

When you were growing up, Have you ever been disciplined for something that you did that you shouldn't have done?

When I was growing up, if I did something wrong, there were several levels of punishment,

Sometimes it was a lecture on what I had done wrong.

Sometimes I would get a slap on the wrist,

Sometimes I would be grounded for what I did.

Sometimes I would get a good licking

But if I heard my Mom calling, Lawrence David Shean!!!

I knew I did something wrong and was in big trouble.

And my punishment would most likely be a lecture, a good licking, and I would be grounded

It was not a good feeling when I received my punishment, even though I deserved it.

And it was hard to hear the truth about why what I did was wrong

A couple weeks ago I spoke about the circumstances which we are in are most likely the result of choices which we have made.

In the book of Jeremiah we see that the people of Israel are in a situation because of the choices which they have made.

They had been unfaithful to God.

They chose to go against God's word and became accustomed to worshipping the idols of the neighboring nations,

Because of what they have done,

Jerusalem was conquered
Their houses were destroyed,
An invading army plundered their belongings and livestock,
The Temple was destroyed,
And
They were exiled into Babylon.

But God had a plan.

Six hundred years before Christ, God gave the prophet Jeremiah a tough job.

Jeremiah was called by God to go and preach to the Nation of Judah because God was going to send down his wrath and anger on them for their sins.

Although God called them to repent through Jeremiah and other prophets,

They were told that if they did not repent, God would, out of Love for them, judge them because their evil ways were destroying them.

God had repeatedly shared there would be consequences apart from repentance.

Although what God said through the prophet Jeremiah was true, the people believed it was false and unreal.

False prophets told the people, “Don’t give up; there’s still hope. God will surely send a miracle of deliverance as He has in the Past. This will not last long, it is only temporary.

When we go back a few chapters, we see that God had already told them the opposite through His prophet. Jeremiah.

“This is what the Lord Almighty says; “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.

They keep saying to those who despise me, “The Lord says: You will have peace.’And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts, they say, “No harm will come to you.”

The false prophets were filling the people with lies and false hope.

The people are now under oppressive rule and living a long way from home.

They are now under the enemy's control and suffering emotional and physical stress.

They were traumatized and lost everything.

When we get to Chapter 29, in verse 11, Jeremiah writes to the exiles who had been displaced to Babylon.

In this particular verse we find this extraordinary verse of hope and comfort.

Jeremiah writes:

“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.”

Ironically, this is a popular verse coming from an unpopular prophet.

Due to his deep sorrow and lamentations over the spiritual and moral decline of Judah, he was not only sad in an emotional sense,

but his tears reflected a profound grief for the sins of his people and the consequences of their sins.

Jeremiah witnessed the widespread idolatry and injustice in Judah, and he mourned the spiritual emptiness of his people .

He saw that they had forsaken God, their source of living water, and turned to idolatrous practices.

Jeremiah was tasked with prophesying God’s judgment upon Judah.

This knowledge filled him with grief, and he foresaw the suffering his people would endure.

Despite Judah's rejection of his warnings and their persecution of him, Jeremiah cared for them deeply and wept

for their sins and the consequences they would face.

Jeremiah also shared his doubts and frustrations to God in prayer, questioning why he had been called to such a difficult and unpopular ministry.

His honesty and vulnerability contributed to why he was known as the weeping prophet.

Jeremiah 29:11 is not uncommon, it's a verse which is used almost every day,

But if we read this in Jeremiah and Judah's situation, this promise will not be fulfilled for another 70 years.

For us to understand verse 11, we need to go back to verse 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.”

The place which God is referring to is Jerusalem.

God works amid deep pain and trials.

Scriptures are filled with people suffering through brokenness, such as;

Joseph, Daniel, David, Apostle Paul, and the Disciples.

But the testimony we are to be raised in is that God is faithful and will see it through, even as we suffer for His glory.

When we see Jesus being crucified upon the cross, do you think that is telling us that we will never suffer?

