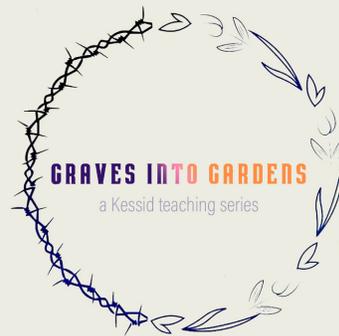


"GRAVES INTO GARDENS"

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Our "Graves Into Gardens" series about, "Not just surviving difficult times, but thriving."

(Vs) Jeremiah 29:11 - "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."

We love this verse...

- But where was this promise planted?
- What posture were the people in to receive such a word from God?

Illustration: An Old Testament professor stood before his class after reading that verse from Jeremiah and said, "I am going to destroy what this verse means to you, but then I'm going to reframe it so you understand it better within its original context, and then you will love it, even more, when we're done."

We often approach Jeremiah 29:11 as a security blanket:

- We think... "God has a plan for me that is good, so clearly this suffering I'm going through will end soon, and then my flourishing will begin!"
- But... That is not at all what God was promising to the Israelites, and it's not what He's promising us, either...
- Author and blogger Mary DeMuth address our misunderstanding of this. As she explains, the heart of the verse is this...

"Not that we would escape our lot, but that we would learn to thrive in the midst of it." - Mary DeMuth

The story happening around Jeremiah 29:11...

- The Israelites were in exile, a punishment from God as a result of their disobedience...
- The prophet Jeremiah confronts the false prophet, Hananiah, who had boldly proclaimed that God was going to free Israel from Babylon in two years (spoiler alert: God doesn't do this).
- Jeremiah calls out Hananiah's lie and then states the promise we read in 29:11.
- Jeremiah wants them to know that God does indeed have a good plan for the Israelites, and it is a plan that will give them hope and a prospering future...

- The thing is, before he shares this promise, he gives them this directive from God:
(Vs) Jeremiah 29:7 – “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.”
- This is not *at all* what the Israelites wanted to hear!
- They wanted to be told that they were going to go home. They wanted to be told that their suffering was going to end.
- Instead, God’s plan was for them to stay right where they were and to help prosper the nation that enslaved them!

And then came the biggest blow of all. For God says He will do this...

(Vs) Jer. 29:10 – “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.”

- This meant that none in the current generation of Israelites would ever return to their home. What a crushing thing to be told!
- Mary writes, “Yes, of course, God knows the plans He has for us. And ultimately, He will give us a glorious future. But as we walk out our lives on this crazy earth, let’s remember that the best growth comes through persevering through trials, not escaping them entirely. And when we learn perseverance, we find surprising joy.”

Whatever the hard thing is that you are currently going through...

- In the midst of your suffering, cling to Jeremiah 29:11, but cling to it for the right reason: Not in the false hope that God will take away your suffering, but in the true, gospel confidence that He will give you hope in the midst of it.

One last thing...

- Jeremiah’s entire prophecy starts off in verse 4 of the same chapter...

(Vs) Jeremiah 29:4 – “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.”

“The Old Testament prophets instructed the Israelites to plant gardens during times of exile as an act of resistance. I keep thinking about that in these challenging times. When so many around me at the airport or the grocery store or on social media carry this unsettled, low angry hum. What does it look like for us to experience joy in the midst of disorientation? How do we love those with differing opinions? (In our families and our churches!?) Where do we display peace in the midst of so much unknown? How can I extend patience when I’m frustrated? Where can we offer kindness even if it’s undeserved? What goodness am I intentionally experiencing and delighting in? What does faithfulness look like in the midst of challenge? As the Lord is being gentle with me, am I able to exercise gentleness and self-control? These fruits of the Spirit are not possible on our own, but time in the Lord’s presence can water the seeds we’re trying to plant. Here’s to seeing and not missing a moment to celebrate God’s goodness and beauty, to delight as an act of defiance in turbulent times.” – Keri Ladouceur