



Dysfunctional Relationship – Part Five

Inattention to Results - Ego

Finding Hope by Being a Compassionate Steward – Jeremiah 29

- if you grew up in church, you probably remember the words to the chorus **This World is Not My Home**...part of it went like this...
 - **This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through**
 - **My treasure's are laid up somewhere beyond the blue**
 - **The angels beckon me from heaven's open door**
 - **And I can't feel at home in this world any more.**
- the tension that is articulated in that song is one that God's people have wrestled with throughout history...
 - for example, Saint Augustine, the great North African theologian who lived from 354-430 AD wrote his classic work, The City of God...where he described human history as a conflict between two great cities...the of God and the city of man...he said...
 - **"This race we have distributed into two parts, the one consisting of those who live according to man, the other of those who live according to God. And these we also mystically call the two cities, or the two communities of men, of which the one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil" (Saint Augustine, The City of God, XV.1).**
 - the term Augustine used as an alternate name for the city of man was the word Babylon.
 - in 1996, James Montgomery Boice, who was the long-time pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, in his book Two Cities, Two Loves, said...
 - **"According to St. Augustine, who gave us the distinction between 'the two cities'...Scripture unfolds the history of two distinct groups of people, each having a distinct origin, development, characteristics, and destiny. These are two cities, or two societies. The earthly society has as its highest expression the city cultures of Babylon and ...Rome. The other is the church, comprised of God's elect. The former is destined to pass away. The latter is blessed by God and is to last forever" (James Montgomery Boice, Two Cities, Two Loves, p. 35)**
- so, whether we're talking about an old church chorus, or the ancient words of a church father, or the writing of a relatively contemporary pastor and theologian...the tension is the same...how are people who say they have a personal relationship with God supposed to relate to those who would clearly say that they don't?...what is "I'm just a passing through" supposed to practically look like in our day and age?...in the hundreds of interactions and decisions I'm have to make on this issue each and every week?...
- with that in mind – please consider the words of this well known verse... **Jeremiah 29:11 - For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.**
- now, you might say – well, I know that verse, but what does that have to do with anything?...
 - let me answer your question with a question...

- where do you think the people to whom that verse was addressed were living at the time?...in exile in...Babylon...
- and the verses just prior to this gave them specific instructions about how they were to relate to the city, and the leaders, and the people of Babylon...
- Robert Linthicum made that observation in his book City of God, City of Satan when he said,
 - “My daughter and her family live near Detroit, Michigan. Recently when I was there to visit, I noticed a rather intriguing plaque hanging on the wall of their home. It was a photograph with golden lettering on it. The photograph was any camera buff’s dream—pine trees near the foreground framing the picture, a crystal clear lake mid-scene, and in the background a majestic snowcapped mountain against a cloudless sky. Across the plaque was inscribed the promise from Scripture: ‘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.’**
 - It is a magnificent Biblical promise that is engraved on the photograph of that plaque—in fact, one of my favorite promises of Scripture. But that promise was not made among pine trees and crystal clear lakes and snow-capped mountains. Instead, this promise was made in a city and given to an urban people of God”** (Robert Linthicum, City of God, City of Satan, p. 145).
- how do people who say we are part of the City of God live effectively in the City of man during our days on earth – the Lord has entrusted us with this opportunity – how can we be faithful to the trust?...with that in mind, please open your Bible to Jeremiah chapter 29.....
- we’re looking at the last of the five “dysfunctions” of families.
- we’re going to see the emphasis of Jeremiah 29 as being **Finding Hope by Being a Compassionate Steward.**
- with that in mind, let’s read Jeremiah 29, beginning in verse 1 (**read Jeremiah 29:1-14**)
- so we’re talking today about Finding Hope by Being a Compassionate Steward...
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- the Lord has entrusted us with a lot when it comes to the matter of how to best serve the city of man...and of course ultimately glorify God by winning men and women to Jesus Christ and inviting them to become part of the city of God...
 - but I believe you could make the case that the Lord has given us a significant number of reasons to be especially energized about community ministry...
 - some of what is coming to fruition is the results of decades of effort on the part of people in our church and community...
 - I’m not always sure we recognize or appreciate how unusual our situation is...when I describe community issues to other pastors in other cities, they cannot believe the level of openness and opportunity that we enjoy here...
 - but the concern is threefold...
 - one, that we take those opportunities for granted...
 - two, that we act as if those doors will always be open and we can enter whenever we get around to it...
 - and three, that we fail to be faithful to what God has entrusted to us in our town...
- now, on the other hand – none of that is to suggest that all of this is easy or immediately obvious or trouble free---community ministry is like walking in a minefield...

