

Thriving in Exile: Part 2
 Ordinary Faithfulness based on Extraordinary Hope
 Jeremiah 29:1-14; Daniel 1-6

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf..."

Introduction: Living in exile is hard. We just finished covering the first 6 chapters of Daniel, which are the narrative of his life in exile from faithful teenager to fruitful elderly statesman, observing God's faithfulness throughout decades, centuries, and millennia to come. Chapter 7 represents a switch from historical past to prophetic future, and the final 6 chapters largely deals with what is still to come, what is promised by our faithful, supreme, and sovereign God through the strength and reign of Jesus Christ. So its appropriate, on this day we transition back inside, that we take some time to consider ***how we thrive in exile as well***. Now that may seem like a downer of a statement or even dissonant to those who have grown up in freedom, but much like Israel in their 70 year exile out of the land and in Babylon, we can glean much from the life of Daniel and the wisdom of **Jeremiah** as we face a certain future, both in terms of hardship in this life and joy eternally.

There are three large ways we feel and know that we are exiles, strangers, sojourners, or aliens in this world:

1) This world, and our country, is not getting better - When an individual places himself above God, his life unravels. When a country does it, it signals a downward spiral with centrifugal force that only picks up speed. As our nation continues to embrace the tenets of humanism, replacing the authority that is God's alone with the supremacy of the self, and everyone doing what is right in their own eyes (Deut. 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25), we are quickly embracing what every nation eventually succumbs to: ***running AWAY from God and facing judgment instead of enjoying the joy of submission to Him***. Each generation thinks they have it figured out, wired, or have progressed to some new plain of knowledge and understanding, only to fall into the same pit as everyone else.

Now, there is a reason you feel this way, a reason why we are observing and feeling things change and devolve right before our eyes: ***it was and is prophesied and explained that it would happen***. If we look at **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, we have a great description for our present situation. ***"But understand this, that in the last days there will come time of difficulty."*** Do you feel that? Are you experiencing difficulty from those around us in terms of truth statements, moral imperatives, and fundamental disagreements? ***For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of PLEASURE rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."*** Was Paul observing us? Did he just write an Op/Ed for a news publication? He was spot on because we live in a fallen, broken, sinful world that refuses to turn to God and instead turns to self. Everything that is problematic that we face comes out of that fact.

So, we feel like strangers in a place we grew up, wondering how to change it, and sometimes simply trying to move away from it to find peace. ***But no matter where you move to, folks, this will be the relentless trend, the incessant bent, the unremitting inclination of every culture until Christ returns***. The question, then, truly is ***how should we then live?***

2) Restoration with God puts us at odds with the world -

The reality is we ALL started as aliens and strangers when it came to our relationship with God:

*"And you, who were once **alienated** and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds..." Col. 1:21*

*"Remember, that you were at that time separated from Christ, **alienated** from the commonwealth of Israel and **strangers** to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."*

God framed our condition in unbelief and under His judgment in terms of being aliens and strangers. We were at odds with God but also without hope as those who wander as exiles, not possessing any true home. Before Christ, we were in this world and under the control of the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), but truly had no **peace, hope, or home**. But Christ changed all of that:

*"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once **far off** have been brought near by the blood of Christ...So then, you are no longer **strangers and aliens**, but you are **fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.**" (Eph. 2:13,19)*

We are not only **restored but we have a new home in Christ**. We are members of a new group, no longer "friends with the world and at enmity with God" (James 4:4), but now we **belong** to a family. But that means that we are simultaneously out of place, since we live among those who are still at odds with God, in turmoil over their sin, and enemies of Christ. Our goal is to reach them with the gospel but we are no longer members with them.

3) This world is no longer our home, but is exceptionally temporary -

*"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body** to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, **my joy and my crown, STAND FIRM thus in the Lord, my beloved.**" (Phil. 2:20-3:1)* There is a longing, now, for us since we know what is coming. We know there is something categorically better in the future. We will exchange these broken-down, wilting, pain ridden bodies for new, glorious, eternal ones. We will be **transformed**, changed into a glorious body that is built to serve and worship Jesus forever. Sound good? This fact of new citizenship is why we can **enjoy things in this world, but they never truly satisfy**. We can enjoy expressions of the good gifts God gives us (relationships, food, sports, art, sunsets, books, vacations, bike riding, etc), but never in the fullness they were intended. The gifts and material in this world can never truly satisfy since Christ is our true fulfillment, and we will not be with Him until His return or our exiting this world (Phil. 1:21; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 21:3).

