

Lessons in Exile!

Overview

Think about the people of Judah who were placed in exile for 70 years. Sometimes I would say for me, when I've read this, I have found it difficult to relate. I have found it difficult to feel like, okay, well, Lord, you have saved me.

I'm not, I'm not banished from you. I'm with you. So while I'm reading this, you know, I want to hold onto your promise.

I want to hold onto the fact that you have plans for me, but I'm not the same as them. This morning, Church, I wonder if there's something that we can draw out of the exile nature and the exile reality that the people of Judah were led towards intentionally from the Lord. Exile, by definition, is being displaced.

It's being removed from something. And I would invite you to be curious with me this morning, because only you and the Lord know what's going on in your own life. While maybe you're not feeling or experiencing being displaced geographically, like being uprooted and moved, would there be places in your life and in your season where you are displaced? Where you don't feel like you're quite where you want to be or you should be? Or maybe it's in the context of relationships.

Maybe there's family, friendships, certain things where you feel like you're not neither here nor there. Or maybe it's living in our social context, watching the world go through its many elections, many things that I don't even need to name specifically in our country and in the States. And whether you hold a certain political view that aligns with mine, it doesn't matter.

The fact is, for a lot of people, for their own reasons, living in our country and in our cities and in our towns feels like we don't belong. And then as people of God, there's another level and layer added to that, where in some ways it feels like, Lord, what is happening? It feels like we are being displaced, not willingly. And so, of course, we come to God and we pray, which is what we're called to do.

Or maybe it's a work or other situation in your life where you've been following the steps and then somehow you're like, hey, it's been like five years, it's been 10 years. Or maybe it's your family, your children, your grandchildren, and there was a path that they were going on and somehow you look and you're like, why is it like this? Friends, I would suggest that the sense of being displaced is actually not that uncommon for us, if we actually allowed ourselves to do what Brother Larry was inviting us to do as we entered into the Lord's table, which is examine our hearts and our condition and our position and our circumstances. And I would say that as I read this, would you allow the Lord's word to saturate over you, but also to be open to what exile and being displaced might mean for us today.

Jeremiah 29 verses 10 to 14. This is what the Lord says, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and to give you a future.

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart, declares the Lord, and declares the Lord and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

The people of Judah have been at, in this time, where God was sending the prophet Jeremiah to speak to his people, were at odds with the Babylonians for the longest time. And meanwhile, while they were the chosen people, of course, human nature, without going into the details, and if you wanted to go read it, there was idol worship, there was basically things that people were doing that were keeping them from following the Lord. And the thing is, is that not sinful nature? Is that not the history and story of humankind? Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.

Prone to leave the God I love, as we sing. And yet, while they were experiencing 70 years of a consequence, what the Lord was doing was not abandoning them, because He is a good God and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Is that not what He says? And so, while they were living in 70 years of something that they technically didn't want, but was a result of their own doing, the Lord was making a way, which is always what He does.

But the difficulty is, when you are in exile, I don't think it feels that way. I don't think what we experience in the times of being separated or in between, or when we're on a path of thinking we're, you know, doing the Lord's will, it doesn't actually feel like we're in it. Does that make sense? And I think this is where we need to be reminded prophetically, from the way that He called Jeremiah to speak to His people, to listen.

And say, in your seasons of feeling displaced, of experience actual displacement, know that He is sovereign and in control. You are actually not apart from the will of God, necessarily. Although I think that's a conclusion, as humans, we draw.

Things are tough. Things are not going the way I expect or want. I must be outside of the will of God, or I must be doing something wrong.

I listened to this one pastor the other day, and he said, he doesn't know where, he goes, he goes, I don't know where we got this as Christians, where when we hit trials and tribulations and roadblocks and turning points and stop signs, we stop and we start thinking, oh no, I've done something wrong. This must not be the will of God. He's like, church, this is the invitation to the Lord's table, to pick up our cross and to follow Him.

