

Pray for Davidson

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to be thinking this morning about our relationship as Christians with our community, with society, to our province, and to our country, but especially to our community here in Davidson.

God's word has told us that as those who believe in Jesus, we belong to a different kingdom than the kingdom of this world.

As Paul said, we have been brought out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. Our citizenship is now in heaven. Our allegiance is now to Jesus, our king.

We are called to be distinct from the people of our world, to be different, to live holy.

We've been told by Christ that we no longer belong to this world, but that we belong to him. And so what should our relationship to our world look like?

[1 : 1 0] What should our relationship to the people around us here in Davidson, this community, look like? That's our question for this morning.

And so as we look to an answer, we're going to begin in the pages of Jeremiah the prophet.

So if you have your Bible, I encourage you to open it up to Jeremiah chapter 29. Jeremiah chapter 29.

Jeremiah chapter 29. Starting in verse 1.

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

[2 : 2 6] This was after King Jehoiachin and the Queen Mother, the court officials, and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.

Jeremiah entrusted the letter to Elisa, son of Shaphan, and to Gemariah, son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah, king of Judah, sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

Before we get to what Jeremiah said, just a few thoughts about what's happening here. Jeremiah is a prophet of God. He's in Jerusalem.

Many of the former inhabitants of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah have been taken captive and into exile by the Babylonian armies.

Because the bigger story here is that the Israelites have not listened to God. They have not obeyed God. They have turned away from him. They have lived wickedly.

[3 : 2 7] And so God has brought the judgment, the punishment on them that he promised that he would. And up until this point, it's not as though Israel hasn't had second and third and fourth and fifth chances.

They've had prophet after prophet after prophet sent to them from God to warn them. God's used all kinds of different ways to get their attention, gifts of grace to invite them back into a right relationship with him.

But on the whole, they have refused to listen. And it's not as though God expected perfect obedience. That's why they had the sacrificial system.

That's why they had priests. On the whole, they have rejected God. They have turned to other gods. And so God finally brings the judgment that he promised upon the people of Israel.

The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered. It was taken. Its inhabitants were taken into exile by the Assyrian Empire. And then finally, now the southern kingdom and Jerusalem itself has been conquered.

[4 : 46] And it's many of its inhabitants taken away into captivity, into exile by the Babylonians. And so Jeremiah is writing to the surviving elders, the priests, the so-called prophets, as well as to anybody else who was carried off to Babylon from Jerusalem.

And this is what he says. He says, This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters.

Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there. Do not decrease.

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it.

[5 : 55] Because if it prospers, you too will prosper. Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says. Do not let the prophets, 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.

This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good 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 on 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.

[6 : 58] I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. The first thing to notice here is that this is not just a letter from Jeremiah to the people in Babylon.

This is a letter from God to them and a heartfelt one at that. Can you imagine what some of the people might have been thinking as they gathered around to hear these words being read out?

From their perspective, it would appear that God was done with them. Maybe that they were cut off and rejected by God.

They had now received the full measure of what God had said he would do to them if they lived wickedly. Back in the days of Moses, God described what would happen if they were unfaithful to the covenant, if they turned away from him.

Some of those words go like this. Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known.

[8 : 19] Among those nations, you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing and a despairing heart.

You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, if only it were evening. And in the evening, if only it were morning, because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see.

These were the words that God used to describe what would happen to them if they persisted all the way in wickedness and unfaithfulness.

As a people, they had entered into a special covenant with God himself. This is something that none of the other nations or peoples of the world could say.

It was a privilege and an honor that had been given to them by God. But for centuries, for centuries, they rebelled.

[9 : 27] They broke their side of the covenant. And now they had received the punishment that God had promised. Can you imagine how it must have felt for them to be marched into the city of Babylon as captives?

Weak and exhausted from the long journey. Many people that they knew and loved, perhaps, had died along the way. And as they entered the city, they're surrounded with all these unfamiliar things.

People are speaking a language that they have no idea what they're saying. Can you imagine what it would have been like for some to finally acknowledge for the first time who the true prophets were?

And that what they had said, what God had said through them, really was true. They were guilty for their sins.

And this had all come from God's hand. They probably wondered, is this it? Are we done? Is God done with us?

[10 : 37] Have we used up all of our second and third and fourth chances? Is there another chance for us? Can you imagine what spark of joy and hope and faith might have come in their hearts as they received this letter and heard the words?

How their eyes would have brightened to hear this from God. Yes, you are receiving what you deserve.

But I'm not done with you. I have good plans for you. I'm going to bring you back. And you will be my people.

And I will be your God. But you're going to be in Babylon for a while.

Seventy years, says Jeremiah, must be completed. And then you will come home. For most of those who had gone into exile, that would have been too long.

[11 : 45] For the most part, it would have been probably the next generation of Israelites who would make that journey back home. You're going to be there for a while.