So, if all of this is true (and it is) **how do we actually go about this?** How do we live out **1 Pet. 1:17** *"And if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the **time of your exile.**"* This is where the advice of Jeremiah and the life of Daniel come into play: one by counsel given by a wise prophet, the other by a life lived by a faithful servant.

Counsel from a Wise Prophet (Jeremiah 29:4-14):

Most of you today have heard part of this counsel, even if some of you can't recall much about the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 29:11 reads, *"**I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.**"*

Now this is a wonderful promise given to Israel, but typically this is ripped out of context and loses its power and complete message. This is why we must understand the Bible, always,

within the context in which it was written. All of the Bible is useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), but it demands we come to grips with the breadth of the promise and understand what God was saying and not saying, what can be universally applied directly and what must be applied in principle.

A letter to exiles (29:1-4):

Jeremiah 29 is a letter written by the prophet to the surviving elders, priests, prophets, and all the people carried off to Babylon after the 2nd deportation in **597 B.C.** He wrote it as an encouragement to a group of people that would never see their homes again, never be able to return to the land they loved (except perhaps the ones 10 and under) and who would have to figure out life in a foreign land.

An Encouragement of Engagement (29:4-7):

Israel was in the predicament of exile as a punishment by God for their faithlessness, disobedience, and unwillingness to take God at His word. God had sent prophets to call and warn the people against their drifting away from Him, but they refused to listen. But the exile in Babylon was more than a punitive action by God to satisfy His anger. It was **purifying**. Much like He did with Israel in the Wilderness under the leadership of Moses, a generation had to die off before entering the Promised Land. Here, multiple generations would die off before getting **back to the Promised Land**. Because of this, it is extremely instructive as to what He wanted his people to do for these 7 decades in the foreign, pagan, godless land of Babylon:

- **Build houses and live in them** - Set down roots and function as citizens in that country
- **Plant gardens and eat from them** - Engage in commerce, provide for your family, and be industrious
- **Be fruitful and multiply (6)** - The idea here was not to intermarry with the Babylonians, but to have children, have them marry other Jewish men and women, and multiply their numbers, again, much like what happened in Egypt.
- **Seek the welfare of the city where I sent you (7)** - This is exceptional and the idea is unique in the Old Testament. But it is clear, that far from being resistant or a thorn in the side of the Babylonian government, they were to seek to be a blessing. They were not to rise up, to fight against, or take matters in their own hands. Why? They were there for a purpose, and **God was very clear about that purpose**. He put them there, so now they were to bloom and thrive by working in and with the Babylonians without losing their distinctiveness or give themselves to idolatry (as modeled by Daniel). *What is the most tried and true way to keep away from being the culture instead of helping it?*
- **They were to PRAY on the cities behalf** - Prayer is the idolatry antidote. Fervency in prayer and praying for those in our culture helps bring clarity to reality and our mission. This truth is echoed in **1 Timothy 2:1-2** *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."* We are to pray diligently for God to bring about the change of heart that is needed for transformation. Prayer keeps us from setting our roots in cement, and helps our mind and heart remember that we are not home in any city that we live, but are called for a purpose in whatever place we are planted. There was no **shelf life** to this command, but they were to live this way regardless if they died in Babylon or not.

Uncover the False Teaching of the Day (8-9):

There were certain false prophets who would continue to spout forth the same message: ***Don't worry, Babylon will fall and there will be an early restoration to Judah! Man, did***

that message sell! The problem was, God was abundantly clear as to HIS PLAN. If they lived according to their own desires, they would stop being **fruitful in the place they were planted and would always be looking elsewhere for fulfillment.** We need to be aware of the same principle today. Heaven is future, not now. Wherever God brings us, whether in Simi Valley, New Hampshire, or Poland, we are called to live, reach, and pray for the people there. Some never experience the opportunity for fruitfulness because they think ministry will happen, someday, in someplace, when the timing is right, or we finally buy a house, or get the perfect job, or have enough saved.

