

A Heart of Hope

Finding hope when we feel everyone is against us is challenging. Today, we are going to talk about how to find hope when things feel hopeless.

Introduction

Living in a lost and dying world can be difficult to navigate. Sometimes it feels as though we are swimming upstream against a current that is trying to keep us from moving forward. This current can be the crowd telling us to go against what we know is right, or the current can be a subtle suggestion trying to slowly turn us away from God's plans for our lives. Other times, the current is hard, obnoxious, and rolling us over and over in the torrent.

Finding hope when it seems that there is none, can be difficult especially when we feel that we are swimming against the current of life. God understands that these times can be discouraging and wants us to have a heart of hope.

The Right Focus

The prophet Jeremiah was sent to the people of Judah who were taken captive by the Babylonians. The elders and leaders of Judah were discouraged and oppressed. Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles to bring hope in the midst of their circumstances. Let's read what Jeremiah tells them, then we will break it down.

Jeremiah 29:4-14

(4) This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: (5) "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. (6) 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. (7) Also, 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." (8) 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. (9) They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD. (10) This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. (11) 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. (12) Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. (13) You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (14) 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."

Jeremiah says that God is instructing the people in captivity to go about their business building houses and settling down. He tells them to plant their gardens, have weddings, and have babies. In other words,



make this place of exile your home for now. You are going to be here awhile but in 70 years, he will fulfill his promise and bring them back to Jerusalem.

God then talks about their focus. Although they are in captivity, although they are to find jobs, get married, and make lives for themselves, he gives them specific instructions in verse 7. Let's look at this again;

Jeremiah 29:7

(7) Also, 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."

God is calling them to pray. He is calling them to focus, not on their situation, but on their captors, the foreign land, and the people for which they are living. God is calling them to be a blessing while in the bondages of captivity. God is asking them to take their focus off themselves and pray for his blessing upon others.

Specifically, God says to seek peace and prosperity. How difficult that must have been to not fight against the system. How frustrating must that be for God to say choose peace instead of taking up arms.

The melding of societies and customs would be difficult to navigate by themselves, but on top of this tremendous change, the exiles are to seek peace, this must have gone against everything within them. They were treated unfairly, some family members had died, they had been plundered, and now God was asking them to live in peace with their enemies.

God also tells them to pray for prosperity. Sure, that is easy. Everyone wants to be blessed and prosper, but God was specific, to pray for the prosperity of the city. Not only is God asking the exiles to pray for peace for their enemies, but also that they prosper.

God wanted to bless the exiles in captivity. He needed them to take their focus off themselves and put it on others. He would bless them through their enemies.

As Christians, when we set our focus on others and pray for those who are our enemies, God can use us to be a blessing to others.

Guard Your Heart and Mind

The Lord continues to give the exiles direction by cautioning them. Let's look back at verses 8 and 9:

Jeremiah 29:8-9

(8) 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. (9) They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD.

While swimming upstream against the flow, people will try to convince you to do or say something that goes against what is right. God understands this and warns us about having the discernment to know what is from him and what is not.

There are people who will try to reason with you to convince you to behave in a certain way that violates the will of God. They may even wrap it up with words that sound good and maybe even have



good intentions for you, but when you are navigating difficult times, Satan will try to squeeze in and turn you away from Jesus.

We must cling to the promises of God. We must allow only godly counsel in our lives. We should not allow people who are negative to influence us. We should surround ourselves with people who love us and who would encourage us to follow Jesus.

Seeking the Lord with Your Whole Heart

God has kept every promise he has ever made. He promised the exiles that they would return in 70 years. He also promised them that his plans for them would prosper them, to give them hope, and a future.

Let's read the promise God tells them when they follow his instructions in verses 12-14:

Jeremiah 29:12-14

(12) Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. (13) You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (14) 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."

We can have hope that when we call on the name of the Lord, he will listen to us. He is there for us. He promises that when we seek him with our whole hearts then he will be found.

Seeking God with our whole heart means holding nothing back. It means to surrender our fears, our dreams, and our sins to him. It means to love him with everything in us. It means to focus on him as the reason to live. It means to seek him first above all things.

When we seek him with all our hearts, he frees us. The current we are swimming against, he helps us navigate to streams of living water. He brings us to calm waters and restores our souls. He gives rest to the weary, joy to the grieving, and hope to the hopeless.

Conclusion

Having a heart of hope requires the right focus. It is easy to focus on our circumstances when things are not going as expected or we find ourselves in difficult situations. Choosing to pray for others, even those who are hurting us brings hope to the soul.

Guarding our hearts and minds means filtering the world. Only allowing truth to resonate in our hearts rather than negative influences or the sounds of others, will bring God's perfect plan into our lives.

When we seek the Lord with our whole hearts we find him, and in him is our hope. He will help us navigate life in this fallen world.

