

Jeremiah 29:10-14

“10For 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.”

Let's pray...

I chose this passage in Jeremiah because it contains this week's VBS verse. My hope is that it sets the tone and lays the ground work for the Gospel ministry that will be taking place this week through VBS.

The verse that our curriculum centers around is Jeremiah 29:13 “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

This echoes our prayer for every single one of our kiddos at South Side - that they would seek God with their whole hearts.

We value children and children's ministry around here. So if you are a teacher of children in some capacity through the ministry of South Side would you please stand so we can recognize and thank you for your Gospel labor?

As CS Lewis said: “Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work.”

Now on to today's text:

And let me just address the elephant in the room: there's one of today's most popular verses in this passage. Chances are most of us at one time or another have had verse 11 on a coffee mug or a plaque in our house. Even unbelievers have this verse in their twitter or instagram bio. Why? because everyone wants to prosper. But when we take this verse out of context and slap it onto a coffee mug we don't only do a disservice to the verse, but to ourselves. The meaning of this passage is so much richer than what earthly health and wealth prosperity could ever give.

In order to truly grasp the gravity of this passage we must do what all good sermons do, and that is dive into the context.

Go to the beginning of this chapter. Verse one says,
These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. (See 2 Kings 24)

Tragedy has struck in the land of Judah. God's people are taken from God's land. And Jeremiah writes them a letter.

But why is he writing this letter? Let's keep reading picking up in verse 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: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your son, 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."

Jeremiah tells the people to dig into Babylon. Don't try to leave. Then carries on in verse 8-9:

"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."

So he is also addressing false prophets in this letter. Specifically the false prophet Hananiah.

You can see in chapter 28 Jeremiah and Hananiah's interactions together. Hananiah was telling the exiles, "don't worry, this exile is only going to last two years and everyone's going to come back to Jerusalem." Hananiah later proves to be false because after Jeremiah calls him out, Hananiah dies.

That's what happens when you prophesy false prosperity.

So Jeremiah writes this letter and says, "Don't listen to these false prophets! Buckle down in exile. Seek to thrive there." Jeremiah is correcting false teaching by reminding them of God's true promise.

I. God's True Promise

And here we find ourselves at 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."

God has already marked out how long this exile will last. And any time the number 7 is used like in the number 70 here, it means a perfect number of completion. We know looking backward that after 70 years the Medo-Persian empire comes in and takes over the Babylonian empire. This is where the prophet Daniel interprets the writing on the wall. This promise came true.

So making it 70 years is a way of showing that this judgment is from the Lord. This judgment is painful, but in the midst of this judgment, he promises after the 70 years of exile has been completed, he says,

I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

What place is God talking about?

This place is the Promised Land. Why is the Promised Land so important? Throughout the Bible we see God's plan for His people. That God's people would dwell under God's authority in God's land.

We see this first in Genesis. God creates the Garden of Eden, puts man in the garden to care for it and it was good - God's people, dwelling in God's land, under God's rule. Once the fall happens, once they rebel under God's authority, they are exiled from God's land. Next we see Abram. And what does God promise Abram? To make him into a great nation and to give him the land of the Canaanites.

Abram is God's people who will dwell in God's land under God's rule.

Then we have the story of Joseph. God sovereignly uses the evil that Joseph endured to eventually save God's people from the famine, but he brings God's people out of God's land and into a foreign land. So for 400 years, the God's people are not in God's land.

But then God raises up a deliverer named Moses and leads God's people out of the land of exile back into the God's land. And what happens on the way to the land? God reestablishes His rule with the giving of the Law. So God's people is going to God's land living under God's rule.

But then what happens? They get to God's land and they send out the 12 spies. Two spies come back with a good report saying, "God is faithful, let's trust Him!" But 10 of the spies say, "No we can't do it, there's giants there!" And the people listen the ten spies and God punishes them by wandering the wilderness for 40 years. The God's people rebel God's rule and so they cannot dwell in God's land.

Then after 40 years they come back to God's land and Moses gives the law a second time right before they enter (Deutero-nomos = second law giving, where we get Deuteronomy from) and they enter back into God's land and Joshua leads the way.

As they enter God's land, God has gives this promise in Deuteronomy 4:25-31

*"When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. *But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.*

He promises, if you rebel against my rule, I'm kicking you out of my land.

So what do you think happens?

We see in the book of Judges everyone does what is right in their own eyes, but God gives them a righteous King named David and they are faithful for a while, but only to fall back into sin again which eventually leads to the kingdom being divided. Eventually the Assyrians take away the northern kingdom from God's land and Babylon taking away the southern Kingdom, Judah, from God's land.

Which is where we find ourselves today in Jeremiah - they have rebelled against God's rule and are exiled out of God's land. BUT Here in Jeremiah, God is faithful to His promises. He promises He will bring them back to the land.

So God is faithful to His true promise and specifically here, his land promise. But there's still something missing. They've proved over and over again that they rebel against God's rule even

when they are in God's land. So what's the point of returning to the land if they're just going to rebel again? What's 70 years of exile going to do? How does this fix the problem? We'll get to that in a minute but let's move to verse 11.

Jeremiah writes this letter to not only show God is true to His promises but also that His promises are good.

II. God's Good Promises

He backs up His promise with assurance in verse 11

"For 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."

God is in control. Judah must be freaking out at this point, that they've truly messed up at this point, but Jeremiah displays God's fatherly love toward them by assuring them that God is still in meticulous control.

Just consider Jeremiah 27:6-7

Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes...

God calls Nebuchadnezzar his servant! Nebuchadnezzar was not random, no, God *raised* up Nebuchadnezzar as a servant and uses Him to discipline Judah. But let's not forget that this discipline is for their good. We know this because God says, "these plans are for your welfare and your good."