Understanding God's Heart for His People (10-14):

God DID have plans for the welfare of His people, and He always intended to bring them back to the land He had promised. In fact, just as He said, Cyrus ran out the nation of Babylon and established the Medo-Persian empire, and allowed the Jewish nation to return in 539 B.C:

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout the kingdom and also put it in writing: 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.'" 2 Chronicles 36:22-23

God was faithful to His promise, His timeline, His desires. He made it happen. But what was and is God's ultimate desire: **He wanted His people to CALL upon Him, to COME AND PRAY to Him, to SEEK Him and FIND Him, and to SEEK HIM WITH ALL THEIR HEART.** In other words, what God desired for Israel was not just a return to the land, but a **return to Him!** He wants to be found, wants to hear, wants to restore, wants to gather, and wants to bring back! That is the heart of our God. He is not some mean old man who pummels someone who offends Him. He is a loving Father who has His arms opened wide to embrace those who seek Him. He even grants the ability to believe! But that is the pathway. It is a **whole-hearted repentance that is needed.** After a 70 year correction, God wanted a restored people that would trust, love, and depend on Him. This is exactly what He desires for us today.

Neither the book of Daniel nor the encouragement of Jeremiah 29 is about **moralistic duty, or working to change culture, or some push to BE better citizens alone.** It is a recognition that left to ourselves, on our own, we will always fail. The study of OT Israel is almost a self-study in our own propensity to move away from God, to do things on our own, and dealing with the consequences of our sin. No, the time of exile showed **two dominant realities: We cannot save ourselves, and God is faithful to His Word out of a love for His people and a passion to bring glory to His name.** God has called us to radical obedience because He has offered us radical restoration through Jesus Christ. Daniel knew that faithfulness to God was a **result of God's faithfulness to Him.** That is why Daniel personified the counsel of Jeremiah:

- He chose faithfulness over greatness as a young teenager in a foreign land
- He embraced convictional living in the midst of compromise
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- **He sought to be a blessing** to multiple pagan kings (Nebuchadnezzar & Darius/Cyrus), seeing them as God's instruments made in His image, not as the enemy - and both praised God as a result
- **Trusted God's sovereignty** over safety
- **Served faithfully** from the beginning of his life to the end, never retiring from service but rather being used in different capacities
- **Distinguished himself** through godly character, not clever dealings or political wrangling
- **Never complained** - even when he was treated unfairly
- **Rose the ranks of multiple kingdoms** as a result of his convictions, not as a goal
- **Prayed faithfully** for the repentance of the people of Israel
- **Exercised great wisdom** as a direct result of his study and practice of God's Word
- **Knew there was something better**, a better future that God had promised

It is this last point that helps us transition from a focus of exiled individuals to the ruler of the entire world who will establish His kingdom one day, a better kingdom, an eternal kingdom, one that will exist in power, justice, and perfect love. This reality is not an unnecessary add-on to the gospel, it is at the heart of it, the finished point of redemption, that we will rule and reign with Jesus forever. It is what saints of old knew, that *this world is not our home, that we have been called to live faithfully and righteously in this time of sojourn and exile, and one day this will give way to what is better.* The saints of old believed this:

*"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having **acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, **they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.** Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for **He has prepared for them a city.**"*
 Heb. 11:13-16

Did you catch that? They acknowledged they were strangers and aliens! When they could come to grips with the fact that this world was not their home, they could desire and anticipate a **better country, one that is distinctly future, one that is heavenly.** Our obedience in the present is tied to the work of cross in the past and His eternal reign in the future. We are motivated for obedience NOT to earn, but to please, NOT to gain a standing, but rather because our standing has been purchased by Christ. So we live life to the glory of God, raising families, seeking the welfare of whatever context we've been placed, praying for the repentance of those around, knowing that judgment is real and the end is approaching. In thinking and living this way, we move from disappointment and angst of exile to joyful anticipation of what is coming in the future.