



20 September 2024

"I don't want to be here!"

Have you said that? "I don't want to be here!"

The list of places is long, and people start their list early.

For some children it is school.

For many teens it is anywhere in public with their parents.

Then as we get older the list can get longer—long lines at stores, the dentist, work and, of course, our own personal list of places we don't want to be.

One place we don't want to go to is anywhere that we would be an exile—to be forced from our home country to live in another one. Voluntary immigration is one thing, but to be forced out of your homeland, being exiled, is quite another.

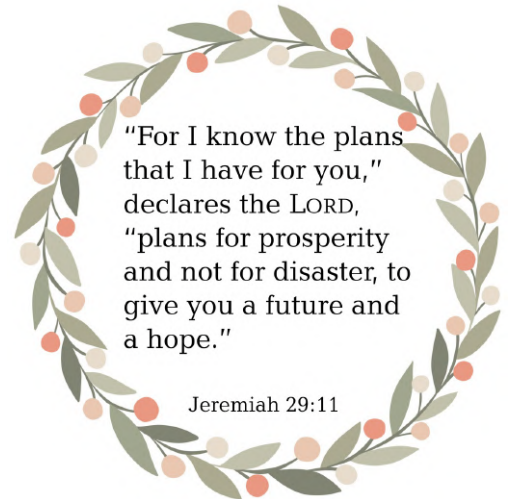
There is a long history of people being exiled. The first exiles were Adam and Eve who were forced out of the garden because of their sin. Since then countless others have been exiles. The United Nations states that there now are over 120 million exiles. That is just over three times the total population of Canada!

We know that Israel was exiled more than once. After the nation split, the northern kingdom was exiled in 722 B.C. because of their sin, never to return. The southern kingdom of Judah went into exile in 586 B.C. for 70 years because of their sin.

Jeremiah was a prophet who served God for more than 40 years, proclaiming a message of God's judgment and hope. The judgment part, to say the least, was not well accepted. He faced rejection, ridicule, beatings and being imprisoned. Caught up in Judah's exile, he ended his ministry and life as an exile in Egypt.

The people exiled in Babylon sang, as recorded in Psalm 137,

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion ... How can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land." (1, 4)



Both Jeremiah's message and the exile were heavy burdens. In chapter 9 of his prophecy he cried out in grief,

“Oh, that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for those slain of the daughter of my people!” (1)

So what are we to do when we feel like exiles, when our situation leads us to tears, to cry out, “I don't want to be here!”?

God told the exiles through Jeremiah that they should build houses, plant gardens and raise their families (29:4-6). In other words, “You are going to be here for 70 years, so settle into your new home.” You may be well acquainted with the phrase, “Bloom where you are planted.”

Then God told them what may have sounded quite strange at first.

“Seek the prosperity of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD in its behalf; for in its prosperity will be your prosperity.” (29:7)

Although they didn't want to be there, God had work for them there—to be a lighthouse to the people around them.

It was after this that God gave them the wonderful, hope-filled promise of taking them back home after 70 years because

“‘I know the plans for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope’” (29:11).

We are not Israel, but there are lessons here for us in our times of exile, of not wanting to be in the situation or place where God has brought us.

- God is with us, wherever we are, whatever is going on, however we feel.
- God has a mission for us, work for us to do even in a strange, foreign-feeling place or time.
- God has good planned for us, a future that gives us solid hope for today and every day.

Another prophet, Isaiah, gives us God's word to those who call out to Him, who trust in Him,

“And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” (58:11)

God has not changed. He will be there and do this for you, even in your times of exile, of not wanting to be where you are.

Pastor Lyle