

Remembering the Future

by John Vissers

The sermon reminds us that despite the challenges and uncertainties of life, God has a plan for our prosperity and not our harm, and that we can trust in His promises and call upon Him in prayer.

Duration: 34:51

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:10-14, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Future"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the promises of God as the new year approaches. He emphasizes that despite the challenges and problems we face, there is a future for the people of God. The passage from Jeremiah is highlighted, where God promises to bring his people back to their land after 70 years of exile. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of prayer and calling upon the Lord in times of need. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to trust in God's promises and seek Him in prayer as they face the future.

Transcript

We want to read this morning from the Old Testament, a wonderful passage from the book of Jeremiah. And we're going to read from verse 10 to 14 there, just a small part of this passage, which is part of a letter, really, that was written by Jeremiah to the people of God in exile. And we're going to focus on these verses from 10 to 14 this morning.

So let's hear God's word as we read from Jeremiah. Jeremiah 29 at verse 10. This is what the Lord says.

When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

Plans to give you hope and a future. 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 seek me with all your heart.

I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile. Amen, and may God bless to us this reading from his word this morning.

Let's pray together, shall we? Let your gospel come now, O Lord, not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction that we might indeed be encouraged and challenged to live for you in these days through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. One of my favorite cartoons is the cartoon strip, Kelvin and Hobbes.

As it happens, today is the last day that Kelvin and Hobbes is going to appear in the newspaper since the strip is retiring. Those of you who read that comic strip will be familiar with it. Kelvin is a little boy who's always trying to make sense out of life while he talks with his alter ego and his faithful friend Hobbes, this stuffed tiger who miraculously comes to life.

And in one of the cartoons which I particularly like, Kelvin is shown trudging along in the snow, and this is what he says. He says, I'm getting disillusioned with these new years. They don't seem new at all.

Each new year is just like the old year. Here another year has gone by and everything's still the same. There's still pollution and war and greed and stupidity.

Things haven't changed at all. I say, what kind of future is this? I thought things were supposed to improve. I thought the future was supposed to be better.

And then in the concluding frame of the cartoon, Hobbes makes this very perceptive observation. The problem with the future, he says, is that it keeps turning into the present. The problem with the future is that it always keeps turning into the present.

We are living at a time when many people feel, I suspect, like Kelvin and like Hobbes do. The recent year-end CTV Maclean's poll indicates that most Canadians have lost any hope in the future, in the future of this country, in the future of their own positions, their own personal lives. People don't expect things to get better any longer.

They expect to work harder for less. There's a great loss of faith and a great loss of hope in the institutions of our country. People worry about the economy, about health care, about money.

Many young people don't expect ever to be able to own a home. My generation doesn't expect to receive a government pension when they turn 65. And Generation X, the generation trailing behind the baby boomers, lives, it seems, in constant despair.

There's this sense of hopelessness, this sense of despair in our nation. We wonder whether the nation's going to survive through to the end of this century and through to the end of the millennium. Canadian poet, singer, and songwriter Leonard Cohen paints a stark picture of the future in one of his songs.

He says, give me back the Berlin Wall, give me Stalin and St. Paul. I've seen the future, brother, it is murder. I've seen the future and it is murder.

And the problem with the future, of course, is that it does indeed keep turning into the present. And those who live with a bleak picture of the future with no hope live in the midst also of a bleak present. And as we come to Jeremiah chapter 29, I want us to realize that the prophet Jeremiah spoke to a people who thought and who felt and who believed that they faced a bleak future.

The people of Israel were in exile. They had been conquered by the Babylonians under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem, the holy city, had been plundered.

The temple, the holy place of God, had been decimated and destroyed. The hopes and the dreams of God's people were dashed against the rocks of defeat and death. And the people were taken.

They were removed from their homes and from their families. And they were taken from the promised land that they loved. And they were carried off into exile where they were forced to resettle in a land that they did not know.

They were wrenched from loved ones. And in exile they toiled till often only death gave release. They found themselves in a living hell.

