

Firmly Grasping Some of God's Most Powerful Promises

The other day I saw a sign that quoted the famous verse: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). It reminded me how so many people pull this out of context and miss the true power of this verse to their lives.

Probably rule No. 1 of studying the Bible is to understand a verse in its context. This verse is in the midst of an interesting story. It is in a letter that the prophet Jeremiah sends to the early group of people who went into captivity. False prophets had apparently been telling them that this captivity would not be a long time.

Jeremiah actually writes the letter to tell them the opposite. They are going to be there for a long time, 70 years, to be exact. He encourages them to settle in for the long haul and build houses and plant gardens. At the end of 70 years, they will return from captivity. Then he writes the verse that we know so well, "plans ... to give you a future and a hope."

This is not a "your problems will quickly go away" verse as it is often used. That sounds more like the promise that the false prophets were giving. So what is the encouragement of this verse anyways? Why is this verse actually good news?

First, let me say that sometimes God turns things around quickly. He can bring a healing in an instant. The salvation of a friend or loved one can happen as quickly as the turning of a heart. God can do in a moment what would take us a lifetime.

That being said, sometimes things take time. Abraham had to learn to wait for a promise that took years. Joseph's promise seemed to be going in the opposite direction before being

fulfilled. It is in moments when nothing seems to be happening that God's promises become the most powerful.

In Chris Guillebeau's book, *The Happiness of Pursuit*, he talks about the idea that sometimes we would rather have something to die for than have to live for every day. The everyday pursuit of important things can be boring and tedious. To use an analogy that Jesus used it is the taking up of our cross daily. Some days it may feel like we are just carrying our cross to some ultimate destination that we are not sure we will ever get.

It is in those moments when the promise of Jeremiah 29:11 becomes most helpful. We take the advice of Jeremiah to settle down and do the work. If they did the daily faithful work and invested in their kids and grandkids, the next generation would get to experience an amazing deliverance.

Abraham would become a great nation. Joseph would rise to power in Egypt. And the Israelites would return to Jerusalem. And you or your children may experience amazing things if you hold on to the promise of God's future and hope for you. {eo}

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