You're going to be there for a while. So settle in. One of the things I love here is what the Lord gives them by way of instruction.

Build houses. Settle down. Plant gardens. Eat what they produce. A letter comes halfway across the world from God.

And he knows exactly the kinds of questions that they have in their minds. The anxieties that they have. Here they are in a foreign land. What should we do?

Should we build a house? How long are we going to be here? Should we rent? Should I get married? Or should we just kind of wait until we see how things are going?

[12 : 44] Should we start a family? Or should we wait and see what's going to happen? Isn't it beautiful that God even cares about those everyday decisions of life for his people?

He's aware of what they're going through. We might have expected God to say, you blew it.

So figure it out for yourself. But instead of judgment or tough love, they've already experienced plenty of that.

God gives them grace. He tells them what's happening. He tells them how to carry on. You're in a foreign country and you're going to be there for a while.

So settle in. Build houses. Plant gardens. Get married. Have kids. And then nestled in God's gracious and sensitive instructions is this in verse 7.

[13 : 55] He says, Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it.

You can imagine at this moment that everybody's there listening in the room and they hear those words and they're like, what? Did he just say that? Did he just say that we should seek the welfare and the prosperity of Babylon?

Did he just say that we should pray that God would do good things and bless Babylon?

It's probably hard for us to imagine how difficult it would have been for them to hear those words. Many of them had lost loved ones at the hands of the Babylonians.

The Babylonians had put them through hell, starving them nearly to death in Jerusalem during the siege, slaughtering them in the conquest, seemingly sparing the lives of some only to use them as cheap, skilled labor.

[15 : 09] This would be like telling a Jewish person through the fence of a concentration camp that they should pray for God to bless Berlin. I don't think so.

There's only one thing that I'm praying for right now, and that's for fire and brimstone to rain down upon Berlin and upon Babylon for what they have done to us.

As a side point, if you ever have someone say to you that the God of the Old Testament is not the same as the God of the New Testament, that the God of the Old Testament is angry and wrathful and just judges a lot, and the God of the New Testament is different.

He's loving and compassionate. I hope you know that that characterization is superficial and false. Jesus himself said this. You've heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Why? That you may be children of your father in heaven.

[16 : 25] He causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

In other words, if you want to be like God, then love your enemy. Pray for those who harm you. That's the kind of God that he is.

He is kind to the good and to the evil. And boy, do we ever see that here in Jeremiah's letter. As he tells them to pray for the cities of Babylon in which they find themselves.

To pray and ask God to do good things for them. Ask me to do good things so that things go well for the cities where you find yourselves.

The cities of your captors. Your enemies. Your oppressors. We love the truth that God is both just and compassionate.

[17 : 33] Acceptment means justice for me. And compassion towards others who have wronged me. This letter was written very specifically to the Jewish people of Jeremiah's day who lived in exile.

So what does this have to do with us here this morning and with the question that we're seeking to answer? Well, these are not just old historical records that have no relevance to our lives today.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he said this. For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. So that through the endurance taught in the scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope.

There was a time when I used to think that our relationship with society should be thought about like the Titanic.

A sinking ship. And I did use that metaphor last Sunday for those of you who are here. To describe how God is patient and does not want anyone to perish.

[18 : 44] But there was a time when I thought that's the way we should see our relationship with society, with our community, with our world. That we should use as little of our time as possible in anything except getting people off the ship.

Rescuing people from the ship that's going down. I thought that efforts to make the sinking ship a better place on its way down, that's just a waste of time.

Don't bother laboring to bring about social reform. This whole world is going down anyway. So what's the point? We need to be focused just on meeting the spiritual needs of people because that's all that really matters.

That's how I used to think. But the sinking ship metaphor is not the metaphor that God has given us to think about our relationship with society and to our community.

The metaphor that he has given us is that of living as a foreigner or an exile in a country that is not our ultimate home. It's the apostle Peter who points us in this direction.

[19 : 56] In his letter to those who have been born again in Christ Jesus, he said this. He said, Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

He goes on. He says, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor or the king as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

Live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the king or the emperor, some translations say.

[21 : 13] So how should an exile and a foreigner live when they're in a foreign country? According to Peter, we should not give ourselves to the sinful customs and patterns of the world that we find ourselves in.

In that sense, we are to be different. But Peter says nothing about us trying to escape this world. To get back home or about starting a colony or starting our own Christian country, our own Christian city or town.

He says nothing about how we should hold ourselves up in our houses and keep to ourselves. In fact, the opposite is implied. He says we are to live among the people of our world.

Enough that they have the opportunity to see our lives. To see our behavior. To see that we do indeed submit to the governing authorities that God has put over us.

We are to be distinct. We are to be holy. But we are still, in a sense, to settle in. And to live with and to live among the people around us.