Or do you think that this is telling us that there will be a resurrection one day?

Our suffering is not our final chapter.

There were many false prophets lurking among God's people who were trying to deceive them and they were part of the reason why God's people were in the mess that they were in.

Jeremiah was trying to warn them (and us) about the false prophets and their lies and we see this in Jeremiah 29:8-9 when he said,

“For 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, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord”

There were many lies the false prophets declared.

One of the lies was that God's people would only be exiled for 2 years before God would raise his hand and lead them to freedom.

However Jeremiah tells them that is not true, you'll be there for 70 years, and it will not be easy for you, but God will guide you through the years.

In Jeremiah 29: 5-7, Jeremiah also tells God's people while they are in exile to;

“Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce.

Take 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. “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.”

Instead of pulling away from society, God tells Jeremiah to instruct His people to integrate into society and avoid the temptation to isolate themselves outside of the culture.

That all sounds great until we realize Jeremiah says this to them when the culture is governed by Godless leaders who seek pleasure and self - indulgence and have a disregard for values and responsibilities.

In society we are led to believe that we will not suffer if we follow Christ.

We are led to believe that we can follow Jesus and never suffer hardships and suffering, but in reality, when we decide to follow our Lord and Savior, that's when Satan works harder to deceive us with his lies and tries to get us to follow him.

The first most important issue for our lives is Salvation.

The second important issue for our lives is fruitfulness.

In coming to Christ we are called to live fruitful lives

In James 1: 19 - 20 we are told;

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

God honors the direction of your heart. God promises that He will draw near to you if you draw near to Him. If you surrender to the Lord, He will be honored, and you will find him in your life.

In God we have Hope and a Future,

Even in difficult situations like when God’s people were exiled in Babylon, God promises a future with hope

Jeremiah 29; 12 - 13 highlights the importance of seeking God and praying to Him, with the promise that He will listen and be found.

The scripture encourages us to trust that God’s plan, though sometimes mysterious, is for our own good and well being.

There are lessons which we can learn from Jeremiah.

1. It takes courage to tell people the truth.

Sometimes we are afraid of hurting people's feelings, so we let them go in their lives without confronting them in their sin.

Jeremiah told the truth and was punished by the people for doing so.

2. When you tell the truth, you will be hated.

Jeremiah suffered a great deal of scorn and mockery from the

people to the point that he wanted to quit.

But God had other plans.

3. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet.

He saw the impending destruction of Jerusalem and wept.

At times Jeremiah would preach to the people with tears in his eyes because he cared so much for them.

4. Jeremiah consistently preached , with no care of what would happen to him.

The people would not listen to him, but he preached anyway.

5. When we get down to it, it's all a matter of the heart.

In Jeremiah 17, He tells us,"the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond, it is engraved on the tablet of their heart; and on the horns of your altars.

Can you imagine sin written on our hearts so that it could be read; etched in a person's soul?

God knows our hearts

Jeremiah 17:5, Jeremiah wrote;"Thus says the Lord "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord."

Jeremiah also tells us, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord

Many Christians know and cling to the Jeremiah 29:11 verse itself.

But when we understand its historical and literary context, we will find that it takes a deeper, more relevant and even more powerful meaning for our lives.

When we're facing difficult situations we can take comfort in Jeremiah 29:11 knowing that it is not a promise to immediately rescue us from hardship or suffering,

but rather a promise that God has a plan for our lives and regardless of our current situation, He can work through it to prosper us and give us a hope and a future.

Furthermore, we can take comfort in knowing that God promises to be there for us in our difficult and trying times.

In the verses immediately following Jeremiah 29:11, God proclaims through Jeremiah that when you,

“Call on me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you .

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Consider how Jeremiah 29; 11 speaks to your current life situation.

Are you facing uncertainty or difficulty?

How can God's promise of a future and a hope encourage you?

Just remember, God loves you and He will never forsake you.

Amen