

# Hope and a Future in New Haven

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Would you turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 29? It's if you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, it's found on page 656.

We'll start our series in 1 Thessalonians next week, but for this week we'll do a one-off sermon on Jeremiah. In my office next door, I have a little plaque framed and hanging on one of the walls, and I don't remember how I got it, but it says the following, for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope, which is Jeremiah 29, verse 11.

Now in my experience, this is one of the most widely quoted Bible verses today. You can find it on wall hangings, you can find it on many people's Facebook pages, birthday and graduation cards, there's even a website, Jeremiah2911.com, devoted to this particular verse.

But depending on who you talk to, it's less clear what this verse actually means. Is it a promise of prosperity and a bright future for everyone? Well, it sounds like a nice idea, but it doesn't seem to turn out that way for everyone.

Or is it a promise for people who believe in God, that God will protect believers from calamities and disasters? Well, again, that sounds nice, but what do you say to a believer who experiences disaster or calamity?

[ 1 : 3 3 ] Did God's plan fail? Or, well, others have reacted by saying that we shouldn't quote this verse because this verse was in the Old Testament meant for the Israelites, and so it's not directly applicable to any Christians today.

But that can't be completely right either, because in Romans 15, Paul says, whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.

Now, there is a wonderful promise in this verse, and we're going to look at the context in which it's located, the whole chapter, or at least the first half of Jeremiah 29. And we'll see that it contains a more challenging and difficult call than we might have expected, but also a more comforting and encouraging promise from God as we begin this new year.

So let's read Jeremiah 29, verses 1 through 14. It reads as follows. These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasa, the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah, the son of Hilikiah, whom Zedekiah, king of Judah, sent to Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

[ 3 : 0 8 ] It said, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and live in them.

Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives, have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, and do not decrease.

But 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 find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you.

And do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name. I did not send them, declares the Lord.

For thus says the Lord, When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise, and bring you back to this place.

[ 4 : 13 ] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans for welfare, and not for evil, to give you a future, and a hope. Then you will call upon me, and come, and pray to me, and I will hear you.

You will seek me, and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes, and gather you from all the nations, and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord.

And I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. Well, what we just read, as we heard in the beginning, is a letter from the prophet Jeremiah, who was living in Jerusalem, to the Israelites who had been exiled to Babylon.

Now, a little historical background to start off. The Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem in 597 BC. They had looted the palace and the temple. They deported the most powerful and influential people, and they left the rest with a puppet king that they had set up.

And this was their common practice when they conquered a new land. They were a rapidly expanding empire, the superpower of the world in those days. But when they conquered a new land, they wouldn't try to take everybody all the way to Babylon.

[ 5 : 25 ] They would actually let most of the people stay. But they would take away the educated people, the skilled workers, and the leaders, and then leave everyone else.

So verse 2 says they took away the king, the officials, and the skilled craftsmen. Now, to make an analogy, imagine if tomorrow the Canadian army swooped down through Vermont, down through Connecticut into New Haven, and took away all the doctors and nurses, all the professors and teachers, and all the lawyers and judges, and left all the rest of us here.

Now, without doctors and nurses, the hospitals would not function very well. Without professors and teachers, the colleges and schools might as well shut down, and then kids would be out on the streets all day.

And without lawyers and judges, there would be no court system anymore. And even if all the rest of us were left, you might not want to be in New Haven anymore. Now, that's basically what happened to Jerusalem when the Babylonians came.

Now, imagine if you were one of the people taken into exile. Imagine if you were forced to walk 500 miles across upstate New York, all the way to Ottawa, the capital of Canada.

[ 6 : 47 ] It would take at least a month, maybe longer. Some people might get sick or even die along the way. Some of your closest friends and family might be left behind, and you would have no way to communicate with them.

And then you're forced to settle in Ottawa, where it's freezing cold for six months, not just three or four months, but six months of the year. Well, for the Israelites, it wasn't that much different.

They walked 700 miles through the desert, and it was blazing hot in Babylon for six to nine months of the year. And the people in Babylon spoke a different language, worshipped different gods, and had a totally different culture.

