



Good News/Bad News

Sunday, October 12, 2025

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Last week you may recall I preached from Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion...How can we sing the songs of Zion in a foreign land?" (vs. a, 4).

This morning I would like to take you back into Babylon, to where those deported Jews tried to adjust to life having been exiled from their Promised Land.

Old Testament Lesson, Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the few surviving elders among the exiles, to the priests and the prophets, and to all the people Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon from Jerusalem...

⁴ The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims to all the exiles I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Get married and have children; then help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they too may have children. Increase in number there so that you don't dwindle away. ⁷ Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.

⁸ The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims: Don't let the prophets and diviners in your midst mislead you. Don't pay attention to your dreams. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I didn't send them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰ The Lord proclaims: When Babylon's seventy years are up, I will come and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. ¹² When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. ¹³ When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. ¹⁴ I will be present for you, declares the Lord, and I will end your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord.

Sermon, "Good News, Bad News"

The title of my sermon is "Good News/Bad News," and I'd like to start by telling you about Good Ole Joe.

Did you hear about what happened to Good Ole Joe? The *bad* news is he fell off the roof of his barn. The *good* news is there was a haystack next to the barn. The *bad* news is there was a pitchfork sticking up out of the hay. The *good* news is Ole Joe missed the pitchfork. The *bad* news is Ole Joe also missed the haystack.

We have something of a "good news/bad news" scenario in Jeremiah 29. As we study it together, we will see (1) Good news that is bad; (2) Bad news that is good; and (3) Good news that is wonderful.

First, we consider **good news that is bad**. The setting for this text is important for our consideration. The elite from Judah have just been taken captive into Babylon, 800 miles away from home. Remember Judah was the Promised Land given by God to the Israelites. Now, with the loss of that sacred ground, it seemed as though God had abandoned God's own people. Psalm 137 records how they mourned by the banks of the rivers of Babylon.

Into this scenario a group of Jewish prophets arose, and they began to proclaim to the exiles that their deportation would be brief: within two years, they would return home to Judah. It sounded like good news. "We can stick it out if it's only going to be for a couple of years."

The problem was that they were absolutely wrong, and it was up to Jeremiah to proclaim the bad news to the Jews. In fact, the message of a short deportation as proclaimed by the false prophets was dangerous to the faith and morale of the exiled Jews because that kind of "good news" would only create a false faith in them. Jeremiah rightly proclaimed that God had no intention of bringing them back so soon.

It reminds me of those who proclaimed that the Rapture was going to happen three weeks ago on September 23, 2025, and when it doesn't happen, naïve Christians lost their faith in God, not realizing that rapture theology is bad theology.

The danger in Jeremiah's day is the same danger we face today, that if these false prophets continued in their teaching, the people would not simply lose faith in the false prophets; they would lose faith in God.

One of the traps which preachers fall into is to preach what the people want to hear, rather than what God wants to have them proclaim.

In 1980 I graduated from Bible College and began my ministry in Collinsville. At that time, a theological fad was sweeping through many of our evangelical churches, splitting them in two. Simply put, this theological fad proclaimed that God wanted you to have the best and if you wanted to have what God wanted for you, all you had to do was to have faith. And if you had sufficient faith, then you would be free from sickness, you would drive a big fancy car, and more money would drop into your lap than you would be able to spend.

What those so-called "faith preachers" really did was they created a box and said God would fit inside it so he could be controlled by people with faith. The reality of course, is that God will not be boxed in and God will not be controlled by any person regardless of how much faith they might have.

That message hasn't gone away. Different versions of it are still being preached in churches across our land. But what happens when the doctor tells you your biopsy indicates cancer? What happens when you're downsized? What happens when a loved one dies in an automobile accident? You just might lose your faith in God.

It's hard to separate the prophet from God, so when people are disappointed by a person, they forsake not only the person, but the God which they proclaimed.

God doesn't want you to give up on him because someone preached what they thought you wanted to hear only to have their message turn out to be wrong. Jesus said the rain falls on the just and on the unjust. The reality is that many believers are sick and it's not because they lack faith. Many believers are poor and it's not because they lack faith. In fact, scripture makes it clear that God *loves* the poor and you can find any number of scriptures that fault the *rich*.

One example is found In Matthew 19, where Jesus says to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. (23-24)"

If that's the case, then why would any preacher want to proclaim that you should get wealthy? It almost sounds like those pastors are teaching their congregations how to *avoid* eternal life. Of course, that wasn't the motivation. But why did they preach that message? Simply because it was a message that people wanted to hear and so it filled sanctuaries.

Preaching "Four Steps to Getting Everything You Desire" is much more appealing than preaching against sin and injustice.

Let's face the fact that serving Jesus will not make all your problems go away. You might get sick. You will eventually die. You may not become wealthy.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day preached a message of a short exile because that's what the Jews wanted to hear. But they were actually misleading the Jews. The words of the prophets may have sounded like good news, but it was bad news. And if the Jews living in

Babylon listened to it, they risked missing out on what God wanted to accomplish through them.

What Jeremiah offered was **bad news that was really good news**.

These verses are remarkable because of the advice they give to the Jews concerning their life in exiles. Jeremiah tells the exiles to settle in Babylon and live normal lives there, even praying for their captors. Jeremiah's advice reminds us of the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:43 that we should pray for our enemies.

At first these words seem bad to the exiles because they meant that they wouldn't be going back to Jerusalem anytime soon. But upon further reflection, they tell us that life can and will and must go on, even in the captivity of Babylon.

These verses also tell us that the Jews had considerable freedom in their new land: They were slaves, but they had a lot of autonomy, almost like citizens. Consequently, Jeremiah encourages the exiles to use the freedom you have in Babylon to your advantage. "Bloom where you're planted." Settle in Babylon; it is your new home. Make the most of it. You might feel as though you're 800 miles away from God, but you can still call out to God knowing that God will be found of you. And always remember that God is with you even to the ends of the earth.

This was in direct contrast to the preaching of the false prophets in Jeremiah's day who were preaching what was really a message of escape: "Don't get too comfortable in Babylon because you won't be living there for long."

That was the message last month by those who said Christians would be raptured on September 23. But it was nothing more than a message of easy escapism. But God's word was not given to use to help us escape from our present situation; rather, God's word was given to us to help us cope with our present situation, whatever it might be. More than that, it was given to us that we might thrive in whatever situation we find ourselves.

Returning to our text we see that Jeremiah concludes by offering **Good News that is wonderful**.

Have you ever wondered what's going on in someone's mind? I think parents of teenagers ask this question a lot: "What were you thinking?"

Have you ever wanted to say that to God? "God, what were you thinking?"

I suspect the Jewish exiles asked that question of God. Notice how God responds in v11-14a: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, plans to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will be found of you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord."

In other words, God promised to bring the Hebrews back home to Israel, but history has borne out that it didn't happen in two years; it happened 70 years later after many of the

original deportees had died. But they died with the hope that one day their children and grandchildren would return to the Promised Land.

We need to hear this when we're losing hope. No matter what our situation is, God has not lost hope. What I'm going through now may not be easy, but God will give me a future and a hope. And even if I don't experience it in this world, I still have a hope and a future.

And my future begins right now, right here, even if I'm stuck in Babylon. We don't have to wait until we get to the sweet by-and-by; rather, our future begins in our place of captivity—our Babylon—and carries us through to our Promised Land, both in this world and in the next.