And in the midst of this situation, there arose a number of prophets who said to the people, don't worry. Things are going to turn out all right. The exile is only going to last two years.

And if you read in the verses which we did not read earlier in this chapter, you'll see how Jeremiah warns against them. These prophets said it wouldn't be very long at all, this situation, this crisis. And soon they would be able to return again to the land that they loved, to the promised land, to a place of comfort, a place of home.

The people should simply buck up and look forward to a speedy resolution to their crisis. But not Jeremiah. Jeremiah's word from the Lord was a very different word.

He said to the people that they should settle down. The people in exile should settle. They should build houses.

They should establish families. They should let their children marry. They should become settled.

Because the exile wasn't going to last for two years. It was going to last for 70 years. And the crisis would not disappear quickly.

There was no instant solution. There was no quick fix. It was going to affect them and their families for at least a generation or more to come.

They were to learn how to live in the midst of the crisis, in the midst of the situation which they faced. But Jeremiah reminds them that there was also the promise of God. God had not abandoned them.

The Lord had a plan for them. The Lord had a future for them. God's plan was to prosper them and not to harm them.

God had plans to give them a hope and a future. They would return to Jerusalem. There would come a day when they would return to their promised land.

They would go home. But it would be in God's time. It would be according to God's plan.

It would be in the sovereign will of God. It was according to God's sovereign design. And I want to suggest to you that it's that word.

It's that what makes this word of Jeremiah the prophet such a powerful word from God to us as we stand on the threshold of a new year. In this nation, with all of its uncertainties, in our own families, with all of our problems and with all of our pressures and with all of our despair, in this city, in this community, in the life of this congregation as we move forward into a new year with many challenges and many uncertainties.

As we think about all of these situations, there is a tremendous cause for concern.

There are no quick fixes, but there is a future, Jeremiah says, for those who put their trust in the living God. There are no easy solutions to the problems that we face, but there is a future for the people of God. And it is that future that we are invited to remember this morning as God's people through these words of Jeremiah the prophet.

And the first thing I want us to notice as we reflect together on these verses and try to apply them and think about their meaning for our own lives this day as we're on the last day of 1995. The first thing I want us to notice is this, that these verses are filled with a note of promise. As we face 1996, as we end 1995, we realize that there is a note of promise, the promises of God in this text.

The paragraph begins and ends with words of promise. Verse 10. This is what the Lord says.

When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. The Lord promises his people that they will be brought home. They will go back to the promised land.

And then in verse 14, this promise is reinforced. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

The people are in exile. They're facing uncertainty. And the promise of God is that they will return to their homes.

The divine purpose for Israel is stated. God will bring them home when the period of crisis and the period of judgment and the period of exile has come to completion. But they had to wait.

They had to wait patiently upon the Lord. They had to trust in the promise of God that even though the time for them seemed so long, the time of this exile, yet the promise of God was that he would be faithful. And they had to see this promise in terms of the bigger picture.

They were to set their own lives in the context of the larger canvas on which God is painting his sovereign picture. The welfare of their families. The welfare of their own lives.

The welfare of their nation. Their future all had to be seen in terms of God's grand design. And with this perspective, they were then invited to settle, to live, to learn what it meant to live in the present while remembering that future.

And I want to suggest to you this morning that as we contemplate the future, the first thing we are to remember are the promises of God and that we are called, my sisters and brothers, to wait faithfully. To wait patiently for the promises of God to be fulfilled. Some of you may feel like you're living in exile this morning.

You feel like you're living under judgment. Your life is flooded with uncertainty. You may be facing any number of situations, illness or unemployment or a difficult marriage.

You may wonder where you're going to live and all of these things seem like insurmountable problems. And time is pressing in on you and everywhere about you, people are quickly offering advice, easy solutions, quick fixes, telling you not to worry. But the word of the Lord to you this morning may simply be

this, wait patiently upon the promise of God.

When the time is complete, God will fulfill his gracious promise to bring you back. You see, we need to see our lives in terms of God's larger picture. We need to live with that promise.