Even in the midst of discipline, God is still faithful to His promises, but God is also faithful to His *GOOD* promises. Even in our most painful circumstance, God is meticulously working *them* for our good.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Christian, trust this. Think of Proverbs 3:11-12 which says,
*"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproofed by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."*

God is not out to get you. God is working for His glory and your ultimate good.

Jeremiah is writing this letter to show God's promises are true and good and also promises their response.

Let's now look at verses 12-13 at the

III. God Promises a Response

"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."

This is a beautiful passage that is both a model of Godly repentance and a prophecy of what will happen.

This shows us how we should repent. We should seek God with our whole hearts! We should not vacillate when we seek God. We should not have conditions when seeking God, "God I will seek you, if you..." No, we should actively, wholeheartedly seek after God knowing that when we do, we will find Him. Unbeliever this is for you as well. If you seek Him and Him alone you will find Him. If you seek after God saying, "I'll follow him as long as he delivers in this area of my life" you will never find Him.

This echoes Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."

This is a model for us today and for the exiles to seek after God with their whole heart.

But this is also prophetic. Remember back to Deuteronomy 4 when God is promising what's going to happen if they rebel against God's rule in God's land, he also says: in verse 29:

But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them."

He's promising the judgment of their disobedience but also their repentance.

Jeremiah clues us in on what's really going on within heartfelt repentance in Jer. 24. Turn to Jeremiah 24:6-7

I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart."

This language is laced with New Covenant terminology and seems to be hinting at The New Covenant when it is officially introduced in just two chapters later in Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

So God promises that he will write the law on their hearts, fixing the problem they've been having! They've been God's people, and will live in God's land, but they don't fully obey Him. Oh they may in certain instances, but it's still imperfect. This was the missing piece! God's people were in the land, but they couldn't truly follow the law!

Back to Jeremiah 29:12-13.

Does Judah do this? Do they repent and turn to God with their whole hearts after the seventy years? What brought about the end of the 70 year captivity?

Daniel 9:1 says

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans (that's the Babylonians) - in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

So Daniel is in Babylon and is reading the book Jeremiah, presumably even this same passage that we're studying today. And he realizes that they are actually coming to the end of the exile. what does he do? Look at verse 3

"Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.'"

Daniel repents on behalf of the people! And as he is seeking God with his whole heart, he fulfills exactly what God promised in Jeremiah 29:13-14. He is seeking God!

So in this passage he mentions Darius. Darius the Mede came into power and was part of the Median empire. Cyrus who was the king of Persia took over the Median Empire but still kept Darius in his position. So when Darius overthrew Babylon, so did King Cyrus. Why is this important? Because Daniel says that he prayed this in the first year of King Darius which is also the first year of King Cyrus. Again, why is this important?

Let me read Ezra 1:1-4

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."

God answers Daniel's prayer by using Cyrus II, king of Persia, the most powerful person in the world, to let the exiles go from Babylon to go rebuild the temple in Jerusalem in order to also fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy!

But we also get to see a glimpse into the bigger picture of the whole Bible back in Daniel.

God also answers Daniel by sending the angel Gabriel to him and in Daniel 9:24 which says, *"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place."*

We don't have time to get into all the theories of all the time references here, but remember 7 is the number of completion. And Seventy weeks is really saying "seventy sevens" because there's seven days in a week. So the common consensus by scholars is that this is saying after 70 sevens or 70 times 7 (which is 490 years) so about 500 years, the sin of the people will be finished and their sin will be atoned for which will bring about everlasting righteousness to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

What happens about 500 years after Gabriel's declaration? In a little town of Bethlehem which is the city of David, a little baby was born from the line of David who is the Savior of the World.

So God is faithful to His good promises and His promises are even better than what we or they could ever perceive! When Daniel sought God with his whole heart, God answered by using Cyrus to let the people go back to Jerusalem which fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy. He also answer Daniel's heartfelt repentance with Gabriel promising an answer for the people's sin - everlasting righteousness.

Finally in verse 14

"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."

IV. God Promises Restoration

God closes with how he started. Look back at verse 10:

I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

How is He going to do truly restore them? How will he bring all these people back to Himself so that they will truly follow Him? Due to changes of power, the children of Israel were scattered all over the known world.

The answer of how he is going to do that was stated back in Jer. 23. Turn to Jeremiah 23:1-8
"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: The LORD is our righteousness."

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."

The Righteous Branch from the line of David will be established and he will rule over His people in God's land in righteousness. Christ came, and partially fulfilled this, but we still aren't in perfect communion with Him.

This is ultimately fulfilled in Revelation 7:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

God is faithful to his promises that God's people will dwell in God's land in perfect prosperity. Because this is how it all began in the Garden of Eden - this was how it was meant to be. God's people, dwelling in God's land under God's rule.

God is true to His promises, His promises are Good, He promises our response, and promises to restore His people to Himself.

Applications

1. True prosperity is believing in Christ.

Having faith in God's promise, is having faith in the Righteous Branch. Having faith in Christ is true prosperity. In Jesus, you have a true future and a true hope. Don't misuse this scripture to settle for the scraps of the world of health, wealth, and prosperity. Believe in a true and better prosperity that is found in the hope of Jesus. He is the only hope in life and death. If you seek the Lord Jesus to save you from the wrath to come, you will indeed be saved because he will hear you.

2. God gives hope through trial.

Believe God's promise that He is working for your ultimate good which is strengthening your belief in the only Hope - Jesus Christ.

3. Lastly, Christian look forward to that day. Press on toward that promised Day when God's perfect People, will dwell in God's perfect place, under God's perfect rule. Let's seek to spread this Kingdom now to whet our appetite for God's perfect Kingdom. His kingdom come, His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

God is faithful to His promises

Let's pray.