How can we avoid selfishness and practice selflessness?

I. Regarding the Way You View the People of Your City, Be Careful Who You Listen To.

- if this is your first time studying the book of Jeremiah, or this period of time in the history of Israel...the overall background of these verses may not be obvious...
- God allowed the southern nation of Judah to be conquered by Babylon in 586 BC...
- the northern kingdom had been conquered years ago by Assyria---that happened in 722 BC...
- as the southern kingdom was falling, there was a series of deportations...where many of the people of Judah were relocated to Babylon...in some senses, they were the lucky ones [if you want to say it that way...], because at least they were allowed to live.

A. The problem in Jeremiah's day.

- Jeremiah had made it clear that this captivity was going to last for 70 years...
- well, you can imagine how unpopular that notion was...
- so, a group of false prophets rose up and told the people they wanted to hear...
 - don't even unpack your suitcases...
 - don't establish any permanent roots...Babylon's about to fall and you ought to be glad for that...this will all be over in a few months or a couple of years...
 - obviously that would impact the way the way the children of Israel would have related to their new neighbors in the city of Babylon...
 - and by the way, the Lord was not happy with these false prophets at all..
 - you can pick up the flavor of that towards the end of our chapter (**read 29:24-32**)
 - the point is – God was very upset at these false prophets...because this captivity was God's idea...this wasn't something King Nebuchadnezzar was doing---it was something God was doing...
 - there was a very definite plan in place and that included His people seeking to be a blessing to their Babylonian neighbors for 70 years...
 - and if they listened to the false teachers who were just telling them what they wanted to hear, they would be very poor stewards of these ministry opportunities in the city to which they had been exiled...
 - they were in the city of man at this point in their lives because a sovereign God put them there for specific reasons at this point in their lives...
- while we're in that neighborhood, let me just remind you that...

B. The challenge of false counsel is as old as man himself.

1. In the Garden of Eden.

- **Genesis 3:1 - Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"**
- and of course that is not what God had said at all...that they could not eat from any tree...but the point is – we're not even three chapters into the Bible before we're reading about how our adversary builds his city...it's by attacking and undermining the Word of God...He is a false counselor...

2. The temptation of Christ – Matthew 4:1-11

- did you know that during the temptation of our Lord in the wilderness, satan quoted Scripture?...or better stated – he misquoted Scripture...
- and did you know that the way Jesus overcame each temptation was by properly quoting God's Word back to His tempter?...
- the point is – just like these false prophets in Jeremiah's day...this has always been a central part of the battle...

3. Paul's warning.

- **2 Corinthians 11:3 - But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.**

4. Timothy's challenge.

- **2 Timothy 4:2-3 - preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,**

- that has been true throughout the history of man...and often the counsel is given in the name of God...and even Scriptures are twisted to justify their positions...
- and you might say then – well, why should we listen to you?...the answer is, you shouldn't, without carefully checking what I say with the words of Scripture...

- what does that have to do with ministry in the city?

C. There are many opinions out there about how to relate to your city.

1. We ought to expect the Christian family to accomplish Christ's mission.

- many Christians present themselves as angry in the public square...
- and would appear to believe that the city of God can be built by force of governmental law...
- in that way of thinking, the church simply becomes another political action committee...and the counsel of Jeremiah 29:7 is drowned out by the shrill voices of the latest political battle...that was Dean Merrill's point in his famously titled book – Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church...
- since when was the city supposed to accomplish the mission of the church through political or governmental means?...there is nothing in the Scripture that would suggest such a thing

2. We are supposed to hate the people of the world.

- often that comes from a misinterpretation of **1 John 2:15 - Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**
- that's not talking about the people of the world – it's talking about the world's philosophies or ways of interpreting life...
- I agree with those who have said – I'm a fundamentalist [in the sense that I believe in the fundamentals of the faith], I'm just not mad about it...
- otherwise you carry yourself with an attitude and a lifestyle that is far removed from...seek the welfare of your city...
- now on the other hand are those who seem to believe...

