

“The Thoughts the Lord Thinks Toward You”

Jeremiah 29:11 was a very positive and encouraging word to God’s people during a very low time: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* Jeremiah was both a prophet and priest who ministered for 40 years during the reigns of 5 different kings. He’s been called the “weeping prophet” because of all the mistreatment he experienced while proclaiming God’s message. He called on the people over a hundred times to repent, and he warned them of impending judgment if they did not turn back to God. But the people rejected both the message and the man.

The Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, were the superpower of their day. Because of the idolatry of God’s own people God used the Babylonians to discipline and punish them. The Temple, the wall, and the city of Jerusalem were all destroyed; and God’s people were taken captive and led into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah 29 is actually a letter that Jeremiah sent to the exiles, as verse 1 explains: *“Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive – to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.”* The Babylonians attacked Jerusalem three different times over a period of nineteen years. After Jeremiah had warned the nation for 23 years (in vain), the Babylonians first attacked Jerusalem in 605 BC, and then eight years later in 597 BC, and finally in 586 BC (when the Temple and city walls were destroyed).

From Jeremiah’s letter to the captives in Jeremiah 29:1-14, there are five lessons that we can learn. **First** of all, ***we must learn to submit to God’s sovereignty.*** Even though Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument God used, the Lord declared in verse 4 that He was the One who caused the people to be carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. Sometimes, what God does doesn’t make any sense to us – but He is God, and we are not. He is good, and He knows what He’s doing. He doesn’t check with us before He decides what to do; His train doesn’t run on our track. God does what pleases Him, not what pleases us. He is the Potter, we are the clay. He is in charge; His ways are not our ways. Everything is either caused by God or allowed by God. God will not always do what we desire, but He will always do what He decides. To accept everything that has just been stated is to submit to the sovereignty of God.

Secondly, *we must learn to bloom where we are planted.* It’s easy to lament how bad things are, how pagan our culture is, and the direction things have been heading for some time. But we can’t retreat or withdraw from where God has placed us. In the very difficult place of exile, God told His people to settle down (see vv. 5-6). They wanted to get out of there as quick as possible, but God knew they were there for the long haul. Even in that very undesirable place God wanted them to carry on with the basics of living. God also told them to bring positive influence to their new environment (see v. 7). In a place they didn’t want to be, during a very undesirable season – God told them to desire good things for their captors. Instead of despising their enemies, God wanted them to desire their peace, seek their well-being, and work for the prosperity of the ones who had taken them captive. They were to pray to the Lord for the city of Babylon. One thing we learn from

God, is that when we pray for our enemies and wish them well, we also benefit. So, let's stop hating the place we are and the situation we are in, and start blessing it, instead.

Third, we must accept the difficult things God says. While some were promising peace and a short stay of only two years in Babylon, Jeremiah was delivering a message from God that the people didn't want to hear – 70 years in captivity in Babylon (see vv. 8-10). Everything doesn't have to be peaches 'n' cream in order for God's purposes to prevail. Just because we don't like something doesn't mean that it can't be from God. Instead of just wanting bad times to be over as quickly as possible, if God has ordained it: let's settle in, and grow, and bloom where we're planted, and bless our enemies, and pray for those who are making our life difficult.

Fourth, we must trust God's timing. God will always fulfill His promises in His perfect timing. Even if we miss out on receiving something we'd like to experience (because our lifetime doesn't sync with God's timetable), let's leave a blessed legacy for future generations by our faith and faithfulness. God has good plans for His people, in His perfect timing. That's why we can have hope for the future, even when things are terrible in the present. There is always an expected end for God people, because the Lord has shown us how the story ends.

And **fifth, we must seek Him wholeheartedly.** God's promises and plans should compel us to call out to Him. Finding God is the ultimate reward. He's the treasure, He's the prize – not just receiving the particular answer we wanted from a prayer. Jeremiah closed his letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29 with these powerful words from God in verses 12-14: *“Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴And I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.”*

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Do you acknowledge that God is in charge and knows what He's doing, even if you don't understand?
2. Are you committed to living your life for the glory of God, whether or not you are living in pleasant or unpleasant circumstances?
3. Are you willing to desire good for your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you?
4. Are you able to accept that sometimes God ordains difficult seasons?
5. Do you believe that God's Word and Promises will be fulfilled according to His perfect timing?
6. Are you going to keep calling out to God and seeking Him?