The promise was never easy, smooth, always fun. It is to come and enter into the death and then the resurrection. And so, part of this, that really stood out to me this time, as I've been looking into it in the last few weeks, was when, when the Lord promises and He says, it's amazing the Lord has to say, for the plans I know I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

And in other translations, it says, not evil. Of course, it's not evil. God cannot be.

But the fact that He had to say that insinuates and suggests that what we experience when we're displaced, what we are going through in exile seasons, feels like we're being harmed, feels like this is actually not going in a good direction. How can this be the will of God? So the whole, the entire invitation for us this morning is to be able to place ourselves in appropriate proximity with where God wants us. Is there places in our lives where maybe He's been inviting us to see something and we haven't been able to? I'm going to use my own life as an example.

So, 11 years ago is when we decided that I'm moving to Beansville. So my husband, Matt, already lived here. And I've told this story a few times.

Just, the plan was to live in Toronto. It's always the plan. Makes sense.

I'm the one working there. He can move. So good for me.

That was the thing. But it didn't work out. For all the reasons that it should have, it didn't work out.

And the Lord used a person to just plant a seed and say, why don't you move out there? And I said, no. No. Why would I go? I didn't even know what Beansville was.

Who wants to go there? Right? Stubborn-hearted, closed-minded, closed in every way. But I said yes, really not wanting to. But circumstantially, yes, because it was almost the only way that would make sense.

I look back at that and I am baffled by the grace and the mercy of God that he would still be so good to me in my decision to do what was best for me, even though I didn't want to. But it was like the condition of my heart was not of utter obedience. It was like, I guess I'll do this.

And in my head it was maybe two years max. I'll be back. You know what I mean? Where it's like, it's just, that's the condition of my heart.

And that is my brokenness at play. And the Lord is so gracious, so generous, so kind, so merciful, that in the midst of my hardness and that kind of attitude, He's still doing the work with the little that I would be obedient to in the most terrible way. He still is doing what is good for the future of my life and of our family.

And I was pregnant then and my first child was not even born yet. All my children were born here. I can't even see a life without being here.

In the years that I have been here, the Lord has humbled me more than I could ever know. And I pray that He will never stop. Because knowing the plans He has for us is one thing.

Logically, mentally, theoretically. But living it is what He calls us to do. And this is what He's calling the people of Judah.

But He's inviting us for the same thing going, until we fully are surrendered to this truth. The truth that He knows the plans He has for us. And that these plans are here for our good.

Not to harm us, but to move us forward and to give us a hope in the future. Because He will show us each step of the way. But until that becomes the guarding and guiding peace.

Which basically is a surrender to His Lordship over all the plans. Over not just general plans. It's just, it's actually how the plans looks.

So who's done this before? The Lord showed me something. I'm going to do this. And then you just start trekking along.

And then a year later you're going, how did I get here? I thought the Lord told me to come here. He sure did. But He also didn't give you all the steps specifically.

Because He wants you to come to Him for every step. He didn't tell you to do A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L. He didn't tell you to do all this. But you did those.

And I'm not pointing fingers. I'm saying this is how we operate as people. And then we stand there at another point saying, why are we still here? Or why am I still experiencing this? Why are they still like this? Why is my situation still like this? I can't answer that.

But He's inviting us to say, you might not like the situation. And in fact, the thing that feels harmful, that is actually not because God is in control, is actually forming us. The thing that feels terrible is actually the thing that He's using to form us.

And so He says, until we can actually surrender to this truth that He knows the plans He has for us. And we can actually come to Him in a way. He goes, then.

I'm always struck by that word, then. For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope in the future. Then you will come to me and pray, and I will listen to you.

Then. The then is not for Him. It's for us.

Because until the condition of our heart is oriented to that place of utmost surrender of going, you know what, God? I don't know why I got here. I don't actually know how I got here. I thought I was following you, or I thought I was doing what you wanted.

Show me where I started to control. Show me where I can't release. Show me the plans that I'm making for myself.

Show me the thoughts that are leading to things that are not aligned with your plans. Because in other translations, the word plans wasn't used. It's translated in a different way.

