

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, January 3, 2021

A BETTER DAY TOMORROW

Jeremiah 31:7-14

I hope your New Year is off to a good start. You may have heard about the man setting goals for the new year. One of his goals was to clean up his desk. Another of his goals was to find last year's goals. Some of us can relate to that.

I can safely say most of us don't want to feel worthless—as we begin a new year. We want a word of hope. We want to believe things can get better.

We're like the people of Israel during the time of Jeremiah. They were a nation divided. They were in distress. The Northern Kingdom had fallen. Many of the best and brightest had been taken into captivity. Things were not going well for them at all. It was during such a time that Jeremiah wrote the words of today's lesson from the Old Testament. And how does he begin? "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations..." It doesn't sound like he's describing a nation in difficulty, does it? "Sing aloud with gladness?" "Raise shouts for the chief of nations?"

There are a couple of misconceptions that people have about prophets. One is that they were glorified fortune-tellers who predicted the future. This is an oversimplification. It is true that prophets could look at events of their time and make bold proclamations about the future. But they were not reading tea leaves. Or the lines in people's palms. Their predictions were based in the character of God.

As Oswald Chambers said, "God does not tell you what He is going to do---He reveals to you who He is."

The prophets knew who God is. God is a righteous God who expects justice from His people. If people live according to God's perfect plan, then they will be blessed. If not, there is a price to be paid. And that is true today, just as it was then. If we as a people conduct ourselves according to the principles of Christ, we will see God's blessing. If not, we will pay a price. The same thing is true of individuals. If we live according to the principles of Christ, we will see God's blessing. If not, we will pay a price. That which we sow, shall we also reap. The prophets predicted the course of history based on their knowledge of who God is.

The other misconception about prophets is they were specialists in doom and gloom. There is much in the prophets, including Jeremiah, that is exceedingly pessimistic. After all, they were writing at a time when Israel was chasing after other gods. But when people needed comforting, the prophets spoke eloquently of God's love and compassion. It was Jeremiah who wrote that verse that is a favorite of many people today, "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)

Our passage today was written when the people of Israel needed a word of hope. And so Jeremiah writes of a time when people of the covenant "shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, wine and oil, and over the young of the flock and herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall young women rejoice in the dance, and young men and old shall be merry. (God) will turn their mourning into joy, (God) will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow."

A Better Day Is Coming. That is the word Jeremiah has for us as we begin this new year. A better day is coming.

That's Jeremiah's word to us. "You're going to make it!" How do we know? To quote Oswald Chambers again, "God does not tell you what He is going to do—He reveals to you who He is." We can trust God for our future because we know who God is. God is our loving father. God is our closest friend. God loves us more than we love ourselves. If we are among those who, like the people of Israel, are in captivity—to disease, heartache, addictions, or whatever our captivity may be—let us hear the word of the Lord. We will be delivered.

In the meantime, could I make a suggestion? **Make some positive plans for the future.** This suggestion comes from the famous psychiatrist and writer Dr. William Glasser.

Glasser served as psychiatrist at the Orthopedic Hospital in Los Angeles. Many of his patients had serious physical conditions, or suffered from serious pain. Dr. Glasser's therapy focuses on making positive choices. He doesn't want patients looking back at the past, or complaining about the present. He learned very quickly that patients showed no improvement when he started their therapy

sessions with the question, “How do you feel?” This caused his patients to focus on their pain, weakness, or depression. Instead, Dr. Glasser changed his opening question to, “What are you planning to do today?” By asking this question, Dr. Glasser was introducing the idea that the patient had control over some area of his life. He would choose to walk up and down the halls, to read a magazine, to call a friend. Instead of focusing on their condition, patients began focusing on their choices. This simple change in focus proved empowering, and led many patients to report decreased levels of pain.

I suspect there is something very healthy about this approach. I’m not going to ask you how you feel today. Rather I want to know, what are your plans? If you sit around and focus on your problems, you will sink further into despair. But if you spend time with encouraging friends, or with a good book, or beginning an exercise program, or host of other positive life steps, you will find it empowering.

What are your plans? I know what God’s plans are. “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.” What are your plans in this new year? Lift your eyes to the divine stage. See the victory that is coming.

AMEN!