

**Impacting our Cities - devotions - Monday, January 23**

Opening thought - when you think about "impacting our city" what thoughts, ideas and actions come to mind?

Read - Jeremiah 29:1-7 and Matthew 5:14-16. As you read this passage in Jeremiah, what would be shocking to those reading this letter who are living in Babylon?

What do you think they expect to hear about how to live as foreigners and exiles?

What imagery does Jesus use in Matthew 5 and how does it relate to being missionaries in today's society?

Pastor Jerry reminded us that King Nebuchadnezzar had come to power and defeated Israel and thus they had become the King's slave (vassal). These defeated people were transported to Babylon, renamed, reeducated in Babylonian ways, and essentially brainwashed into assimilating into the Babylonian culture. But even still God's people had a choice about how to live. And one extreme choice was compromise and assimilation.

- Describe how an Israelite could assimilate or compromise as a foreigner and exile living in Babylon.
- How does verse Jeremiah 29:6 as well as Deut. 6:4-9 speak to this choice?

Reflect - in every generation there is a choice about how to live as God's people in a land "not our own" or amidst a culture that does not honor God. And yet the call is that we be lights in the darkness, that we stand out and reflect God's glory and not just assimilate ourselves and blend in to the surrounding culture. Talk with the Lord in prayer this morning about where you are in your life while living in Palm Bay / Melbourne?

## **Tuesday, January 24**

Opening thought - *when have you been tempted to withdraw or separate yourself from what's going on around you? (At work, neighborhood, family, city, nation)*

Read - Jeremiah 29:1-11 & Colossians 3:12-17 -- As you read this passage in Jeremiah, what do you see of God's concern for his people to shine where they are?

How do you see this same concern in Paul's letter to the church at Colossae?

Pastor Jerry spoke about another extreme response to God's action of exile is to withdraw or separate oneself from the culture; to disengage from it totally. And in fact that this was what the false prophets were telling the people of God to do. They were to pull away, rebel against the wishes of the king and to live in a holy huddle. Just wait out the time God had set for their exile and then after it was over, all would be well.

- How can the modern church act in similar ways?

Yet God is clearly telling his people, through the Prophet Jeremiah that He would have them impact their city by settling in and seeking its prosperity and peace.

- Why do you think they were probably shocked or perplexed at this command?

Reflect - The reality that confronts us is God's battle plan that involves His church taking up residence right smack dab on the middle of "the Kingdom of Satan." And our task is to embrace this call to be salt and light, not resisting who rules over us on earth, but seeking to bring the gospel into every part of our city. In what ways are you caught up in other tasks or visions besides this? How are you embracing this call? Talk with God about this.

## **Wednesday, January 25**

Opening thought - *what different jobs or professions have you held over the years? Would you*

*say you have always seen this vocation as a place for being God's missionary? Why?*

Read - Jeremiah 29:7,11; Colossians 4:2-6. How does Jeremiah contrast the words "welfare" in these two verses? What do you think it meant by this?

What practical aspects to godly living does the Apostle Paul give his readers?

How do these 2 passages relate to one another in all that we have been discussing this week?

Pastor Jerry taught us that "welfare" is derived from the Hebrew word *Shalom* (which is translated as "peace"). And this peace is not merely the end of hostility but a profound wholeness and wholeheartedness of body, mind, emotions and spirit. Thus the people were to seek the flourishing of the city, pray for the city, and work for its true prosperity & peace.

- How is this kind of thinking challenging, shocking or exciting?

Pastor Jerry quoted Augustine when we stated, "the best citizens who live in the kingdom of Satan ought to be citizens of the kingdom of God! How does this quote rightly summarize a lot of what Jeremiah 29 is about?

- How does this quote challenge you as you consider your vocation and location?

Reflect - in what ways have these devotions been a challenge to you? Where do you struggle to be obedient to Scripture in this topic? Where do you need the strength and power of the Spirit?

**Vision - Impacting our City** - Jeremiah 29:1-11 (ESV)

Our Church Vision - We exist to develop followers of Christ who worship God passionately, connect with God's people, and **impact** God's kingdom.

Verse 11 - not a prosperity verse but it could be if taken out of context. This is a specific verse to understand with the context of Jeremiah and in Israel and in redemptive history.