We need to settle down and trust and live in the midst of the promises of God. And I suggest to you that this is something we need to understand as part of the present moment of the Church of Jesus Christ here in Canada. We need to understand it as a congregation and the Church across this nation needs to understand that we are living in a period which seems like cultural exile.

The Church is being shoved off the center stage into the margins of our lives and being a Christian puts you on the sidelines. The Church is no longer at the center of society, but the word of the Lord to us as a Church is stand firm, be faithful in these days of exile, for God's promises are for certain. And in the meantime, we have to learn how to sing the Lord's song in a strange and often difficult land.

I'm an unashamed fan of the television series MASH. Now it seems in eternal reruns. And one scene in one of the MASH episodes I found particularly poignant.

Those of you who know the show will know the various characters. And in one scene, MASH surgeon B.J. Honeycutt, who is a major character on the show, gives this reason for why he didn't give in to temptation in the midst of the Korean War. He said this, You see, B.J.'s hope for the future was grounded in the belief that one day he would again see his wife.

He would again see his young daughter. And he lived for that day. And all that he did was invested and was fulfilled by the expectation that that day would come, that one day he would see them again.

And the hope of that promise gave him the strength to carry on, the strength to live. What is the basis of your hope this morning? Is it a hope in the promise of God? Is it a hope that one day you will see Jesus? Is it a hope that one day you will, with expectation, see Jesus come again? Is your hope rooted in the promise of God? Is it a hope for eternity? That's the future we're called to remember, the promises of God. But secondly, I want us to notice in these verses that what is emphasized is not only the promise of God, but also the sovereign plan of God.

Verse 11, The plan of God. The prophet Jeremiah reminds the people in exile as they face this situation that the sovereign God has a plan for their lives, that the Lord is sovereign, that God knows the plans he has for his people even if they don't know them, that these plans are for their welfare and not for their harm, plans to give them a hope and a future, that God indeed has a divine purpose. And Christian faith, Christian faith, in its root, at its very essence, is faith in a God who is sovereign, a God whose will is supreme, a God whose will is sovereign.

It is faith in a God whose plans prevail. We speak about the providence of God, and what do we mean by that? But that God rules, and why does God rule? God rules to provide. God's ways are perfect.

God rules to provide. God's rule is good. And as we remember the future, we are invited, and we are invited to see it in terms of the plans of God, the will of God for our lives, personally and for our families and for our church and for our communities and for our nation and for our world.

And when we're confused, we are called to trust in the God who knows the plans that he has for us. And when it seems like those plans are so difficult and we can't understand what God is doing, nevertheless,

by faith, we are called to believe that those plans are to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future. And it's not always easy to see that.

It's not always easy to accept that. So often the plans that we see unfolding seem to be not for our good but for our harm, not for our welfare but for our hurt. And yet God is at work, and faith believes when sight finds it difficult to accept that God wills for his good pleasure and for our eternal good.

Do you really believe that this morning? You know, some of us have this picture of God, that God's just waiting to get us. But the prophet Jeremiah says God has plans for you, for a hope and for a future. Corrie ten Boom, the great Christian writer, the author of *The Hiding Place*, always put it this way in one of her little poems.

My life is but a weaving betwixt my God and me. I do not choose the colors. He worketh steadily.

Oft times he weaveth sorrow and I in foolish pride forget he sees the upper and I the underside. You see, God is at work weaving a tapestry out of our lives, and we often only see what's going on underneath, where things seem to be messy and at cross-purposes with each other, and yet God is at work weaving his grand design. And as we look to the future, let us be mindful of the sovereign God by whose will we live and move and have our being.

I've quoted the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism before from this pulpit, but let me do it again because it so well fits in to what Jeremiah is reminding us of this morning. What is your only comfort in life and in death? The answer that I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil, that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven, not a hair can fall from my head, indeed that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

I learned that when I was six years old and it's never left me. What is your only comfort in life and in death on this last day of 1995? And as we face a new year together as God's people, is it that you belong to God who knows the plans that he has for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, but who plans to give you a hope and a future? And then thirdly and finally, notice that this passage reminds us of our need to call upon the Lord in prayer. Verse 12, then, Jeremiah says, speaking for the Lord, then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.