Now, if this happened to you, if you were taken into exile, you would probably be inclined to do one of two things. You might be inclined to do everything that you could do to try to get back to New Haven.

In other words, you might be inclined to withdraw. Put all your energy in finding some way to get back home. And some of the Israelites were hoping to do just that.

[ 7 : 53 ] You know, even though Jerusalem was a mess, better to be at home, where life was familiar. Better to be in Jerusalem. The temple was there. God had been present with them in the past.

It was the place of their history. And in fact, several prophets claimed to receive messages from God. And they said, God will destroy the Babylonians, and within just a year or two, you'll be back home.

Jeremiah 28 talks about a guy named Hananiah, who was saying that. And the end of Jeremiah 29 talks about Ahab and Zedekiah, who were saying the same thing. God will bring down the Babylonians, and he'll bring you home within a year or two at most.

Imminently. And that message, as you might expect, was very popular. It spread quickly, because it seemed to offer hope. Just stick it out for a short time.

Tolerate it. And then you can get out of here. Well, that's the first thing you might be inclined to do. But the second thing that you might be inclined to do is to just blend in. Forget about New Haven.

[ 8 : 57 ] Cut your ties to the U.S. Apply for Canadian citizenship. And watch Hockey Night in Canada every Saturday night. Not so bad. Right? You know, eat French fries with gravy and cheese and count yourself part of the Commonwealth, a long reconciled loyalist.

Well, that's what the Babylonians wanted the Israelites to do. When the Babylonians took away all the leaders from Israel, you know, they didn't take them to Babylon and make them slaves. They didn't even give them menial jobs.

They actually offered them high-paying government positions. This is what happened to Daniel and his friends. If you read the book of Daniel, it's exactly what happened to them. They were taken away to Babylon, put in a three-year training program, and offered high government posts.

So instead of being a leader in little old Jerusalem, now you can be a leader in the great city of Babylon, the world superpower.

And the goal, from the Babylonians' perspective, was to assimilate the Israelites. In other words, to make them just blend in and just become another part of the huge Babylonian empire.

[ 10 : 06 ] So they'd leave behind their distinctives and become fully Babylonian. So that's how, that's the context in which Jeremiah is writing this letter.

And the surprising thing is, Jeremiah says both of those inclinations are misguided. So first he says, don't withdraw. He confronts the people who were just waiting and hoping to get back to Jerusalem as soon as they could.

So verses 8 through 10, he confronts the prophets. He says, don't let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you. Don't listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they're prophesying to you, and I did not send them.

Only after 70 years are completed will I bring you back home. In other words, you're going to be in exile for a long time. And the hope that you'll soon be released is a false hope.

It's not a promise from God, it's just your own wishful thinking. And so in verses 5 through 7, he says, settle down in Babylon. Stop renting month to month, sign a lease.

[ 11 : 12 ] Even better, build a house, plant a garden. Get married, have kids, raise your family here. Don't stay on the margins of society waiting for God to take you out. Invest in the city where God has put you.

Verse 7 would probably have been the most startling verse of all. Seek the welfare of the city where I've sent you into exile. And pray to the Lord for it. For in its welfare, you will find your welfare.

Now that word welfare, to us it sounds rather institutional and governmental and impersonal. But the Hebrew word for that is shalom, which is usually translated peace.

But it can also mean health, safety, prosperity, happiness, wholeness, completeness, or flourishing. It's the same word that Jeremiah uses in verse 11.

When he says, I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare, plans for your peace and prosperity and flourishing. So in other words, he says, don't just tolerate a hostile and foreign culture and hope to move somewhere else soon.

[ 12 : 21 ] God has plans for your welfare, for your shalom. God has plans for you to flourish and experience peace, even in the midst of your exile. But this will only happen as you seek the peace and prosperity of the people around you.

Now this is one of the most radical commands in the whole Old Testament. Pray for the people who conquered you and took you captive. Read all the ancient literature you want.

You will not find such a command. Pray for your enemies and seek their good. Now that's one reason, as a side note, that's one reason you can be confident that the Bible is truly inspired by God.

