

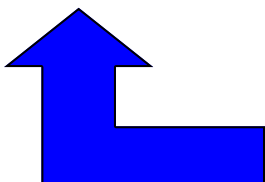
THE WORD FOR TODAY

Jeremiah 29, verses 7-14

Written by the prophet Jeremiah to the Jews exiled in Babylon, these words speak to anybody who feels at odds with the world around them. You probably remember the Boney M song “By the rivers of Babylon” - it used the words of Psalm 137 to capture the despair felt by the exiles. They sat down and wept when they remembered their home. They had been asked to sing one of their songs, but it seemed impossible in “a strange land”. God speaks to them through Jeremiah with some sound advice and some words of reassurance and promise.



The world we are living in is a strange and chaotic one at the moment. Our experience in it seems far from what we would like to call normal—in fact it seems like “a strange land”! This prophet from about 2,600 years ago speaks God’s words to us today. Follow these words of Jeremiah, beginning on the north wall of this little building and then continuing anti-clockwise round the church building. Please say the prayers too if you would like to, and perhaps pause on the benches if the weather is good. We are using the New International Version of the Bible, which you can find on the internet under Bible Gateway.



Turn immediately left to find the first verse of the Bible passage on the bench

***“...Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.
Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers,
you too will prosper.”***

1



However at odds we may feel with the world around us, God is telling us to be good citizens wherever we find ourselves. He wants us to be good citizens of our city, our country, our planet. It's no good spending our time moaning or despairing or wishing things were different. There is always something we can do to make the lives of those around us better and our world a better place. Above all we can and should be praying for the world around us and for its leaders and authorities, and this is something every one of us can do.

***Lord, sometimes we don't like the way we are being governed.
We worry about the future of this planet.
Help us to be public-spirited in our behaviour and to set an example.
Help us to pray, and to keep on praying, for a better world for all of us.***

(No. 2 is on the bench facing us at the corner of the church building)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them", declares the Lord.

2



Who do we trust? There are always plenty of people who will say what they know you want them to say, giving you false hopes and possibly leading you astray. If you are trying to follow Jesus, perhaps in difficult circumstances, there will be plenty who will want to put doubts into your mind. Who do we trust?

God wants us to trust him. We need to hear his voice and to be able to distinguish who is speaking his truth. We can only do this by drawing closer to him day by day through prayer, and through reading his Word in the Bible.

***Lord, we know our human frailties and just how easily we can be led astray.
Help us to draw closer to you every day
so that we can have your guidance in our lives.***

(Turn left round the side of the church to find No. 3)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.”

3



Promises are much easier to make than to keep. Ask any politician, and they will tell you that promises made in the heat of an election campaign are not always easy to keep when the chill of reality moves in. That's something we don't have to worry about with God—promises made are always kept, just as surely as day follows night. Seventy years in exile must have seemed like an eternity—we might think of it as a whole lifespan—but God did return the Jews to their homeland. And we have the sure hope of eternal life with our heavenly father when our lifespan on this earth is over—a promise sealed by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

***Thank you, Lord, that we can trust you to keep your promises.
Thank you for the prospect of everlasting life.
Help us to be people of integrity whose promises others can trust.***

(No. 4 is further along this side of the church)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“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.”***

4



This is the sort of verse I think of as worthy of being a memory verse. Words worth committing to memory so that I can recall them from time to time, but particularly when things are not going well.

God has plans for me—how reassuring is that!

The Almighty God, Maker of the Universe, has plans even for me—and what is more they are plans which will be life-enhancing and plans which will give hope and a future. Unlike the Jews of Jeremiah’s day, we know that through Jesus’ death and resurrection we have a most amazing future to look forward to. We know too that Jesus wanted to bring life in all its fullness to us all not just in the future but now, in this life. It is our choice whether we take up that offer.

***Lord, thank you for caring for me enough to have plans for my life.
Help me to follow Jesus so that I may know
the life in all its fullness he came to bring, now and into eternity.***

(Walk along the back of the church and turn left to find No. 5)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”

5



God wants his people to call on him and pray. Yes, he knows all about us—our troubles, worries, our despair—but he wants us to go to him with them. He knows that that is how we will find the comfort and guidance, the strength and reassurance, he can give. We don't pray into a void. God is there and will listen to us.

***Lord, help us to turn constantly to you in prayer.
We know you are the source of all we need and yet we hold back.
Help us to know your listening presence when we pray.***

(No. 6 is at the other side of the church tower)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“You will seek me
and find me when you seek me
with all your heart.”***

6



When we pray, sometimes God can seem remote. Is he really there? Is he really listening? How we would like to be sure. Here is another of God's promises, promises we know are kept. When we look for God, if we are totally wholehearted about wanting to find him, if we leave behind our scepticism, if we simply pray, we will find him. He will let us know in some way that he is there.

***Lord, thank you for these words of reassurance.
Help me to put my whole being into my prayers.
Help me to pray in the expectation that you will make yourself known.***

(Turn left to find No. 7 at the front of the church)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“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.”***

7

Unlike the Jews to whom this prophecy was directed, we are not in captivity—we have not been banished for long years to a country which we don't like. But these words speak to us of another of God's fundamental promises to all who seek him out—freedom!



God promises that we will be free from whatever holds us back, whether it is our burden of sin and guilt, lifted from us by the sacrifice of Jesus, or our human nature's frailty or physical weakness. The prophet Isaiah said this:

“Those who hope in the Lord will . . . soar on wings like eagles.”

***Lord, help me to seek you and to find you.
Thank you for the freedom and the life you offer me.
Lord, help me to grasp it firmly and to cherish it.***

(There is hand sanitiser in the Offering House by the gate if you would like to use it.)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

Introduction

Panel 1

Panel 2

Panel 3

Panel 4

Panel 5

Panel 6

Panel 7

Milo Rossi on Unsplash

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