3. We ought to become like the world in order to win the world.

- there are some trends in church life today that are absolutely baffling to me...
- some of what comes under the heading of contemporary Christian music...it's so much like the world that the music fights the message...which should never be the case...
- so if you have to become like the city of man in order to reach people in the city of man, when the process is over, isn't everyone still in the city of man?...and how was that promoting the welfare of the city?

- so the point of all of that was---this can be a very confusing topic, with a lot of conflicting voices, just like in Jeremiah's day when these words were originally penned...so it is crucial to be sure that we are thinking this through biblically...

- now let's drill even further into the text...

- we just said -- I. Regarding the Way You View the People of Your City, Be Careful Who You Listen To...now, let's add...

II. Regarding the Way You Treat the People of Your City, Seek Their Peace and Welfare.

A. In Jeremiah's day -- take up residence among them.

1. **Build houses and live in them – v. 5a**
2. **Plant gardens and eat their produce – 5b**
3. **Take wives and becomes the fathers of sons and daughters – 6a**
4. **Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters – 6b**

- in other words, they were not to sulk, they were not to pout, they were not to separate themselves from their neighbors...
- just like Jesus came and tabernacled with us, the apostle John said, these individuals were to settle down and live with the people in the city of man...
- - that leads us to the main point of the text...

B. In our day – look for ways to be a blessing, and bathe your efforts in prayer.

- **Jeremiah 29:7 - Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.**

1. Taught in many places in the NT as well.

Matthew 5:16 - Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Philippians 2:15-16 - Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Titus 3:14 - Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.

- we could multiply verses like that all day long...but the point is clear...

2. Your goal should be to have a positive, godly impact on every relationship the Lord has entrusted to you.

- now, let's try to make this as practical as I know how...
- and let's begin where it has to begin...

a. In your home.

- you can't effectively seek the welfare of your city until you learn to practice that skill at home...
- and there will be people who will attend this church today whose presence is not a source of blessing in their homes...it's a source of tension, discouragement, bitterness...for any person who hears this message for whom that description is accurate, I would call upon you to repent...
- God has entrusted you with those relationships and those opportunities...he wants you to have a positive, spiritual impact...
- and please don't say – but what about him?...what about her?...
- there is never an excuse for being bitter, argumentation, and snarky, and mean and whatever constitutes being an “anti-blessing”...

b. In your extended family.

- when you come up on the holidays...some of you will be going to in-laws who do not know the Lord...and you're already on edge...
- here's the challenge – seek their welfare...seek to be a blessing...
- and you might say – well, I don't like them...what's that got to do with it?...
 - and do it without all the snide comments to your spouse...or the moodiness, or the criticism, or the “when can we go” thing?...
 - you might say – but I feel like I'm in exile when we go there...bingo...
 - that's a trust God has given you...

- [could develop – don't think God couldn't use that – cf. impact on mom's family]...

c. In your neighborhood.

- what are you doing to “seek the welfare of your neighbors”?

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d. At work.

- how do you carry yourself at work?...

- some Christians are mad all the time...or they gossip as much or worse than unbelieving people do...

- but for some (I hope, many) followers of Christ, they are a blessing to their boss...they care about the welfare of their company...

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e. In our community.

- now, let's bring this around to the main point this morning...if the question is, how are we to carry ourselves in our community, the answer is, seek the welfare of the city...

- look for as many ways as possible to be a blessing to those around us...[repeat some of the previous NT verses – cf. Titus 3:14]...recognizing that the ultimate welfare for anyone is coming to see their need for a Savior...but that will not happen unless we look for ways to show compassion.

- now, here's what I'd like us to be sure we walk away with

3. God has entrusted us with unusual opportunities and relationships to be especially effective.

Most of us are so accustomed to “looking out for Number One” that we barely give a thought to the welfare of those in our own family. Can that be right?

- I hope by now we're seeing a trend...God has trusted us with an incredible number of very unusual opportunities to seek the welfare of others...

- the question is – what are you doing to be part of that effort?

III. Regarding the Way You Think about Your Ministry in the City, Remember You're Not Home Yet.

A. For the children of Israel, the exile would not last forever.

Jeremiah 29:11 - For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

B. For you and me.

- we're like Abraham... Hebrews 11:10 - ...looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.