

FINDING HOPE IN GOD

JEREMIAH 29:4-14 ROMANS 15:13

APRIL 19, 2020

In 625BC, the people of Judah and Jerusalem, were not very good examples of God's people! There was much corruption and Godless living, idol worship, immorality, etc. There were some brief periods of turning to God, but king after king led the people in the wrong direction, which was basically away from God. Into this setting, God called the prophet, Jeremiah, to speak words of warning and asking the people to turn to God. For nearly forty years, Jeremiah delivered this message to an audience who did everything to try to quiet him, even kill him, because he spoke discomfoting words to them constantly! I am certainly glad to have NOT been Jeremiah!

In 587BC, God allowed the wicked king Nebuchadnezzar to overrun Jerusalem, and take the strongest/smarestest/best persons into captivity in Babylon, hundreds of miles to the east, the area which is now Iraq. To the captives, this was the end of their culture and race, everything was now lost, because Jerusalem was burned to the ground, including the temple, and they were now being held against their wishes, in the control of a Godless empire. It was 'lights out', all over, the end! NO FUTURE AT ALL!

When the people were taken captive, Jeremiah was permitted to stay in Jerusalem with the sick/elderly ones who had been left to die. But in Chapter 29-31, there is an interlude of bright, encouraging, and hopeful messages, in the form of a letter which Jeremiah wrote and had delivered to God's people in Babylon.

Jeremiah told them to do some very strange things, like settle in, build houses, have children, and seek the welfare of their captors!! God wanted to give His people a sense of HOPE to encourage them, and help ease the anxiety/fear they felt. If they only saw their situation from a human standpoint, they would only feel defeated, sad, angry, anxious and ready to just give up, a very negative outlook!

In many respects, we are also in a time of captivity. If we look only to our situation, we could be very anxious, and some have lots of reasons to feel this way. But God wished to give a word of HOPE into their situation, and I think it applies to us today, with the present crisis in our country and world.

A quick definition of HOPE is:

--It envisions an outcome that improves one's present life

--It helps make a present difficult situation more bearable

--It motivates one to take steps to make the better outcome happen

Let's look at Jeremiah 29:4-14, and see what God said then, and what it says to us in our "Covid 19" Crisis:

1. V.5-6 ACCEPT IT FOR WHAT IT IS, GET ON WITH LIVING!

--Don't spend time grieving and pining for what they had before, or wished it to be again! It was never going to be the same! Things would never 'return to normal', which was all past and gone. Rather,

accept the situation for what it is, and get to living in new ways! Build houses, plant gardens, raise families, even in adverse times!

--Accept the fact that for the present time, you are not in control of the big picture; you can only decide you will have a positive attitude about what you can do, and then do it!!!

--Note v.4, God "Carried them into exile"; God still lovingly cared for them going into captivity, and **WOULD BE WITH THEM ALL THE TIME!** God is carrying us as well, no matter how difficult things might be.

--God did not CAUSE this present virus problem, but God certainly will care for us and help us through it, giving us opportunities to learn very valuable lessons.

2. V.7 BE READY TO HELP OTHERS AS WELL AS YOURSELF (Even the enemy!)

--Here is an important principle: Helping others also helps you!!!

--Helping others, caring for others, takes the focus off your own pain and problems, and uses your anger energy to bless/help others! And looking out for others' welfare, will always lessen your own anxiety!

--Maybe the best thing we can learn is that God wants His people to ALWAYS be concerned about others' needs, and not just focus on our own selfish interests/concerns! (Thankfully, I commend you of Oak Grove congregation, for doing a very good job of this already!)

3. V.11 HOPE IN GOD, NOT THE SURROUNDING SITUATION

--It is difficult to understand how hopeless their situation seemed to them in Babylon. They saw nothing to rejoice about or feel hopeful.

--Right now, there seems to be little for us to feel good about our present "Captivity". The future is very uncertain, anxiety filled physically and economically; it all seems very threatening and unclear.

--It would be easy for us to expect for "government" or leadership to solve all the problems, immediately! But there is no human answer adequate enough to give us solid HOPE! The solutions humans try, will only be imperfect!

--God says to us today: "I have plans for your future, Oak Grove Church, and you can rest in ME, knowing that I have your future totally under my control, and have the resources to make it happen!"

4. V.13 SEEK GOD IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL YOUR CHAOS/CRISIS

--The people in Babylon thought that God had deserted them by letting them be over run and taken into captivity.

--But God was still with them then, AND NOW! They just needed to take special effort to find God at work, even in the middle of their chaotic, bleak, uncertain, situation and challenges. And God promises that we will find Him, if we look carefully! (v.14) God is always present, even when we do not seem to sense or see Him! Look harder!

--Often when we are in the middle of a crisis situation, we get so busy and wrapped up in what we try to do to solve our problems, that we forget to seek God's help and guidance. STOP what you are doing, and look for God! "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10)

--And ironically, we will often be more inclined to look for God when we are in difficult places, or in adversity, rather than when things are going smoothly! That is precisely because we can sense our need of HIM more when we reach the end of our capacity to do it ourselves!

5. V.14 TRUST GOD TO WORK IT OUT, TO EVENTUALLY SOLVE THE PROBLEM

--Our ultimate hope for the future is found in trusting God's ability and desire to work it all out for our good and HIS GLORY!

--For the people in Babylon, it did not get resolved quickly! Seventy years! Three generations! They just needed to be patient, and continue to trust God, not try to work it out themselves! I doubt it will take 70 years to get thru this present crisis, but I do think the solution will be much longer than we would like it to be!

--God does not need our help to do anything! But He does sometimes invite us to be part of the solution! That means that we have to be responsible in how we act, so as to be a constructive part of the answer, not make the problem worse!!!

--We also see that God does not always do the 'quick fix' we would like, just to try to shorten our time of difficulty or pain! We will learn more trust and faith by trusting God to carry us thru the difficult times, than to have it quickly resolved or taken away!

--In Romans 15:13, Paul gives us a similar reassurance: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, by the power of God's Spirit."

MAY WE ALL BE FILLED WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S JOY AND PEACE, SO THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO SHARE GOD'S HOPE WITH ALL WHOM WE MEET!!!