- [22 : 28] The people in our community. If the reason why we won't attend a community gathering. Or spend time with our neighbors and coworkers is simply because they're not Christian. Then we've got it wrong. How else will they see our good deeds? And come to glorify God on the day he visits us.
- What I think Peter is showing us here. Is that there is much that we can learn today as Christians. From what the exiles went through.
- In those old scriptures. Back in Babylon. There will come a day for us too. When Christ will return.
- And will gather us. And this world. He will remake into. Our new home. But that day hasn't come yet. So what should we do in the meantime?
- [23 : 27] How should we relate to the people in our community. Here in Davidson. To the people of Saskatchewan. To our fellow Canadians.
- The message of Jesus was this. The second most important thing. That God desires of you. Is this.
- Love your neighbor. That's really what God was encouraging his exiled children. To do through Jeremiah. Isn't it? Seek.
- To seek. The peace and prosperity. Of the city. To which I have carried you into exile. Pray. To the Lord for it. As children of our heavenly father.
- We should seek. We should search out. we should go after the shalom, the peace, the welfare, and prosperity of the Davidson community, of the province of Saskatchewan, of our country, and not just the spiritual needs, but the physical needs as well, with a view to the success and flourishing and prospering of our community and our province and our country as God defines those things.
- [24 : 49] How sad would it be if, as those who bear Christ's name in this community, we were remembered as those strange people that meet in that strange-looking building that didn't really participate in anything in the community.
- They just kind of kept to themselves and did their own thing. We don't really know what they were about. That's not the kind of exiles that we've been called to live as. How wonderful would it be if we, as those who bear Christ's name in this community, were remembered as those strange people who live differently.
- But, man, wouldn't it be awesome to have a few more people like that here in Davidson? Those people from the Davidson Community Bible Church, they're so quick to move towards others who are in need.
- Look at all the good things that they have done for our community. What would our community be like without them? I don't want to think of that. A lot of people are in it for themselves or to make themselves look good.
- But those people from the Davidson Community Bible Church, they're as genuine, as humble-hearted, as kind, and as selfless as they come.
- [26 : 14] They've done some really great things in this community. Let's not settle for a Titanic-like relationship to our community.
- The ship may be sinking, but it could be a while before the king returns. Let's show this community what it means to know the king of kings, to be a citizen of the kingdom of light.
- Can you imagine what this world would be like today if William Wilberforce thought of his country as the Titanic?
- Nah, forget it. The slave trade is so well-established. It's been around for years. Half of parliament is invested in businesses that benefit directly from the slave trade.

Even if we could change the law, others will probably just rise up and change it right back. Nothing's going to get better until Jesus comes back. This world could be a very different place if William Wilberforce thought about that.

[27 : 22] Would we have seen the abolition of slavery in 1833? William Wilberforce understood what it means to live as an exile, as a foreigner, and to seek the welfare and the flourishing of his country.

Of his fellow man. And he prayed to the Lord for it. And look what God did. Why do you think God has us here in Davidson?

As a church. Why has he brought us here?

God loves Davidson and the people who live in this community. His desire and his will is that we would seek the welfare and the prosperity of Davidson.

That we would be instruments of his grace. Conduits through which his compassion flows to the people in this community. And the place to start is prayer.

[28 : 43] Pray to the Lord for the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for Davidson.

For Saskatchewan. For Canada. And so, these past number of weeks, we've been seeking to make a regular habit of prayer.

Prayer for our families. Prayer for one another. For our church. Prayer for those who don't believe that we know in our lives. This week, I would like for us to add to our prayer list.

Or if you're using the Prayer Mate app, to add in your app to pray for Davidson. To pray for our community. Our town.

To pray for our province. Our country. The people that we live among. There are social evils that are going on in our country.

[29 : 44] And our province that God can do something about. There are elections happening this year. There is a need for Christian men and women to bring God's grace to this community.

To help start new initiatives. Or to help refresh old ones that have kind of fallen by the wayside. By the grace of God and as an answer to our prayers, we may yet live to see God do wonderful works of grace and compassion even right here in this community.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we confess that we have not always done this well.

There have been times where we've thought, well, the world can just go to hell. and we don't have time for that.

There have been times where we have been more concerned with just living happy lives, minding our own business. But we thank you for the reminder this morning, Lord, that you have placed us here for a reason.

[31 : 08] Help us to see how we can participate in what you're doing. Lord, each one of us has different connections to this community, different friendships that we've, and people that we've known over the years.

Help us to see each one of us clearly how we can participate, can seek the good of this, of Davidson. as we prayed earlier, stir in our hearts that we would not be content to just go our own way to keep to ourselves.

We want this week to be different, Lord. We want this whole week to just be full of prayer for our community. Stir that in our hearts.

Work that in us, we pray. In Christ's name, amen. Amen.