

SERMON OUTLINE, SESSION 5

Chapter 5, “Blessing Babylon”



Scripture reading: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Guiding theme: Be a blessing to Babylon.

- Illustration: Waiting for a letter.
- Review: 587 BC is the point of no return, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. Eleven years before that, in 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar was trying to repopulate lands that he had destroyed, so he showed up in Jerusalem and began to take the young, bold, and beautiful to rebuild cities and be assets to Babylon. He left Zedekiah as a kind of puppet king in Jerusalem. During the decade in between, the people of God were wondering, *What’s God doing? What’s going to happen to us? Where is God in the midst of this?*
- Dueling prophets—exiles want to believe the message of the prophet Hananiah: In the next two years, God is going to show up, everything is going to be rebuilt, and Jerusalem is going to be the place we’ve always dreamed it would be again.

Jeremiah 29 is the letter that comes to the people during this uncertain decade, and the word from the Lord is this: “Build houses,” “settle down,” plant gardens, cultivate vineyards, “get married,” “have children,” and, most importantly, “promote the welfare”—the good, the *shalom*—of Babylon (vv. 5-7, CEB).

- There is an equally strange “letter” from God to exiles in the Roman Empire; a Prophet from Nazareth tells them, “The kingdom of God is like a farmer who sows seed . . . like yeast and dough . . . like a mustard seed.”
- Old Testament scholars would say that the Old Testament, particularly the Pentateuch, came together during and right after the exile, as the Israelites and Judeans began to compile the literature that had been floating around among them for centuries.
- Review: Babylonian story of creation vs. Hebrew story of creation; Jeremiah 29 calls us back to Genesis 1.
 - “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen. 1:28, KJV). It is easy for people in exile to say, “I don’t want to bring a child into this broken, ugly, evil Babylonian world.” Having children is an act of hope.
 - “Fill the earth” (v. 28, CEB). Use the giftedness given to us by God to contribute to the goodness, the beauty, and the well-being of the world.

- “Have dominion” (v. 28, KJV). This doesn’t give permission to exploit the earth; rather, humans as God’s image or reflection should have dominion over (give loving care to) all of God’s creation.

The command from Genesis to “fill the earth” (CEB) is the essence of what the prophet Jeremiah is telling the people in exile.

- The Greek word *oikonomia*, or “household,” is the root of the word “economy”; the idea is that our lives are intertwined and connected and that things to which God has called us make us part of a great household of people who care for one another, minister to each other through our work.
- There is no divide between the sacred (home/life) and secular (work) spheres.
- Illustration: “Ministers” in your congregation (real-estate agent=minister of homes; coffee-shop barista=minister of lattes).

The letter from Jeremiah tells the people in exile to work in roles that bring beauty to this community; to do work in ways that are honest and fair and that seek the good of those in the household or *oikonomia* where God has placed them; and to be God’s image, his reflection, as they do this.

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