Because it has these ideas in it that were completely unprecedented in the ancient world and yet perfectly reflect the character of God. And Jesus said the same thing.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. And you will be children of the Most High who is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

[ 13 : 30 ] So Jeremiah says, don't withdraw, but instead invest in loving the people around you and seeking the welfare of your city. But he also warns them, don't become just like the Babylonians either.

Don't become just like the people around you. And don't put all your hopes in living the good life in Babylon. That's why he says in verse 10 and verse 14, after 70 years, I'll bring you back home.

I'll fulfill my promise and bring you back. You see, Babylon, he was saying to them, Babylon's your long-term place of residence. But it's not your true home.

Your true home is with God and with his people. And one day he'll bring you back to your true home. Now, by this time, you might be saying, well, that's interesting, but what does this have to do with me?

I'm not exactly concerned about the Canadian army. Not exactly a present threat. Well, Jeremiah's message is relevant to us because the New Testament in several places describes Christians as exiles in the world.

[ 14 : 35 ] And we read earlier from 1 Peter in the New Testament. Peter begins his letter by referring to Christians as elect exiles of the dispersion.

In other words, God's chosen people exiled and scattered throughout the world. You see, unlike the people of Israel, when they had a king, the Christian church is not a nation state.

It's not a political entity. Christians are God's people not because we live in a certain country, but because we believe in Jesus and we belong to Jesus. So Hebrews 13 says, here on earth, we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

And in Galatians 4, Paul says we're children of the Jerusalem above, the heavenly Jerusalem. In other words, if you're a believer in Jesus, you're an exile and a stranger in this world until the day when Jesus will return and bring the new heavens and the new earth, the home of perfect righteousness.

But Peter continues. If you notice, there are two other places in the reading we had this morning where he refers to God's people, where he refers to Christians as exiles. In chapter 1, verse 17, and chapter 2, verse 11, he says Christians are exiles and sojourners.

[ 15 : 54 ] And that word could also be translated something like resident aliens. In other words, people who are full-time residents but not citizens of a certain country where they live. So to take the analogy, if you're a Christian, you have a green card on earth, but your citizenship is in Jesus' heavenly kingdom.

Now, just like the Israelites, we can be inclined to either withdraw from the world just to try to tolerate it temporarily in hopes that we can soon get out of here or to become just like the world and put our hope in all the things that are right around us.

So we don't have to have that tension of being in exile anymore. So Jeremiah's message is very relevant to us today. And I think it can be particularly relevant in a place like New England.

Now, I don't know how you feel, but I think many of us who are Christians here can feel this sense of exile, perhaps even more strongly than some other places. Right?

You travel around New England, you go to the center of any town. There's a historic white congregational church, right? Maybe also a Catholic church or an Episcopalian church or maybe a Baptist church.

[ 17 : 13 ] First Baptist church in the United States was in Providence, Rhode Island. Right? You have historic church buildings. You have universities founded originally to train Christian leaders and preachers.

But of course, the present reality is two or three percent of people in Connecticut go to a Bible-believing church every Sunday morning, something like that. Or the four least religious states in the country are all located in New England, according to a Gallup poll.

So how do we live as Christians, as exiles, in a culture that's increasingly secular and I think rightly described as post-Christian? Now, let me speak first to those of you who are relative newcomers.

Trinity is full of people from all over the place who are here in New Haven for a short time. Probably half of you have started coming to this church in the last three years and probably almost as many of you have plans to leave within the next three years.

So let me speak to all of you first. I've been in New Haven for 13 years now and I've met hundreds of people who have recently arrived in New Haven. And people come for all sorts of reasons, right?

[ 18 : 20 ] Some people come for work or an internship. Some people come to study and get a degree. Some people have just got out of jail and got dropped off here by the bus. Some people are refugees, literally exiled from their home countries and resettled here.

But over 13 years of being in New Haven, I cannot remember a single person who has said this to me. I've just arrived in New Haven. It's where I've always dreamed of living.

And I'm planning to settle here for the rest of my life. Right? Most people who weren't born and raised here come here with the intention of being here temporarily.

And most people come to get something from the city, whether it's a degree or work experience or social services. And usually, or often, when people get what they want, they move on.

But Jeremiah says, you're not here just to get something and move on. seek the welfare of the city where I've sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf.

