

Scripture Reading:

Jeremiah 29:1 “Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive--to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. **2** (This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) **3** The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying, **4** Thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: **5** Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. **6** Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters--that you may be increased there, and not diminished. **7** And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Jehovah for it; for in its peace you will have peace. **8** For thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. **9** For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says Jehovah. **10** For thus says Jehovah: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. **11** For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

"Seeking the Peace of the City"

You may have noticed from the reading this morning, that I am taking a brief pause in our series on the Gospel of Luke. Lord-willing we are back in Luke next week and we should reach the point that Jesus enters Jerusalem just before we begin our Advent season for the 2009 Church calendar!

We have a presidential election coming on Tuesday and our nation faces many serious challenges, having abandoned the God of the Bible, being involved in serious foreign entanglements & a potential world-wide economic collapse...

- With that in mind, I thought it would be good to bring a pastoral sermon aimed at comforting and guiding God's people from God's Word in these trying times.

My desire is for this to be a comforting message, but in doing so I must first:

- **Make us quite depressed as we honestly consider the state of our affairs!**
- **Next I want to look carefully at a principle that God has given in both the Old and New Testaments that God's people are to practice, even in troubled times: Seeking peace in the city!**
- **Finally I want to call us to simple obedience in the midst of these troubled times so we might truly be a people who seek the peace of the city AND are anxious for nothing!**

In thinking about how to describe our state of affairs in the United States today, I did not have to go much further than the front page of the Sacramento Bee on Friday...

As we pointed out some months ago, there is a major battle raging over marriage with Proposition 8 on the ballot Tuesday: I challenged us as Christians to be ready & willing to engage this battle Biblically and the latest Field Poll certainly confirmed the need for this. Field asked in one question if voters agreed with this statement: "The institution of traditional marriage between a man and a woman is one of the cornerstones of our country's Judeo-Christian heritage." 65% agreed and only 30% disagreed. Seems like pretty good news, but then Field asked these same voters if they agreed with this statement: "By eliminating the right of gay and lesbian couples to marry, Prop 8 denies one class of citizens the right to enjoy the dignity and responsibility of marriage."

61% of these same voters said they ALSO agree with that statement!

So the government schools have done there jobs well:

- **A third of the electorate rejects our Christian heritage outright!**
- **Another third can support conflicting statements with a straight face!**

Then there was the radio host who interviewed supporters of Senator Obama in New York City... However, he reversed the policy positions of the candidates, asking them whether they support Obama because of his strong ProLife views or the fact that he wanted to win the war in Iraq. Most said winning in Iraq and they were not even bothered when also told that Senator Obama had chosen Sarah Palin to be his vice president--

- **I heard this myself, and the only rational reaction is to say, "and we let these people vote???"**
- **I bring up these frustrating things because they illustrate the need for a pastoral sermon.**

We have long discussions of such things on our porch on many Sunday nights at our home & we sometimes talk of such things over our Sunday meals, and then there is everything you can find on the Internet: It can be overwhelming at times!

- **Our nation may well elect our first outright socialist on Tuesday: This should cause us great concern.**
- **We may be saved from this by electing a ticket that could bring our first woman president in just a few short years!**

The later would fulfill the warning from the Prophet Isaiah where he says, “11 Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, For the reward of his hands shall be given him. 12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them.”
Isaiah 3:11-12

And this only touches the political stuff that can get us depressed...

-- On the economic front, we have built an entire system that violates God’s principles of sound money!

-- Fractional reserve banking and the printing of fiat money have created a world-wide house of cards that could tumble down at any time.

- **Whether we have a terrorist attack like 9-11 or a stock market crash that should be a wake-up call: All that our elected officials can now tell us to do is to “go shopping” because 2/3rds of our economy is made up of consumer spending.**

Anyone who suggests a return to sound money or that we should work hard and consume less than we make is ridiculed as a caveman who does not understand modern economic theories.

- **The economic rules that count have not changed since creation and there will be serious consequences to violating them at the end of the day!**

And if all of that is not enough, we as Americans have the blood of over 40 million unborn children crying out from the ground to God for justice.

- **The Spirit pulled no punches in II Kings when He explained why the nation of Israel was sent into captivity...**

“3 Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.”

Israel was God’s chosen nation that had been greatly blessed under the reigns of Kings David and Solomon.

Much as we have seen today in our nation, they soon forgot God, violating His Sabbaths, turning to idolatry and shedding much innocent blood seeking peace and affluence.

I have included a chiastic outline of the seven things God hates from Proverbs six for further study this week over your family dinner tables!

- **You can see with a quick glance that judgment must come at the center in order to frustrate the wicked plans of men!**
- **The exile of God's people to Babylon for 70 years was just such a judgment...**
- **As we have just read, the exile to Babylon was a result of God's people shedding innocent blood.**
- **Its duration of seventy years amounted to one year for every Sabbath year of rest the land was denied during the 490 years the people had been in the land of milk and honey**
- **And this exile finally cured the people of Israel of the sin of idolatry which we do not see after their return.**

So, what were God's faithful people to do in the midst of such a judgment?

- **Well, as you might suspect, they were not to be anxious!**
- **They were not to be depressed!**
- **They were not to throw up their hands in despair and think that the end must be near!**

In fact God had some very specific instructions for His faithful people and we saw them in the reading from Jeremiah this morning: But before we review them, I want to make sure we have a good picture in our minds of what has happened...

The nation of Israel was not what it once was, but if you study the books of Kings & Chronicles you see they did not notice this much: They still had lots of religious ceremonies, which the Prophet Isaiah condemns right away in chapter one! They were still winning wars and defeating enemies. There was an long civil war between the northern and southern Kingdoms, but both sides were convinced they were right. The northern Kingdom was swept away, but even that did not stop the pride of the south as they continued in their idolatry which included sacrificing God's little children on the overheated hands of Moloch!

