



## A Spiritual Encouragement Message

April 14, 2020

### We Are Where We Are

We ended our last article talking about discontentment. We observed that discontentment is the cancer of the soul. It eats away our joy, corrodes our happiness, destroys our outlook on life, and produces a terminal jaundice of the soul so that everything looks negative to us. We cannot be happy because we will not be happy. We cannot be satisfied because we will not be satisfied. Such a person is truly a lost soul—miserable today and miserable tomorrow.

So how can we overcome the debilitating condition in which we find ourselves? What do we do when we are trapped where we do not want to be and do not know how long we may be there. I believe the answer (as always) lies with good theology. Sin always stems from wrong thinking about God, about ourselves, and about life in general. Jeremiah 29 contains some amazingly helpful insights about discontentment even though the word itself is never used.

Jeremiah 29:5-6 give us God's specific directions to the exiles in Babylon. It definitely was not what they expected to hear:

***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.***

The Israelites probably wanted God to say something like this: "My children, I know you don't like living in Babylon, so I have some very good news for you. Sit tight, stay out of trouble, do your time, and before you know it, you will be back home again." But that's not what God said. His advice is quite different. "You're going to be here for a long time—70 years, to be exact. Since you won't be coming home early, it's important that you make the best of your situation." We don't know how long this lockdown will last, but the advice still holds. We can fit the good advice to our individual situation.

***Build houses and settle down.  
Plant gardens and eat what they produce.  
Marry and have sons and daughters.***

***Let your children get married and have children.  
Increase in number. Do not decrease.***

To borrow a familiar phrase, God's advice is simple:

***Bloom where you are planted.*** You may not like where you are, but that doesn't matter. put your roots down. Buy some land, build nice homes, plant some gardens, go into business, build a community. In every hard situation, we have to face the same question. Are we going to complain or are we going to get busy? God says, "You are in Babylon now. Make the best of it. Don't complain. Don't mope. Don't spend your days pining away for Jerusalem. You aren't going back there for 70 years. Don't waste a single moment looking back on what used to be. Use your energies to make your life better now."

It's always easy (and dangerous) to play the "if only" game:

If only I get married, I'll be happy  
If only I get a new job, I'll be happy  
If only I graduate from college, I'll be happy  
If only we have children, I'll be happy  
If only we can retire to Florida, we'll be happy  
If only I make more money, I'll be happy  
If only I win this case, I'll be happy  
If only we move to a new home, I'll be happy  
If only I climb this one last mountain, I'll be happy  
If only this lockdown were over, I would be happy

But life generally doesn't work that way. We cannot live in the future. That's a bad place to live. Somewhere I read that when new inmates come to prison for the first time, they are given a crucial piece of advice: "Keep your head where you seat is. "If you spend your days thinking about the past or about what might have been, you'll lose focus on where you are, and you're liable to do something stupid that will get you in even worse trouble. We have to live in the present—not the past or the future. In this present time of distress, let us all "Bloom where we are". A change of attitude will allow this time of uncertainty in our lives to become a time when we can flourish in our relationships with God and those closest to us. What is the bottom line for us?

- 1) We are where we are.
- 2) We can serve the Lord where we are right now.
- 3) We can glorify the Lord where we are right now.

**Randall Jarrell**