[ 19 : 30 ] For in its welfare you will find your welfare. So as long as you're here in Connecticut, as long as you're here in New Haven, you're here by God's design. And you're not here just for yourself.

See, why did God bring the people of Israel all the way from Jerusalem to Babylon on such a long and painful journey? And why did he keep them there for 70 years?

Well, partly, they had rejected him and they had failed to honor him in their homeland and so part of it was a punishment. But it was, but Jeremiah says it's more than that.

Israel had always been called to be a blessing to the world, to be a light to the nations. But instead, they had become self-absorbed and self-enclosed. And they rarely fulfilled that calling.

And so the exile was an opportunity for them to stop being so self-centered and to become what they were always meant to be, a light to the whole world. And you can even see that happening in the story of Daniel or even later in Esther.

[ 20 : 40 ] Now maybe that's why God's brought you to New Haven, to strip away your comfortable idolatries, to bring you out of your comfort zone and to make you a light to the world.

Last week, Nick talked about John the Baptist as a light who pointed others to Jesus who is to come. You know, sometimes it's a painful process when God strips away your idols.

But it's a good purpose. Now, I realize New Haven can be a hard place to settle in. Right? It's blazing hot and humid and many buildings don't have air conditioning in July and August and then it's cold and wet and gray from November through about February.

So, people are usually used to one or the other and have to deal with both. And it can be isolating. New Englanders were not exactly known for being the most friendly and hospitable people on earth.

Right? In some circles, everyone seems too busy to care for anyone that they don't already know. And, of course, the cost of living is high, jobs are demanding and people aren't always trustworthy and there always seems to be somebody smarter and more accomplished than you.

[ 21 : 51 ] And so, it can be stressful. And so, for all those reasons, it's tempting to withdraw. It's tempting to go into survival mode because it feels like that's all you can do to manage.

And pray and hope for the day when you can move somewhere else. But if you do that, then you become just like those unfriendly, self-absorbed New Englanders who contributed to your own sense of isolation and stress.

And then it becomes a vicious cycle. But Jeremiah wrote to break that cycle. He said, in the midst of your exile, in the midst of your pain and alienation, God is concerned for you.

and he's made provision for your welfare, for your flourishing. He has plans to you to find peace and wholeness.

When Joseph was exiled from his family and sent down to Egypt, he was in Egypt for a long time, and he had a son in Egypt and he named his son Ephraim. And he says, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.

[ 23 : 00 ] Genesis 41, 52. So Ephraim means fruitful. But he says, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering. And that's my prayer for those of you who are having a rough time.

That God will make you fruitful here, even if it's the land of your suffering. But you know, part of the way that he will make you fruitful is for you to love and serve your neighbors.

God also has a plan for others in this city to flourish and find peace and wholeness in him. And he's called you to be his ambassador.

So don't withdraw from your cranky neighbors. Think about, perhaps, how you can reach out to them. Go through your apartment building and invite all the people on your floor to come over for cookies and hot drinks some night this winter.

Or get involved in a local ministry. You can mentor inner city high school kids through Young Life. You can come to the homeless shelter with me and some others and share the gospel with people who are homeless.

[ 24 : 07 ] You know, when I started going to the homeless shelter 11 years ago as a college student, I had no clue what I was doing. But somehow, God found a way to use me. And he taught me more than I could ever have expected in the process.

For some of you, God is not only calling you to invest for a couple of years, but he's calling you to stay. And some of you immediately bristle at that.

But he's calling you to stay longer than you expected. Now, don't worry. New Haven is not the same as Babylon. Jeremiah said it would be a sin to try and go back home. I'm not saying it's a sin to leave. Right?

Some of you, God is calling to go elsewhere. That's part of our mission as a church. We should own it. And bless you. But some of you, he's calling you to stay. Not so that you can get something else, pursue another degree or advance in your career, but maybe so that you can invest in the city.

So you can settle here and invest in your neighborhood and in this community and pray with us for it. Maybe even like Jeremiah says in verse 5 and 6, get married, have kids, and raise a family here.

[ 25 : 28 ] Now, let me say a few words to those of us who have been here for a long time. If you've been at Trinity for more than a few years, it can be tiring to see people come and go every year.

