

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

MAY 11 - 15, 2020

SERMON SERIES

4.19 - 5.17

LIVING IN

Exile



MONDAY

Jeremiah 29:10-14

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

As you read Jeremiah 29:10-14, count each of the promises given and ask God to open the eyes of your heart to His truth.

Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most popular, well known and oft-quoted biblical texts. We often see this promise on calligraphed plaques, surrounded by puppies and butterflies, or on cards of encouragement. It is, however, one of the most misunderstood and misused Scriptures. An Old Testament professor told his students that he was going to destroy their understanding of what they believed the text meant and then reframe it in its proper context. Verse 11 has been interpreted as *“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!”* Some lean into a false belief that it is God’s main plan to make us all happy, healthy, and prosperous on this side of eternity.

Let’s take a moment to dig more deeply into the context. The powerful promises are given during exile to a people who had turned from God to idolatry. Much like us today, their world had been turned insanely upside down. Although God’s people were held captive, they were given hope. But this would be a delayed hope; 70 years is a long time and many of the exiles would not live to see the promise fulfilled.

How do we lean into hope in the midst of these times when we, like the exiles, are facing so many unknowns? We lean in deeply to the

faithful God who has not forgotten us. We hold to the truth that God's purpose and plans CAN NEVER and WILL NEVER be thwarted!

As followers of Christ redeemed by His blood, we can stand on the hope of 2 Corinthians 1:20: *"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so, through Him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."*

Let us as His people keep pressing on, keep pressing in, and ask our Faithful Promise Maker and Promise Keeper to help each of us to trust, obey, thrive, serve and give Him the glory today and always.

QUESTIONS

Which of the incredible promises from Jeremiah 29:10-14 speaks to your heart most right now? Who is one person you can share that truth with today?

PRAYERS FOR GLAD TIDINGS INDIA

Glad Tidings India brings hope to the hopeless through literacy, life skills, empowerment, and the message of peace and hope. Pray for the safety and health of the staff of GTI partners throughout India who are critical to ministry. Pray for provision for staff salary. (Donations from India partners covers staff salary and overhead.)

TUESDAY

Nehemiah 1:1-4; 2:1-5

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP—REMEMBERING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

The book of Nehemiah has been called a lesson in leadership and shows the significance one person can make when they trust and obey the Living God. Nehemiah serves as cupbearer to the king, and upon hearing the news that Jerusalem's walls "were broken down and the gates were burned" (1:3), he goes directly to humble prayer.

Why was Nehemiah so distraught? First, a city in Nehemiah's day needed a protective wall around it to keep from being attacked. As Christ followers we are not always protected from physical harm, but in Ephesians 6 we see God gives us spiritual armor that we may walk in victory.

Secondly, Nehemiah was aware how the broken walls around Jerusalem could make His God the ridicule of other nations. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Nehemiah wanted to see Yahweh receive the glory.

With a big call on Nehemiah's life, he starts with humble reliance upon Yahweh. He begins with praise, remembering the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His covenants; Nehemiah then acknowledges his own sin and the sins of Israel and cries out for God's mercy and compassion. Godly leadership proclaims God's glory and seeks His strength in humble prayer.

In chapter 2 Nehemiah approaches his boss, King Artaxerxes, to present a huge, unprecedented request and acknowledges he is fearful. What he was requesting could mean his death. Fear, however, did not stop Nehemiah; and before making the request, he says this about facing his fears: *“So I prayed to the God of heaven”* (v. 4).

In Nehemiah we see the best leadership lesson is to rely completely on Yahweh’s strength. A theme throughout Scripture is to “remember the faithfulness of God.” Like Nehemiah, when we lift praise and thanksgiving in prayer recounting His mighty works, it gives us faith to trust and obey both in the present and in the future.

“Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.” (Max Lucado)

QUESTIONS

What mighty works of God can you remember that will increase your trust and obedience in His faithfulness? Make a list and share it with another person.

PRAYERS FOR GLAD TIDINGS INDIA

Pray for the safety and health of GTI local partners, as well as literacy teachers, CBS teachers, and ambassadors who have been trained over many years to share the message of hope and peace with people of all castes. Pray for our brothers and sisters who are dealing with increased persecution from radical Hindus.

WEDNESDAY

Nehemiah 5

BUILDING A COMPASSIONATE CHURCH

Nehemiah 4 ends on a note of great victory as, even with obstacles, the people of God were doing the work of God. As chapter 5 begins, that victory turns to “a great outcry.” Families were working on the wall during the day and guarding it at night with little time to tend to their fields. In addition, their fields weren’t producing enough grain; so in order to get the food they needed, families were mortgaging their homes, fields and vineyards, causing them to go heavily into debt. In verse 5 we see the tragedy that families were forced to give their children into child slavery to pay off the debts. The greatest tragedy is that the oppression was coming from within the community building the wall.

Nehemiah becomes angry at the economic injustice and oppression caused by greed and a lack of compassion within the people of God, and he deals with it! Nehemiah confronts those whose sin was causing other’s pain and disunity within the body.

Nehemiah asks a question that goes to the heart of our relationship with God and each other: “*Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God?*” (v. 9). As he confronts this sin, Nehemiah is able to point to his own example that he walked the talk and had not misused his position or resources.