I know the thoughts, I think. And all of the Lord's thoughts are for His children. And all of the Lord's thoughts are good.

Then we will come. And it says, then not only will we pray and come to Him with the desperation and the humility and the open-handedness and the childlike faith that He wants, but He will listen because we're coming in that way. And then it says, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.

That is another piece of evidence that shows it is about the condition of our hearts. It is about not the fact that we say, not the fact that we know He's in control. It's being able to make decisions in our daily life to actually embody that we've released that control.

And what that looks like for you and me can look very different. My life right now, in our current season of our family, if I were to draw a picture, it's like we're in this like gray area. It's the epitome of feeling displaced.

But I'm not just, I'm exactly where I need to be. And I would argue that that's the point. And that's what He was trying to tell the people of Judah.

You will feel like you're neither here nor there, but you're actually exactly where I want you to be. So what are you going to do while you're here? A year ago, I had just started attending this church in the summer, having left my old church in Toronto in June. I was coming to attend because I didn't want to start serving without knowing anybody.

And it was part of the conversation I had with Pastor Dave over the course of seven months. A year ago, I had not known any of you. A year ago, I didn't work here or serve here.

A year ago, I wasn't where I am. A couple months after that, I started here. A month after that, the Lord aligned my husband and I to decide to close our business and his shop that he'd been running for a decade.

And a business he started over 20 years ago. And I stand here today with my whole rhythm of life and our family totally being shifted. It feels displaced.

Like slightly chaotic, but in a good way. But with this peace of knowing that we are exactly where the Lord wants us. Not because we know everything, but because at each step, He's invited us to come before Him and say, do you know and trust that I have the plans for you? And they're good.

I'm like, okay, all right. This is hard, but it's brought us to our knees in many ways to seek Him and to find Him when we're able to go to those places of, God, I can't make the best decision for my family, even if for my best effort. I don't know what my kids need.

I can make all these plans and financially plan all these ways and put all these things in place. But at the end of the day, I can't guarantee that this is the future that's best for myself, for my kids, for my grandkids, and for the future of the church, for the future of our family and the legacy. But you do.

And so friends, might I invite you to see that seasons, moments, or circumstances where the Lord allows us to be in exile or displaced are actually seasons in which He's using to invite us to come back to a place with Him. While we are being displaced, it's an opportunity where He's inviting us to come back to our place with Him. Does that make sense? Because that's what He was trying to do.

And He was using Jeremiah to speak because people just didn't want to listen. And in fact, right before, verses before in chapter 28, He was saying, I'm going to give Judah to Babylon. Like they're going to serve Him and serve King Nebuchadnezzar for 70 years.

And in fact, He even said to the over wild animals. Like nothing is beyond His control and privy. This season was not at all an accident.

There was nothing that was unintentional, but the point was for the people to come back to a place where they were seeking Him with all of their heart. And He actually gave them some very specific instructions. I don't know about you, but I find that when I'm in figuring out seasons where it's not really simple, comfortable, I know what I'm doing, which is a lot of my life.

I find there's a tendency for us when we're uncomfortable and we were like, Lord, why am I feeling this? There's some natural responses as humans. We want to run. We want to hide. We want to fight it. We want to resist it. We want to avoid it.

We want to fix it or control it. So that's where internally it all comes from. When we are faced with circumstances, situations in our life, that starts making us feel like, whoa, whoa, whoa.

This is unknown territory. I didn't ask for this. This was not part of my plan, but is it yours God? But before we can listen and seeking with all our heart, we start, okay, well, how do I resolve the sense of discomfort in me? I'm going to run, hide, avoid, et cetera, et cetera.

And the Lord is saying, don't. Don't run from the discomfort. Don't run from what is unknown for this is where we can actually lean deeper into knowing the truth that we say here about his plans that are good and seeking him with all of our heart.

Don't hide. Don't avoid. Lean in.

And then he actually tells in the previous verses where the letter is being read to the people of Judah, words that were written by Jeremiah. He says to the people that were exiled to Babylon, verses five to like around nine or 10, 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, do not decrease. Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city in which I have carried you into exile.

Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you will prosper. Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty God says. So in contrast with a human response of seasons of displacement, discomfort, instead of hiding, he's actually telling us to do the exact opposite.

He's saying when you feel like you don't want to be here, dig deeper. Plant roots. Pour into the season.

Don't run away from it. Don't avoid it. Don't just skim through it and just be afraid.

He's like, plant roots and go deep. Make a life. And in many ways he's saying live into the season because it's for our formation.

It was for the people to realize when you're uncomfortable, when you literally have to start again, you can't rely on what you know because you don't know. So who do you turn to? When you've never lived there and you don't own your house, you've got to find a house, then you've got to build your family in a place where you don't speak the same language. What do you do? You try but you pray.

And he says don't act like you're better than where you live or you're better than the people that you're placed with. Whether this is in a context of society, where you live, family, relationship, workplace, whatever that is. He's saying pray.

Pray to the Lord for the peace to be people of that seek peace and prosperity for where you are in context. How often do we in these in these times but also even in our families in whatever areas of relationship where it's like if someone doesn't agree with us or doesn't live like us we're just like and we pray for them but pray for them in a way where it's like pray them to be like me. Right? I'm not saying you're doing it but we've all done it.

Let's be real. But he's saying let's pray not for that. For the will of God to be done.

Pray for the peace of of this circumstance. Pray for the peace in this family. Pray for peace, his peace, his shalom.

Because with that it prospers and when they prosper even even if people don't know Jesus how can they avoid and deny his presence? Because it is his glory that's being exuded in the peace over the circumstance. It is his peace that's in us in trials and tribulations. Seeking the peace and prosperity of where we don't want to be is counterintuitive but it is the kingdom way and is also the way in which he has called us deeper into seeking him and finding him with all of our heart.

So friends all that being said only you know today where you are in your life, in your season, in your context, in your relationships and only the spirit of God is the one that's moving inside of you playing out situations as the word is being preached. And so I invite you, I invite you to lean in to knowing that it is the Lord's plans he has for you. And I invite you to do that this week as we leave this gathering of the Lord's table.

To seek him so that you're going to find him with all of your heart. To see what the season is for and why and to be able to pray the things that we don't naturally want to pray for. I'm going to ask Linda to come up so that we can finish this morning with declaring that it is the faithfulness of God that carries us from season to season.

Yeah and maybe there's places where it feels like the situation is too hard and it's been hard to recognize why we must continue and where their hope is, where there might be hope. That's precisely why he's inviting you today to come and come before his Lordship and say I don't even know where I went astray. I don't even know where I took control, where I was running away, where I was avoiding.

But I'm coming to you now Jesus and I'm coming to you to lay down all my plans. So church whose plans have we been seeking and whose plans do we have before us? If you would stand with me if you're able. If we can come before Jesus and declare that in the midst of in-betweens it is his faithfulness that has always and will always carry us.

And may your heart be open to seeking him so that you can find him when you seek him with all of your heart. With every breath that I receive of the goodness I sing all my life. All my life you have been faithful.

Yes you have Lord. And all my life you have been so, so good. With every breath that I inhale I sing of the goodness of God.

Your goodness is running. Your goodness is running after me. Sing your goodness.

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me. With my life laid down, I surrender now. I give you everything.

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me. Sing your goodness. Your goodness is running after, it's running after me.

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me. With my life laid down, I surrender now. I give you everything.

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me. We sing all my life. All my life.

We declare all my life you've been. All my life you have been so. With every breath that I inhale I raise my life.

All my life. I sing of the goodness of God. I will sing, I will sing of the goodness of God.

Yes, I will sing of the goodness of God. Church, receive the words for he knows the plans he has for you, Church. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

Plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon him and go and pray and he will listen to you. You will seek him and find him when you seek him with all of your heart.

Church, God bless you. And if there's anyone who might need prayer alongside you, then may you have a blessed week. And say hi to someone and grab some coffee.

Bless you.