

## **“Living in the Future Tense – Following Christ in a Post-9/11 World”**

Jeremiah 29:4-14  
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Jeremiah 29:4-7,10-11

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. 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."

In 1945 some 2-3 million Poles were displaced from their native Poland because of the new Soviet-imposed eastern boundary of their country.

Millions were forced to move and start life over again in a new place.

Their property confiscated, forced to leave in a hurry, they escaped with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Imagine the hardship, the disappointment, even the despair.

2600 years earlier another group of people was displaced.

The country was called Judah and they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

These were God's people - in New Testament terms, the "Christians" of that time.

The Babylonian military juggernaut had overrun their country similarly to the way the Soviet Union did Poland in the last World War.

Ten of thousands were forced from their homes, marched hundreds of miles and interned in camps in an unfamiliar land.

If ever there was motivation for rebellion against their captors or, conversely, despair in their circumstances they had it.

Actually, as the people thought about their circumstances, they had four options:

1. Rebellion against their captors, which is what some activists among them were calling for.
2. Despair in the midst of their circumstances and just giving up.
3. Adopting and being assimilated by the new culture and giving up their relationship with God.
4. Living in the future tense.

For many in America 9/11 was a watershed day and event.

Even if 9/11 didn't cause all the troubles or anxieties that many experience today, 9/11 certainly has become symbolic of them.

We live in a post-9/11 world.

There is uneasiness in the land.

Insecurity seems to be the emotional state of the day:

- Jobs are lost or threatened
- The stock market can't seem to rebound.
- Retirement plans are tenuous or have evaporated.
- The economy doesn't live up to Pollyannaish expectations of some prognosticators.
- War looms.

In addition to that, we live with the reality that life itself is tenuous.

Many of us have spent time with the Roseman family this weekend, after Al Roseman suffered a heart attack.

Life will never be the same for them.

But it doesn't take tragedies to build up anxiety.

It may take nothing more than the accumulation of disappointments in life or just the steady dailiness of life that sometimes grinds people down.

As with the people of God in Babylon so many years ago, we, likewise, have options in the face of anxieties.

One of those options is a private despair – a very private giving up.

The disappointments, or tragedies, or circumstances of life can overwhelm some who then simply **live life, waiting**.

Waiting for what? They don't know, just waiting, just putting one foot in front of the other, just doing what needs to be done.

They've largely given up on life, on people and they've given up on God.

They have no expectations, no hopes; they are just coping, just waiting – dead before death.

Another option we have is not to give up but **to acquiesce** – to quietly accommodate the circumstances and be assimilated by the culture.

We give up on what we once assumed was God's marvelous plan for our life and we settle for lesser plans and goals.

We give ourselves to "401k"s, high definition televisions or Caribbean cruises – we give ourselves to acquisitions and/or pleasure.

But God, through the prophet Jeremiah, called them to a third option: **"Thinking and living in the future tense"** or in a word: **hope!**

Here's what God tells us to do in a post-9/11 world:

Jeremiah 29:5-7 ""Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

God says I don't want you to withdraw or quit.  
I want you to engage life, live it, face into it.

Those exiles were to engage the culture and embrace the opportunities before them.

The people were not to withdraw into a two-tiered world – one of everyday life and another of the spiritual.

They were not to withdraw into sectarian seclusion but to assume responsibility for the larger community.

Life was **not** to be lived **in spite of** the circumstances but **in** the circumstances.

God's plans were not above the circumstances but in them.

We don't just endure life to get past life to the better.

Life, as God gives it, **is** his means to the better – we are to engage it **because we see the future.**

Look at verse 4: "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those **I carried into exile** from Jerusalem to Babylon..."

Interesting that he credits himself with his people being where they are.

Their circumstances were not a surprise to God.

Their predicaments, their tragedies, the losses were not something God had to overcome, God was in them.

God was sovereignly in control.

It is not that "the devil is in the details" but that God is in the details.

- How could they embrace such circumstances?
- How can we look at our post-9/11 world and not give up?
- How can we experience set-back after set-back and not either despair or pursue more immediate goals?

Verses 10-14 tell us how.

And verse 11 captures the heart of it: "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."

Who is someone you respect and admire from a distance?  
They don't know you but you know enough about them to admire them.