And verse 13, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. You see, the promise of God and the presence of God and the plans of God and the providential undertaking of God in our lives is connected to our response. It is connected to our life of prayer and the privilege of the people of Israel in the future that they hope for would be to continue their relationship with God, that God would be their God and that they would be God's people, but it depended upon them calling out to the Lord.

When Jeremiah wrote this letter, some of the people were angry. Some of the people were bitter. Some of the people were resentful.

We are God's chosen people. God gave us a promised land and look what's happened to us. What kind of a future is this? What kind of a life is this? What kind of a God do we serve who leads us in captivity out of our homes and into a place that we despise, where we toil for our very lives? How can God care for us?

How can God love us? And so there was anger.

God had let them down. They were in exile after all. They were imprisoned.

How could God let this happen to them? This certainly did not feel like prosperity at all, but it felt like harm. And it was therefore that Jeremiah, with the word of the Lord burning in the very core of his being, came and wrote this letter to the people in exile and said, yes, your exile is going to last for a number of years, but call out upon the Lord to save you. Call out upon the Lord for he has your future in his hands.

And that requires turning from your resentment and your bitterness and your anger and your hostility and letting them all go and calling out upon the Lord with all of your will and with all of your energy for the Lord's salvation. Some of you might be angry this morning. You might be angry at God.

You might be angry at others. Things have not turned out as you had hoped. You may feel like you're in exile.

You feel like you're under judgment and life somehow has killed your dreams, dreams for a job, dreams for a home, dreams for a happy marriage and family, dreams for a future of security. And as you look down the pipeline of history and the coming year, you don't expect 1996 really to be very much better than 1995. In the Broadway production of *Les Misérables*, one of the saddest and most moving moments comes in Fantine's song.

Fantine is a young woman caught in a desperate cycle of abuse and despair without any hope of escape, and she sings, and some of the words of the song she sings are these words, I dreamed a dream in times gone by, when hope was high and life worth living. I had a dream my life would be so different from this hell I'm living, so different now from what it seems. Now life has killed the dream I dreamed.

You may feel that way this morning. Your dreams have been dashed on the rocks of daily experience. You feel that God has let you down.

And to you, my friends, the Lord says in these words of Jeremiah, call upon the name of the Lord for your salvation. Call out to the Lord, for if you seek the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your will and with all of your strength and with all of your soul and with all of your mind, then, God says, I will be found by you. I will listen to you.

Call upon me and pray to me, and you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. My dear sisters and brothers, our times are in God's hands. Your future and my future is in the hands of the living God.

And God says to us this morning, trust in me. Call out to me. Trust in my promises.

Trust in my plans. Trust in my presence. Trust in my saving grace in Jesus Christ.

During his Christmas broadcast of 1939, King George VI quoted these very, very familiar words from Minnie Louise Haskins at a time when the future seemed bleak and seemed so uncertain, and may they be our words this morning. I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown. And he replied, go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way. So I went forth, and finding the hand of God, God trod gladly into the night, and he led me towards the hills and the breaking of the day in the lone east. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.

Won't you call out upon that Lord, that sovereign God, this morning and walk with him into the new year? Let us pray. We acknowledge, O living God, this morning that our times are in your hands. And as a congregation of your people, we are gathered here this morning, and many of us have our own concerns, our own hopes and dreams, our own anxieties and worries as we face a new year.

And we pray, O living God, that in our own lives and in the life of our families, that you would make your presence very real to us, and that you would pour out your saving grace upon us as your people, as a congregation here at Knox, that you would indeed overrule and walk with us into the new year, that we might indeed be found as your faithful people as we anticipate our life together here and our witness in this place. Would you make your presence very real and very near to us this morning, individually, as families, and as a congregation of your people, for we ask it in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26700.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-vissers/remembering-the-future/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net