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**Sermon Summary – Sunday 22 November 2020**

**WHEN YOU DON’T GET IT, TRUST GOD’S GOT IT (Calven Celliers)**

*“When the going gets tough, the tough get going. When the going gets rough, the tough get rough.” (Billy Ocean)*

Those lyrics pretty much sum up how I feel when I find myself in a place in my life that I don’t want to be, my instinct is usually a toss-up between fight or flight. Either I fight, as in resist my circumstances, or I keep my bags packed and my eye on the door. Either way my prayers are usually focused on God helping me get out of whatever is consuming me at the time.

In Jeremiah 29, a chapter of Scripture best known for its hopeful promise for the future, there is, however, a strong encouragement to make the most of where you are right now. Even if where you find yourself right now is a place you would rather not be.

Jeremiah 29 is the text of a letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the people that Nebuchadnezzar had forcefully taken from Jerusalem to Babylon – **Read Jeremiah 29: 4 & 5.**

The longing of the Hebrews hearts was no doubt to get back to Israel, to their homes, to what was familiar and comfortable, and certainly easier than what they were dealing with under Babylonian oppression. And so, it makes sense to me that as they opened up the scroll and started reading what Jeremiah had written their initial reaction might have been something along the lines of *“WHAT?!?”* Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine for just a minute that *‘exile’* is that place that you’d rather not be in, or circumstances that are far from favourable. And Jeremiah is saying *“Stick around. Learn from what you’re going through. Don’t be in such a rush to move on. Put down roots, embrace the season and purpose of this season.”* In other words, instead of resisting what’s happening right now, or planning your escape, turn your attention to what this time has for you. WHAT?!?!?!

The words *“build houses and settle down”* gives us an indication of longevity. Jeremiah doesn’t say *“rent houses on a month-to-month lease”*, he says settle down. Can you imagine how sad the Israelites must have felt as they read that letter? They were no doubt counting on Jeremiah giving them their marching orders, a plan of action to get them home, and instead they discovered that their exile would last another seventy years! ***(Read Jeremiah 29:10)***For some in their midst that was a life sentence. But God didn’t want them to waste this time just waiting to be rescued out of it. There were things God wanted them to discover and learn about Him, and about themselves. Seasons of hardship in our lives are not mistakes, they’re not simply placeholders in time, they are there for a purpose, and God invites us to learn, discover, grow and mature.

When we are in a place that we don’t want to be, whether it’s physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, it is perfectly natural to feel uneasy and restless. And so, the call to settle down feels very incongruous with what our hearts naturally feel. And yet there is a sense that God might be saying to us in the midst of trying circumstances, *“slow down; respond, don’t react!”*

In his series “Better For It” Andy Stanley touches on this very topic. He makes the comment that *‘pain without gain is always a shame.’* There is purpose in everything. It’s wisdom to pause in the midst of difficulties to ask what are we learning through what we are going through. He also makes a very valid point when he says that simply wanting to better for any particular season in your life, or simply wishing to be better, or intending to be better isn’t going to cut it, because simply wanting or wishing isn’t going to be bring about any of the intended changes or growth, because it doesn’t require anything of us. For us to benefit from what God is doing in our tough experiences we have to engage; to engage that innate ability that empowers us to be better for anything that comes our way! We have no control over what life throws our way, but we do have a choice how we respond to life. God uses circumstances to develop our character. And everything we go through is significant in the grand scheme of things. There is a master plan; the Master’s plan – **Read Isaiah 55: 8 & 9**

We might not always understand what God is doing, but we are called to trust Him. We might not always get what He’s up to, but we need to trust that He’s got it nonetheless.

I have come to see the truth of the apostle Paul’s words in Romans 8 in my own life. I’ve come to learn that God doesn’t cause all things; I honestly can’t blame God for some of the things that have happened to me. I caused some of the things that have happened to me by my own sinfulness, disobedience, and rebellion. But I have faith, that out of His amazing grace and great love for me, as His child, that He will work all things out for my good, in accordance with His Word, and His glory! That doesn’t mean everything in life will be good, and yes there are always consequences, but God brings about good because His purpose is greater than our problems, our pain and even our sin.

Jeremiah also made the point that whilst in exile the Israelites should *plant gardens and eat what they produce*. What could this possibly mean for us in difficult seasons? I reckon there’s the implication that God wants us to do what we can for the good of those around us, despite what’s happening to us. There’s a service element to this command. Even when we are somewhere, we would rather not be, God invites us to participate in the lives of the people who are there. In periods of exile it can feel hard to connect with people and we may feel tempted to isolate, to withdraw. But there’s a mysterious sort of healing that happens when we reach out to others in our hurting. The pain of what we’re going through almost dissipates when we shift our focus off of ourselves and onto those around us. God has created us to be in community and when we reach out and help those around us, our own lives are fulfilled. Life is meant to be shared. God intends for us to experience life together. And by experiencing life together I’m talking about things like unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, and sympathetic comforting.

This is what Jeremiah encourages the Israelites to do, to work for the good of the land that they’re in, even if it’s not the land where they want to be. As you think about the Israelites sitting around the table and sharing in the produce of the land, it brings to mind moments of joy in the midst of struggle. Find moments in whatever you’re going through right now to savour and enjoy, it will make even the hardest season of your life a lot easier to endure.

These few verses in Jeremiah give us great wisdom and insight for the difficult seasons in our lives. We may not always be able to choose what happens to us in life, but may you never forget that you can choose how you respond to what happens in life. Don’t lose sight of the fact that our superpower is our ability to respond to life’s circumstances. Because if we lose sight of that fact then we adopt a victim mentality. And when we start reacting to circumstances as victims, we relinquish our openness to what God wants to do in us and even through us.

*‘Where you are is not who you are!’ (Farrah Proome)*

 Our circumstances do not define us. This is the gift that difficult seasons in our lives offer us, they are opportunities to grow us and mature us in ways that no other season or experience could. The calling of this verse is not to resist or run, it’s not even to endure, but to embrace, to get on board with and to be open to the working of God’s Spirit in your life, as He fulfils His plan and purpose through you, in whatever way He chooses.