Imagine if you met Billy Graham, or Bill Gates, or George Bush someday and they said, "I've heard of you and I've been thinking about you lately."

Wow! You'd feel so special and so privileged.

Here is what God says: **I've** been thinking about you!

**You, you are on his mind.**

God did not simply put history in motion and leave it to do its work – he is involved, he is thinking of us, he is mindful of us at all times.

Psalm 115:12 "The LORD remembers (is mindful of) us and will bless us..."

Here's what he said about those who are his: Isaiah 27:3 "I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest *any* hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

Not only is he thinking about us, **God has plans for us.**

His are not passing thoughts.

His goodness toward us is not accidental benevolence.

His are thoughtful, deliberate, carefully constructed and governed plans.

So intimate is his knowledge of us and so loving are his plans for us that the smallest detail of life is in his thoughtful care.

Matthew 10:29-31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny (virtually worthless)? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

God has plans for YOU and for me!!

Notice something else about his plans for us:

Jeremiah 29:11 "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.**"

The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:11

“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.” (The Message)

Ephesians 2:10 “(God) creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do...” (The Message)

Philippians 1:3,6 “I thank my God every time I remember you... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day (Jesus returns).

1 Peter 2:9-10 “But you are a chosen people... people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

**Many times I have heard people say**, “I don’t know what God wants me to do.” “I have tried to find out what his purpose is for my life but I don’t know what it is.”

I think sometimes we don’t know what his will for us is because we can’t believe or don’t like the answer when we hear it.

We want a job to do – something that we can sink our teeth into and see results, something others will know is important.

Our role models are the big names in Christianity.

We tend to be like James and John and their mother who wanted guarantees from Jesus that the sons would have prominent places in the kingdom.

Jesus said that instead they were called to simply follow him and even suffer for him.

God's plan for us for the future is not a mystery, **it is godliness:**

1 Thessalonians 4:3 "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification..."

And his plan for us is **faithfulness** in the everyday things of life. Matthew 25:22-23 ""The man with the two talents also came. `Master,' he said, `you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, `Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

And his ultimate plan for us is to be **like him and with him forever:**

1 Peter 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

God said to those Jewish exiles and he says to us live in hope – live in the future tense.

Engage the day at hand!

With confidence in God's sovereign superintendence of every detail of life, **live all of life as he gives it.**

Understand that your present circumstances are part of the plans he has for you – "plans to give you hope and a future".

We are people of hope – we live and think in the future tense.

**Some would say that is unrealistic** - Look at the world, look at my circumstances.

But Jurgen Moltmann wrote, "Hope alone is to be called 'realistic' because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught... Thus hopes and anticipations of the future are not a transfiguring glow superimposed upon a darkened existence, but are realistic ways of perceiving the scope of real possibilities... Hope and the kind of thinking that goes with it...do not strive after things that

have no place but after things that have no place **yet...**" (Jurgen Moltmann  
Theology of Hope p25 in Edward Lindaman (President of Whitworth College in 1978) Thinking in the future Tense p169)

"Christian hope has its origin in the event of the resurrection of the crucified Christ. In his resurrection, hope is always kindled anew. In him, the future of righteousness and the passing of evil can be hoped for; in him the future of life and the passing of death can be hoped for; in him the coming of freedom and the passing of humiliation can be hoped for; and in him the future of men's true humanity and the passing of inhumanity can be hoped for." (Moltmann in Lindaman p175)

- In our personal lives life may be hard now but it is God's means to do us good and it is not the way it will always be.
- In our churches we may struggle and the feel like few among the many but God's promise is that his kingdom will increase.
- In our world evil may win skirmishes and even battles but the war will be won by Jesus himself when he returns.

Living in the future tense (hope) is what calls us forward.

Hope is why we plant a church today.

Hope is why we preach and teach and counsel and help.

Hope is why we engage others in this community called Southern Gables Church and the larger community called our world.

Hope is why we love our neighbors, invest in our children, and work so hard at what we do for a living.

### **That hope sees a future that others don't see.**

A future planned and promised to us by God.

That hope sees:

marriages healed,

families living in harmony,

hopeless lives infused with a future,

men and women once living for themselves now living for others.

Hope sees:  
sober drunkards,  
faithful adulterers,  
Christ-following sinners,  
generous misers,  
selfless egotists – in other words, changed lives.

“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.”