And you think, just about the time that I finally get to know somebody and we finally start to become friends, they're going to leave in six months. So why bother? It feels natural to sort of take a step back or maybe find a few close friends and just make sure to see them every Sunday and leave it at that and let the new people take care of the new people.

Now, I understand this feeling and it's a good thing to find a few close friends who will be here. It's a good thing or whoever you are to find a few close friends that you can pray with and laugh with and eat together with and encourage one another.

It's partly why we have small groups. I encourage you to consider one of those if you're not already involved in one of those. You know, if you try to serve people and love your neighbors and carry out God's mission in the world and you do it by yourself, you're not going to last for the long haul.

You're going to burn out. But if we're only focused on each other in our fellowship, in our community, then the depth of our fellowship is going to be limited. We'll become like a stagnant pond with no outflow.

[ 26 : 50 ] But if part of the reason that we come together is to love our neighbors and to serve people in our city, then our fellowship grows both in depth and in freshness like a flowing river.

You know, when Jesus sent out his disciples, he sent them out two by two so that fellowship and community would go hand in hand with ministry and service. It's not one or the other.

They're meant to go together. Now, maybe you've been in the church for a while. Maybe you used to be more involved in this church or in another church.

But at some point, you did get burned out. Or maybe people didn't treat you right. Or maybe you messed up. For whatever reason, you've stepped back. Now, sometimes, it is wise and necessary to temporarily step back from ministry responsibilities.

In fact, at this church, we require deacons and elders to take at least a year off after serving for two consecutive terms. It's a reminder that we're not the Savior and we're only his servants.

[ 27 : 56 ] Sometimes, through sickness or family troubles or other circumstances, God places limitations on our lives so that we can't serve in all the ways that we used to. But you know, sometimes, taking a break temporarily for a good reason just gradually stretches into taking a break permanently for no good reason and not really serving in any way at all.

Now, if you stay in this church for a long time or if you stay in any church for a long time and if you get deeply involved, you will sometimes be disappointed and you may be hurt by the failures of God's people because only Jesus is perfectly faithful.

People don't always keep their word. Only Jesus is perfectly forgiving. Sometimes people hold grudges. Jesus is all-knowing.

Sometimes people make assumptions. Sometimes those assumptions are wrong. But don't let your past hurts fester into bitterness that breeds cynicism and complacency.

If you've been hurt by people in the church, bring your hurt to Jesus because if you don't bring it to Him, you'll pass it on to somebody else. It's like a contagious sickness, bitterness is.

[ 29 : 19 ] It naturally spreads until it's healed. But there's healing in Jesus because Jesus knows what it's like to be hurt by the church. He's been hurt more than anyone else has.

And He loves the church more fiercely than any of us do. He calls us His bride. And He pursues us and loves us.

So if you've been hurt, He can sympathize with you. But He can cleanse you of your bitterness and He can strengthen you to serve. Maybe you've been in New Haven for a long time and you feel wearied by its chronic problems.

Every day, you see the same homeless people asking you for money, the same kids hanging out, maybe even during school hours, on the street. You hear the same couple through the wall of your apartment fighting again and you just want to leave and go somewhere quiet and peaceful.

But if that's you, maybe God's planted you in the midst of the chaos to be a peacemaker, to be a light for Jesus.

[ 30 : 30 ] Several years ago, a friend of mine decided to buy a house on Kensington Street. Now, for those of you who don't know, Kensington is right behind Stop and Shop on Whaley Avenue. It's not the worst neighborhood in town, but it's probably the worst street in that area.

But she moved into the house and she invited other Christians to live with her for the purpose of intentionally building relationships with the many children and even the drug dealers and the single parents who lived on the street.

And over the years, several Christians have lived in that house. Some of them have now started a children's ministry. Some people from Trinity live in another house just a couple blocks away and have started mentoring kids in that neighborhood. You can talk to Alex Liu if you're interested in that.



But that's how the gospel will spread in the city when Christians are willing to move into difficult places and shine the light of Christ and proclaim in a chaotic world that the Prince of Peace has come.

Now, by this time, you might be saying, well, that sounds admirable, but that's hard. And it is. It's not easy to live as exiles in the world.

