have children. Marry off your children. Flourish as the people of God in a far off land. Be the people of God in the midst of a pagan and sometimes, hostile culture.

So it’s like this:

- The Babylonians have every intention that the People of God come in, make themselves comfortable and become like Babylonians and believe like Babylonians.
- The false prophets are feverishly saying “Stay out of Babylon, stay where you are in the mosquito ridden and swampy area that used to be a system of canals. Make sure you remain who you are and believing what you believe by staying isolated and out of contact with the Babylonians.

- But God, through Jeremiah says “Go into Babylon, thrive and flourish and continue to be my people in the midst of the Babylonians. Make a difference. Be people of holiness and grace in the midst of society and therefore transform society.”

It’s easy to transfer this kind of thinking to our lives as Christ Followers. Because, as has always been true, and certainly as it was true in Babylon in 595 BC . . .

### **God loves people and we need to too**

- In this culture we need to see the need and minister to it rather than retreating from it. The best way to transform society is by being in it as we are boldly being Jesus at the same time. This means working out the gospel in the midst of culture even as you work it out in your own life. Allow culture to see you at work.
- Jeremiah proclaims *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.* Jeremiah 29:7. Yes! Pray and work for the prosperity of our culture – not just because you want culture to thrive but also, because as culture prospers, so will you.
- So it’s a no-brainer to always strive to. . .

### **Serve and love**

- Serve and love those with whom you live. Jesus was asked *Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?* Matthew 22:36 and without hesitation he responded with, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. Matthew 22:37-38.* But he wasn’t done, he added, *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Matthew 22:39. The second greatest commandment, straight from Jesus himself, is *love your neighbor as yourself.*
- Loving our neighbors means seeking their best. Ultimately the best we can seek for them is to come into relationship with the living God of the Universe. And the best way for that happen is by serving them out of a sacrificial love for them. That cannot be done in isolation. We must be in society to transform it. You cannot light a room with a light that is covered.
- But . . .

### **Sin has broken society**

- Even though this is obvious with even a cursory glance at the news, this is old news. I mean REALLY old news since it began in the Garden of Eden. But the Great Commission to *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.* Matthew 28:19-20 is a call to be anything but isolated. Going means striving to restore society to what it was prior to Adam and Eve’s fall into brokenness.
- So it’s obvious that living in the midst of culture does not mean closing our eyes to the evil and wickedness of society. In fact living and serving in society never means giving in to its influence, instead living and serving in society means striving to transform society from the inside out.

**Conclusion:** Will it be easy? Not a chance! Peter gives us a joyous promise even while he pulls no punches about the challenges Christ Followers will face as they live in culture in a transformational way. Listen,

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

1 Peter 1:3-9

We have a living hope – living in isolation and keeping it to ourselves is no way to transform culture.

We have an inheritance that is guarded in heaven – that means we can impact society from the inside out with Godly protection for our souls.

Will it be a picnic? Not a chance. We WILL face various trials. Society doesn't want to hear the truth. The Good News isn't good to them yet. And there are false prophets who will work at cross-purposes with us. BUT the outcome of our faith is the salvation of our souls AND those souls we bring along from our living out the Gospel in life.

See the need, be Jesus in sin broken society. Amen.