This is when and why the Prophet Habakkuk cried out to God, "O Jehoavh, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. 3 Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. 4 Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth."

- **Could certainly describe America!**

- **But God gives the Prophet an answer that he did not expect:**

“5 "Look among the nations and watch-- Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. 6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans [the Babylonians], A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs. 7 They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. 8 Their horses also are swifter than leopards, And more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; Their cavalry comes from afar; They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. 9 "They all come for violence; Their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand. 10 They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them.”

The prophet’s response is almost humorous, as he basically tells God, ‘Hey I know we are in pretty bad shape but the Babylonians are REAL bad, so bad that you cannot even look at them!’

- **As I used to tell my kids, God’s answer to the wickedness of America could well be an invasion by the Red Chinese!**

God goes on to explain more fully what is about to happen and then Habakkuk breaks out in prayer, “ O Jehovah, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Jehovah, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”

The prophet reflects on how bad things can be for God’s people and then concludes by saying: “8 Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.”

From the reading in Jeremiah this morning, we learn what it means for God to be ‘the strength’ for His faithful people and for Him to ‘make them walk on high hills.’

- **This was not just a spiritual concept to make us ‘feel’ better in the midst of trials**
- **Nor is it thinking of some future blessing that God would bring**

Let’s take a closer look at what Jeremiah said to see that God expects us to walk in His faithful ways no matter where we find ourselves in God’s plan...

Jeremiah 29:4 “Thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:”

- **These instructions are delivered to those who will be captives in that nation Habakkuk said was to evil for God to even look at!**

5 “Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.”

- **God’s people are not supposed to sit around sulking and they are not to take short-cuts: They are going to be there for 70 years... So they need houses and gardens!**

6 “Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters--that you may be increased there, and not diminished.”

- **They are to marry in the Lord and bear Him children. These children are to marry and bear more children unto the Lord, so they may be increased and NOT diminished!**

7 “And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Jehovah for it; for in its peace you will have peace.”

Here is the great test of whether we are viewing all that is happening in our nation from God’s perspective or from our flesh’s perspective! God had great plans for His people: All of their sins were NOT going to frustrate His great plan of salvation. God was also going to use His people to be a blessing even to their captives

We don’t have time to review all the details but just think of the impact of Daniel on King Nebuchadnezzar and the even more stunning accounts that we find in the Book of Ester.

- **Perhaps one of those Christian home-schooled children that are persecuted under the new socialist “change” will be used by God to convert Senator Obama!**

These instructions from God are very simple and very basic: We are to build Christian homes and have lots of Christian kids and we can do this EVEN if we are living in the midst of Babylon!

- **God also does NOT want us listening to the skeptics who say there is a better way...**

8 “For thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says Jehovah.”

- **God says to listen to HIM and not those who think God’s ways are foolish: God has a plan and He is going to see that plan through to completion!**

10 “For thus says Jehovah: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

- **Considering one of our favorite sayings in this light you might say that WE should focus on doing the dishes and let God worry about saving the world!**
- **I mentioned that this concept of seeking the peace of the city was found in both the Old and New Testaments**

We can see the best example if we look at how Paul instructs Timothy to have men pray in I Timothy chapter two: “1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority...”

- **Note this does not say to pray for only good kings & leaders... We are to pray for whatever leaders God has us under at the time!**
- **And God has us pray for a very specific purpose...**

“that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

- **Just as God knew that His people would return and restore Jerusalem so that the Messiah could come as promised, so God knows whose names are written in the book of life and He will work out His plan of salvation until they have all come in!**

Paul goes on to remind Timothy of this Gospel and then says,

8 “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

- **We are to pray for the peace of the city so that the Gospel can go forward, even if that city is Babylon!**
- **We are to do so with lifted hands that are not wrathful, looking for personal vengeance, or doubting, wondering if God really knows what He is doing!**
- **Paul then adds something that might seem a little strange if we don’t think about the principles we have learned from Jeremiah...**

9 “in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”

Our commands have not changed: We are to build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children!

Paul is reminding Timothy that Christian women are NOT to take part in the ‘fashion’ of Babylon...

- **We as Christians are not there to assimilate into the culture of the world's city, but rather to bring peace to the city and evangelize the lost, bringing forth the new city... the Heavenly Jerusalem!**

Most of you know me well enough to know that I am not saying that the results of elections are not important or that we do not have a role to play at the gates of the city. What I am saying here this morning is that we must NEVER allow the 'bad news of the day' to divert our attention away from the tasks that God has given His people.

In some ways we have just skipped ahead to the end of our study of Luke and Acts: There we find Paul practicing this contentment, bringing of peace at the very heart of the Roman empire: Acts 28: 30 "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

Lest you think I am being too simplistic when we consider all the modern challenges that we face, ponder how the people of Israel who had just been taken captive and hauled off to Babylon must have thought when Jeremiah gave them God's simple plan...

- **Build houses and plant gardens**
- **Marry and have children who will then have children**

They would think, what good would these be against the mighty Babylonian Empire.

By God's grace, many faithful Saints followed these simple commands and a strengthened and increased group of them returned to restore Jerusalem and the Temple 70 years later

- **In the coming weeks and through the Advent season we will celebrate our Savior's coming**
- **As we do we should remember these faithful people who made it possible as part of God's plan!**

It will encourage us to do likewise!

Communion Meditation:

Psalms 81:* "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! 9 There shall be no foreign god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god. 10 I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11 "But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. 12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels. 13 "Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! 14 I would soon subdue their enemies, And turn My hand against their adversaries. 15 The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him, But their fate would endure forever. 16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.""