

August 11

Jeremiah 27-29

Online Campus Pastor Robert Murphy, and I have the privilege of doing the Daily Accelerator for August 11. I'll be focusing in on Jeremiah 27 through 29. Today's reading has one of my favorite passages in the Bible, Jeremiah chapter 29. Pastor Gavin Johnson recently preached from this passage of scripture, but I wanted to highlight a portion of the passage because it's pertinent to us today.

Jeremiah has written a letter to the surviving elders, priests and people of the exile. In it he gives a command of the Lord that must have seemed odd to the exiles. Here's what Jeremiah says in verses 5 through 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.

The exiles, who were God's people and living in the Promise Land, probably wrestled with this command of God's. God is asking them to seek the peace and prosperity of those that just invaded them and exiled them from the Promise Land. But is it really that odd a command from God? Establish yourself where you are. Engage with the people around you. Serve your community and pray for it. Seek its welfare. These seem like straight forward principles that any citizen would do, and yet it is difficult. Pastor Gavin talked about how we, as followers of Jesus, often reject or reflect a community and its culture, but we don't try and redeem it. That's what God is talking about here. Go out into your community, be a blessing to it and its people, and redeem it.

Continuing on in chapter 29, Jeremiah's words -- God's words to the captives in Babylon are magnificent -- they are moving -- they are extraordinary and they contain magnificent promises that warmed the hearts of those exiled Jews and still warm our hearts today:

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

The other big theme of today's reading was the confrontation between Hananiah and Jeremiah. Hananiah was an important man. His name means "The Lord is gracious" and that would surely have been an appropriate name for a man bringing the message that God was going to send back all of the items that had been taken from the temple and that Nebuchadnezzar himself would be broken by the Lord. Whether he had ever been a true prophet of the Lord or not, we simply do not know. But in the political and moral chaos engulfing Jerusalem after the deportation of Jehoiachin, Hananiah saw an opportunity to gain great influence and power. It is just possible he even thought that his knowledge of God was sufficient to insure that what he (and every other patriotic Jew) wanted to be true was

true. Maybe he even had convinced himself that Jeremiah was a fool and that his own view of God was the correct one. Maybe he was more than a charlatan. Maybe he was utterly sincere. But whatever else was or was not true, Hananiah had not heard from God.

There is high drama in the confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah. Jeremiah was (as usual) making a spectacle of himself. This time, at God's instruction, he was walking around with a yoke on his neck -- one more vivid object lesson for the people of Jerusalem. To the undying embarrassment of Zedekiah's government -- the object lesson was also directed to the ambassadors of all the surrounding nations. They too saw the spectacle and they too heard the somber warning. Accept the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar or be obliterated. King Nebuchadnezzar himself could not have designed a more effective or unnerving harbinger.

Finally Hananiah has had enough. It is embarrassing in the extreme. He forces the confrontation and in a show of bravado he rips the yoke from Jeremiah's head and shoulders, and pronounces a message of comfort and peace.

It is easy to see how the average inhabitant of Jerusalem could be confused at this point. There are two prophets. They both say they speak for God but they speak absolutely contradictory things. The confusion can be understood -- almost excused until Jeremiah returns to court with a new yoke and a special message assuring Hananiah that because of his arrogant opposition to the prophet of God and the Lord himself, his life will be required. Soon enough, just as Jeremiah has prophesied, Hananiah is dead.

That should have settled the issue of who truly spoke for God and I would have thought that it might also discourage any future self-appointed prophets. But unfortunately the false prophets kept on coming -- and the people kept believing them.

Two great themes from today's reading. May we all continue to redeem the cities we are living in.