[ 31 : 40 ] So I want to conclude by saying, where do we get the power to live like this? How can we sustain loving our neighbors and seeking the welfare of the city even as we may feel like exiles?

How can we do that without giving up hope? And that's where it's so important to understand verse 11 rightly. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

It's not a promise of a trouble-free life. And it's not a promise that no calamity will ever befall us. It was written to people who had experienced terrible calamity and continue to face daily hardships.

But it's a promise of God's presence. It's a promise of His good plans for us, both in the present and in the future. We've already seen in verse 7, God says, in its welfare, where you will find your welfare.

Even in the midst of our exile, God has plans for us that He is making us whole, that He is making us to flourish in ways that we might never have expected and even through painful ways.

[ 32 : 54 ] But He also promises a greater restoration to come. He promises He has plans for us in the present, in the midst of our exile, and He has an even greater plan for us in the future. He says, one day, I'll bring you back home.

Now, when you first read this passage, it seems like God's just saying, I'm going to bring you Israelite exiles back to Jerusalem 70 years later. And He does. In fact, Daniel actually read this very verse, it seems like, the Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would last 70 years.

And Daniel lived a long time, and so he got to that point. And so he started praying when he realized that it was only a year or two away. And he was praying that God will fulfill His promise, and God did, and He brought the people home.

But you know, it's more than that, because verse 12 and 13 says, it's not just going back to Jerusalem, it's their relationship with God is restored. That was the reason they had gone into exile in the first place, because they'd wrecked their relationship with God.

But in verse 12 and 13, God says, now you'll seek Me, and you'll find Me, you'll call, and I'll answer. And the next four chapters, up until this point, Jeremiah is mostly about God's coming judgment.

[ 34 : 04 ] But this chapter is a turning point. If you read chapter 30 through 33, it's full of restoration promises. And Jeremiah 31 says, one day God's going to make a new covenant.

They had broken the old one, but one day God would come and make a new covenant with the people, and He'd put His law inside them and write it on their hearts. And they'd all know Him from the least to the greatest. And He'd forgive their sins and remember their wickedness no more.

And of course, that's what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. And that's what the Lord's Supper, which we're about to celebrate, is a sign of.

The new covenant that God has made with us through the work of Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, that Jesus came. He came into the midst of our exile. He lived in this world, in this broken and sinful and fallen world.

And He died on the cross so that we might be forgiven and restored to relationship with God. So the Lord's Supper points back to what Jeremiah was looking forward to, but what Jesus has already done.

[ 35 : 12 ] But the Lord's Supper also points forward because Paul says, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. It points forward to what Jesus still promises to do in the future, to the ultimate restoration.

As Matt read in the beginning, when He'll come back and make all things new. And we'll eat and drink with Him at His banquet table and we'll dwell with Him forever in our true home.

And that's our hope, that there's an eternal weight of glory to come that outweighs all our present trials and all the sacrifices that God calls us to make and all the sufferings that we have to endure and that it surpasses the greatest joys and the most profound delights that this world has to offer.

That future restoration. So the Lord's Supper points back to what Jesus has done. It points forward to what Jesus will do, but it also is a sign that Jesus is right here with us today, now.

He's present by His Spirit, even in the bread, representing His broken body, and the cup, reminding us of His blood that He shed on the cross.

[ 36 : 24 ] So as we come to the Lord's table, as we feed on Christ by faith, He strengthens us and He gives us joy and He gives us peace and He equips us to be exiles in the world for His sake.

So let's pray as we come to the Lord's Supper. Father, we thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, that He is our great High Priest, that He was made in every way just like us, that He is our brother, that He's lived the life that we were called to live and yet failed to live up to, and yet He died the death that we deserve so that we might be forgiven.

Lord, we pray that as we come to Your table that we would be strengthened to live for You in this world, that we would be strengthened by Your grace and by Your promises and by Your presence, knowing that You have plans for us, that we might flourish, that we might be agents of Your grace and peace.

We pray that this would characterize us as a church in this coming year, that we would live as exiles in the world for Jesus' sake.

We thank You for the hope of the home that You are preparing for us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.