God's purpose in giving us the lessons from the book of Nehemiah are so much bigger than building a wall. God is building His church, a chosen people, a royal nation who are to walk in the holy fear of the LORD. This love and devotion for God is to be lived out radically in how we love each other and how we love and treat the poor. A church with a beautiful wall and steeple that ignores the needs of the poor breaks the heart of God. *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world"* (James 1:27).

Bob Pierce, the founder of Samaritan's Purse, wrote: "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God."

QUESTIONS

What are some tangible, practical ways that you can show compassion and share with those who are in need?

PRAYERS FOR GLAD TIDINGS INDIA

Pray for the people living in villages who aren't aware of the basics of sanitation and hygiene, people living in slums and crowded conditions, and migrant workers who have been left stranded between big cities and their home villages. Pray that our brothers and sisters will be shining lights of loving kindness to change hearts.

THURSDAY

Nehemiah 8

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT

In the book of Ezra and Nehemiah, returning from exile happens in stages. First, the people returned back to their land (Ezra 2:1, 7:7), then they rebuilt the temple (Ezra 6:14), next they rebuilt the wall (Nehemiah 6:15), and now we see them rebuilding and restoring the worship of God's people. They began this process by reestablishing and refreshing their knowledge of the Law of Moses.

Throughout the Bible we read of the importance of God's Law and about how God's people should meditate on it day and night (Joshua 1:8). The very first Psalm reads:

*"Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on His law day and night."
(Psalm 1:1-2)*

Nowadays, we do not often look to the Law to reinvigorate our worship for God. Sometimes we skip it altogether. But it is important to remind ourselves that the Law is much more than a list of do's

and don'ts. John Calvin famously laid out three ways in which the Law functions in the life of believers. First, it functions as a mirror reflecting not only our own sinfulness but also making us aware of the perfect righteousness of God. Second, the Law works to restrain evil. This is similar to the rules we give to our children. Lastly, the Law reveals what is good and pleasing to God. As Christians, our main purpose is to give honor and glory to our Father in heaven, and we are reminded constantly that one of the main ways we do this is through obedience to the Law.

Our God is a covenantal God, and it is important to remember that a covenant involves two parties. As we wrestle within this exile season, may we remember that although we can trust that God will follow through with His promises, we also have a responsibility and a part to play.

QUESTIONS

What are some ways that you have not been obedient in this season and how can you, like the people in Nehemiah, reinvigorate or revive your worship for God?

PRAYERS FOR GLAD TIDINGS INDIA

Pray for wisdom and guidance for GTI leadership and the Board of Directors (BOD) as they navigate challenges. Pray for health and safety of the leadership team and BOD (one family is dealing with breast cancer). Pray for continued revenue so that God may be glorified through increased ministry despite the devil's schemes.

FRIDAY

Nehemiah 12

STAYING FAITHFUL TO GOD

From the beginning of the story, Nehemiah set out to restore the walls of Jerusalem which had been broken down and whose gates had been burned with fire (1:3). With the walls completed, Ezra and Nehemiah led a seven-day festival where the Book of the Law was read to the entire community (8:18). What a fitting end to have to finish with a celebration for the dedication of the wall. There was music, singing, and joy as the people gathered to commemorate this momentous achievement. After nearly 150 years Jerusalem, the holy city, had been rebuilt.

Celebration can be an exciting and important communal event, especially after such a long season of exile. It is natural to want to sing and dance and express the joy that has built up over time. But there are two important things to remember regarding our celebration. First, it must be partnered with thanksgiving (12:27). After a long desert season, we must remind ourselves that it is only by God's providence that we have made it thus far. Moses reminded the Israelites of something similar right before they entered the Promised Land. He said, *"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth"* (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Seasons of exile remind

us of our need for God, and it does not take long for us to forget and turn back to trusting in ourselves.

The second important thing to remember is that this is not the end. The book of Nehemiah continues on for another chapter. After doing so well in chapters 7-12, we see that this new-found revival did not last long for God's people. The temple was not kept in order (13:11), they started working on the Sabbath (13:15), and even went back to marrying foreign women (13:27). The feelings of joy and celebration quickly fade; and unless we remain strong, disciplined, and obedient, we are in danger of returning to our old ways.

QUESTIONS

What are some practices or disciplines that you would like to have in place to make sure that you do not fall back into old patterns and behaviors?

PRAYERS FOR GLAD TIDINGS INDIA

Pray for open ears and softened hearts that are more receptive to the Word of God during this challenging season and after it is over. We believe there will be a tremendous response to the message of peace and hope. We eagerly anticipate an abundant harvest of spiritual fruit. Pray for a global revival.

Sources

- Quote from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* can be found at <http://www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php>
- Max Lucado's quote can be found at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6570282-our-prayers-may-be-awkward-our-attempts-may-be-feeble>
- Bob Pierce's quote can be found at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/45537-let-my-heart-be-broken-by-the-things-that-break>
- John Calvin's three purposes of the Law can be found at <https://founders.org/2014/11/24/of-what-use-is-the-law-three-purposes/>