### Historical Background - letter to St. Augustine

"Now, as Jerusalem signifies the city and fellowship of the saints, so Babylonia signifies the city and fellowship of the wicked, seeing that by interpretation it denotes confusion. On the subject of these two cities, which have been running their courses, mingling the one with the other, through all the changes of time from the beginning of the human race, and which shall so move on together until the end of the world, when they are destined to be separated at the last judgment, we have spoken already a little ago." [St. Augustine, The Catechising of the Uninstructed, 400 AD)

Augustine understood Jeremiah 29 impacts us today - that their story is our story. From these letters Augustine will write "The City of God."

### I. How can we learn from Israel and their captivity in Babylon?

Temptation - As God's people, our temptation is to live in a way which has no significant impact upon our city.

- ONE EXTREME - no impact on the city
  - Verse 1 - Nebuchadnezzar had come to power; defeated Israel and Israel became their slaves (vassals). Then he continues to fight and capture other nations but with some resistance. But eventually he wins against and captures and exiles many of the leading citizens. These defeated people were transported to Babylon and rename them, educate them in Babylonian ways, and essentially brainwash them into assimilating into the Babylonian culture.
    - Compromise and assimilation is a common response to captured people. But God does not want this for his people - verse 6. It would only take a few generations for this assimilation to completely take root. Abandoning who and what they were as a people for this new environment.
- OTHER EXTREME - Withdraw / Separate / Anger - see verse 8
  - To live in exile but to be looking to rebel and fight against your captors
  - The "prophets" in Israel / Judah are saying they are to this -rebel; pull away; get into a "holy huddle"
  - But Jeremiah is tasked with confronting this lie and tell them the truth
    - The truth is you will be here in Babylon for 70 years, not just a few years.
    - And rather than separate from the city you are in, you are to seek its welfare!?
      - See Verse 4!
    - ***Takeaway Truth: God would have us impact our city by settling in and seeking its prosperity and peace.***

Augustine - city of God vs. City of man (Satan)

- Jerusalem vs. Babylon
- Yet God has put his people into the city of Satan; sent out to this city for its benefit
- What do we call people specifically sent to do this? Missionaries! Shocking!
- Seek the welfare...Shalom (peace)
  - Not just the end of hostility but profound wholeness and wholeheartedness (body, mind, emotions, spirit)
  - Seek the flourishing of the city
  - Pray for the city and for its prosperity and peace - and as it is impacted so we are too! As the city prospers, so the church does too. Were to pray for the city and its peace. Shocking!

The people don't believe Jeremiah and he (Jeremiah) prophesies boldly about the deaths of many as proof he is speaking the truth. And it all comes to pass!! And in the end Nebuchadnezzar takes Jeremiah to Babylon safely. Wow!

God is going to build his city - the City of God - smack dab in the middle of the city of Satan. God doing this and to do it with his people building his city. Ultimately the story that starts in the garden ends in a perfect city in the city coming down out of heaven.

## **II. How were they instructed to live & how should that impact me?**

We live, first of all, on mission. To impact this city for the Kingdom of God. We are missionaries....

- Who own businesses...Who teach...Who work in the service industry
- Who raise children and interact with our neighbors

We seek the peace and prosperity of the city...

- By establishing a visible presence in this city (verses 5-7) and to live your God-saved life right in front of everyone.
- This is a mindset of not being a temporary, renting-mindset of a life....but rather a permanent, here to stay, not a holy-huddle, and a mindset to raise up godly families. That people would see Godly marriages and relationships - out in the open. To get engaged in the fabric of the city
- Seek the peace and prosperity by bringing the message of the gospel to the city!
  - Augustine: the best citizens in the kingdom of Satan ought to be citizens of the kingdom of God!
  - Through our volunteering and serving our city - in big and small way (welcoming new people to our neighborhood)
  - We too are foreigners and aliens (to God, spiritually) and should welcome those who are literally foreigners and aliens.

Matthew 5:14-16 - we must serve and seek after the peace and prosperity of the city WITH the ministry of the gospel. We are not just trying to be good people doing good for others with no mention of the gospel. No! The gospel is what brings peace. We serve so we can gain an opportunity to bring this good news, this true peace.

Intercession Prayer too!

- See verse 7
- Psalm 122:6-9 (NLT)
- We can pray for all to experience the meeting of physical, material, social, safety needs
- We can pray for those who commit crimes to be caught but who also come to know Christ
- Pray for leaders and city officials
- Pray for our neighbors
- And for the gospel to invade and overtake them all!