

Jeremiah 29:4-14 *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, ‘Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.’ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,’ declares the Lord. “For thus says the Lord, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.’”*

Jeremiah was a prophet to Israel and comes to them as they are in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah tells them it will be 70 years, a lifetime for some, and some will not make it out of exile - a lifetime of separation from the land that God gave them. **Psalm 90:10** *As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.*

Even today, it can be discomfoting to be a foreigner in another country as we can easily be sidetracked by the discomforts, withdraw and become ineffective in those foreign places. How we approach our time in those kinds of places matter. We are living in a difficult time and place and in a divided country. Our challenges today are growing. How we approach them and respond is important and challenging. It is uncomfortable but at the same time there should be a brokenness in us as we seek to understand what hurt is underneath and what healing could and needs to take place. As Christians, we tend to focus more and more on eternity. But are we called to be focused on eternal life so much that we distance ourselves from this world and its problems? Are we as believers insulating ourselves from the problems and people around us?

1 Peter 2:11-17 *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.*

Peter is giving instruction for the church on how to respond. He is speaking of an earthly king that was not good. The Jews were living under Roman rule trying to stop the church and Christianity with persecution. Peter instructs them to honor all people and the king. Do we honor today? Honor doesn't mean to approve decisions or acknowledge sin. Are Peter's words difficult for us? Has it become common for us in church to create disunity, withholding love from one another? The Bible is becoming more optional for a lot of people, but fear of God is upholding His Word as the ultimate authority.

John 17:13-18 *But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

Jesus begins with the understanding of joy in His own midst of intense persecution. Our testimony to this world is that we should be the most joyful people because of the truth we have. But many times, we seek to get out of this world rather than press into it. **Matthew 5:13-16** *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Salt was not just to enhance something, but also prevents decay and preserves. As God's people, we are called to prevent decay in people's lives. We are to go into dark places and to bring light. **Jeremiah 29:4-7** *"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 'Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.'*

Jeremiah wanted them to see that God sent them into this place of exile due to God's choosing. God has not lost control today either. God does know what is going on. God is involved in what is happening in our lives. Don't be slack or ineffective in the places God calls you. Become a part of your community. God has a purpose and a call on our lives. Take up a temporary residence to have an influence where you are. Fear of starting a family is common today in this world as it is. Know that God is for you - take the challenge to raise up men and women of God. Press in while in exile. Establish God's authority. Pray for our place of exile, our leaders, our place of grief and brokenness, our place of destruction, our place of aloneness. Pray for our Babylon! Babylon in the New Testament becomes not a physical place but a place of human institution demanding loyalty. We live in Babylons - places of exile. Jeremiah says PRAY for Babylon! Ask God for His desires for us and our families. Prayer is the foundational piece. How we respond to others matters!

Romans 13:1 *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.* **Titus 3:1-7** *Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

We have a responsibility as sojourners on this earth to honor what God has put around us, not focused only on eternity that we lose our effectiveness here. Begin with prayer. Take the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and use it to affect the world around us. If God is for us, who can stand against us. We have the power of the Holy Spirit while we are here in exile. Let our light shine before men, in such a way, to glorify our Father in Heaven.

How do you tend to or want to insulate yourselves from the problems of the world?

What is the difference in praying about and praying for someone or something?

Where are you challenged to get back in the game while in exile?