



A Spiritual Encouragement Message

April 9, 2020

Jeremiah 29

In today's article, I would like for us to examine the first few verses of Jeremiah 29. When we know something about the situation this chapter describes we will discover some profound insights into how to survive the difficult circumstances that don't seem likely to change any time soon.

Before we get into the sound advice given to them by God, we need a little background to this story. However, in relating that background, I am not suggesting at all that what is occurring to us is a national judgement. I'm not looking at the judgement, that's a study for another time. We will observe that not everything in Jeremiah 29 applies to us or our present situation, but there is some very good advice that comes from a letter written to a people that were in a bad position. In the next few articles, we are going to examine this text in the hope that it will encourage each of us in this time of quarantine. Our study will be posted each week.

We can summarize the background of Jeremiah in this way:

God called his people to holiness.

They ignored his call and went their own way.

God warned them over and over again of coming judgment.

He sent prophet after prophet but the people paid no heed.

God raised up Nebuchadnezzar who attacked Jerusalem and destroyed it.

A great many Jews ended up in Babylon in captivity for 70 years.

The time is now 597 B.C. which was a tumultuous time in the history of the Jewish nation, A large group of Jews are taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. It is impossible for us to fully understand how they felt about what had happened to them. But the following does supply us how they felt about Babylon...

...To them it was the center of evil.

...They hated everything the Babylonians stood for.

...They hated them for their cruelty.

...They hated them for their violence.

...They hated them for their idolatry.

...They hated them for attacking the city of God.

...They would hate them even more for destroying the temple, God's dwelling place on earth.

...In bondage, They hated being so far from home.

Because God had said their captivity would last for 70 years, the Jews in exile knew that most of them would never see their homeland again. Psalm 137:1-3 adds that they were so miserable in Babylon that they hung their harps on a willow tree and refused to sing the songs of Zion:

***By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.
For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"***

And that's precisely how the Jews felt in Babylon:

Rejected

Humiliated

Trapped

Judged

Condemned

Forgotten

They had no idea of what the coming days, months, and years would bring to them.

It is against this agonizing backdrop that we come at last to Jeremiah 29. **This chapter contains a letter that Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to encourage the dejected exiles in Babylon. His letter turns out to be a personal message from God to his people.**

With that explanation of events we return to the question I asked at the beginning of our study last week. What do you do when you don't like the circumstances of your life and it seems as if those circumstances aren't going to change anytime soon? We don't like where we are, and we wish we could leave our houses and be somewhere else doing something else. Be encouraged, child of God. If you feel trapped, you're not. We need to know that we can discover that you can worship and serve Him even in our own "Babylon".

After Eden we have never been fully satisfied with anything on earth. And we're still not satisfied thousands of years later. We always want something different:

- *if we're young, we want to be older. If we're old, we wish we were younger.
- * If it's old, we want something new. If it's new, we want something newer.
- * If it's small, we want something bigger.
- * If it's big, we want something really big.
- * If we have a hundred dollars, we want two hundred. If we have two hundred, we want five hundred.
- * If we have an apartment, we want a condo. If we have a condo, we want a house. If we have a house, we want a bigger house. Or a new house. Or a nicer house. Or maybe we want to scale down and live in an apartment again.
- * If we have a job, we dream of a better job, a bigger job, a closer job, with a bigger office, a better boss, better benefits, more challenge, bigger opportunity, nicer people to work for, and more vacation time.
- * If we're single, we dream of being married.

* If we're married.... *well, you can fill that one out.*

None of this is unusual in any way. We were born discontented and some of us stay that way forever. A certain amount of discontentment can be good for the soul. It's not wrong to have dreams about what the future might hold. The hope of something better drives us forward and keeps us working, inventing, striving, creating and innovating. But there is a kind of discontentment that leads in a wrong direction.

But here are five signs to watch out for in our lives at this time. They are signs that discontentment is dragging us down spiritually:

- 1) Envy. The inability to rejoice at the success of others.
- 2) Uncontrolled Ambition. The desire to win at all costs, no matter what it takes or who gets trampled in the process.
- 3) Critical Spirit. The tendency to make negative, hurtful, cutting remarks about others.
- 4) Complaining Spirit. The disposition to make excuses and to blame others or bad circumstances for our problems. A refusal to take personal responsibility. Inability to be thankful for what we already have.
- 5) Outbursts of Anger. Angry words spoken because our expectations were not met.

The discontented person looks around and says, "I deserve something better than this." Because he is never happy and never satisfied, he drags others into the swamp with him. No wonder Benjamin Franklin declared, "Contentment makes a poor man rich, discontent makes a rich man poor." 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 this debilitating condition? Same answer as before, good theology, but I am out of room, so we'll find out next time.

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