

# “Expecting Great Things”

Jeremiah 33:10-16

January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

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There are scholars who have dedicated their lives to studying these ancient scriptures. They’ve devoted years of their lives to mastering the ancient Hebrew and other languages as well as the history, religions, political and socio-economic factors during the time of the writings. They teach in the graduate schools and they write commentaries and articles. We eventually benefit from their work if we open ourselves to it. So what have they said about today’s text?

They believe that this passage was inserted into the collection of Jeremiah’s writings sometime after the fall and collapse of Jerusalem nearly 600 years before Christ. These words of hope were probably passed around as an independent pamphlet to the post-war survivors.

You see, back when Jerusalem was besieged by the powerful Babylonian armies, things looked about as bad as they could for the city. Jeremiah was predicting, to no one’s surprise, that they would be defeated. But the reason they were going to lose, he pointed out, was because their country had not followed God’s leading. King Zedekiah thought that kind of talk didn’t help anyone so he threw him in jail.

The message of this tract, that was later added to the other writings of Jeremiah, had two points. First, it is a reminder that God keeps promises, no matter how their national leaders have failed them. Secondly, only through their relationship with God will they ever gain true security, justice and righteousness. The key phrase in this writing was taken from what Jeremiah had said back when the city was under siege.



In 33:15, it talks about a so-called “righteous branch” Who would spring forth from the lineage of David. This leader would bring about justice and righteousness in the land. When that day came, the people would be saved and Jerusalem would dwell in security. Despite the failures of their leaders that had led to their demise, better

times were coming. Someday, even the Davidic monarchy would be reestablished.

What was being anticipated in the “Righteous Branch” was not a conquering military hero but a national leader who revered God. It was talking about a spiritual leader. But in the minds of the readers then, there was a touch of irony.

If you follow through Jeremiah’s writings, you would meet a number of fairly poor kings, as far as their leadership qualities were observed. Some of them were worse than others, many of whom had simply done evil things. There is even some humor in Jeremiah’s writing.

The name of the king, “Zedekiah,” was derived from the Hebrew root for “justice” and “righteousness.” So when the king’s name was mentioned in the talk about future justice, it was one more reminder that there had not been justice and goodness in their land.



These images of the siege, before the fall of Jerusalem, greatly contrast with the positive words that follow in this tract. The older people, after the fall of Jerusalem, remembered how they had to tear down their homes to fill in the damaged defense barriers. They remembered how diseases ran rampant through the city because of the death and lack of sanitary conditions. They remembered the famine and the total despair. The words in our text recalled the desolation.

Those of you who lived back in the depression,<sup>1</sup> or who were in any of the previous wars, will never forget those years and experiences. Certainly these are the images that stayed with them after the fall of the Jerusalem when this pamphlet was circulated and then added to Jeremiah’s work.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> earlier in the last century

<sup>2</sup> Also keep in mind that as was the case later in the first century, they had different publishing standards than we do today. They would regularly include writings of students of famous prophets and writers out of respect, even though the

The message in this tract was about hope. Despite the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., these remaining peoples should not be expecting the coming of a messiah who would be a military commander. No, this student of Jeremiah, who later quoted from him in this tract after the war, was expecting God to bring about a new era of lasting peace, brought about by a spiritual renewal.

This pamphlet also affirmed that God's love endures forever. Their future was portrayed with two images: ① that of celebrative weddings and ② pastoral images of shepherds and flocks.

For those people who were in despair, what finer and more peaceful images could they have than that of villages involved in the every day celebration of weddings, and the tranquility of sheep passing under the hands of the shepherd who counts each one as it enters the fold. They needed to hear some good news.



As we hear these passages today, we have a strong sense that these verses of hope were somehow foreshadowing the coming of Christ. Today we believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of predictions of One Who reestablished God's eternal kingdom but not politically (for Israel) but in God's continuing reign in the hearts of all who seek God.

Today we read these passages differently than their first readers. It could well be that as Jeremiah was sitting in solitary confinement, he would have been content with a righteous, worldly king, who was related to David. That would have been fine for Jeremiah because it would have fulfilled the prophecies.<sup>3</sup>

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person, to whom the work was attributed, didn't actually write that segment of scripture. They didn't have any problem with that tradition of respect so we shouldn't as well.

<sup>3</sup> In general, Jewish tradition had been looking for any one of three things. They sometimes hoped for a messianic worldly king who would bring about justice. Other times, the ancient Jews hoped for the start of a new era in society characterized by righteousness, but not necessarily brought about by one person. And much later in history, the hope



Everyone has some expectations and whether you're talking about you and the other members of your household or the society in which we find ourselves. What are your expectations for what is to come?

Because of the violence, terrorism and the almost daily news of wars overseas, our society is wired for problems. Bad things are expected by a majority of people in our culture. But what these tragic events have done, however, is force most of us to do some internal work we've neglected. Like it or not, most of us have turned our attention to focus on what gives our lives meaning.

We're sort of rummaging through the closets of our minds and experiences, trying to put our hands on what it is that gives us hope. In hearing the ticks and the tocks of the invisible clock of our own lifespan coming from somewhere out of sight, we're trying to grab meaning for why we are here.

By now, it has become more than obvious that our life is not about massing enough money to keep duplicating our present lifestyle until these bodies, someday, just quit. In the back of our minds, the tune and words of the old song 'Summer Time and the living is easy' play on, ... 'Your daddy's rich and your mom is good lookin', so hush little baby, don't you cry.'

But we do cry, sometimes, and what we had hoped for in our childhood or twenties hasn't come about. People we know and love wake up in the middle of their lives having made it, but the 'it' that they have made is empty. And lots of people around us try once again to find roots or meaning in their mid-life crisis. They try numerous ventures to find uniqueness and self-worth and they end up doing all kinds of things to stay ahead of the boredom and despair, like wearing cowboy boots and driving sports cars.

Some of us find that we're like an airport and there is a lot of stuff we haven't been able to forgive in others or ourselves. And all these things

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was for a specific person, a semi-divine or divine figure that was the Messiah who would make things finally right.

that are not forgiven are a lot like airplanes circling around in our mind. The unforgiven inadequacies of our parents, the injustices that have come our way – we’ve allowed these things to dominate our minds and deplete our energy. We’ve allowed them to rent far too much space in our psyches than they are worth. So instead of using our psychic and spiritual energy for making the best decisions that effect our here and now, we’ve wasted what energy we do have with watching and being caught up in the circling planes of what-ifs, what-should-have-beens and what-will-never-be.

So we have to land those planes. We’ve got to forgive and forget and get on with living life as it now is and can be. We’ve got to turn to use our precious resources to focus on what we’re choosing to do now with our present and near future life. And we’ve got to live with expectancy. Are you expecting great things for your life? What you expect, you will get.<sup>4</sup>

The scriptures of our faith tradition remind us that deliverance and meaning in our life is never going to come from economic prosperity. Our salvation, our meaning in life, comes in living a life of striving to do what God suggests for us. And this certainly means living with openness and attentiveness to learning. A mindfulness that our choices now are what matters to God and that’s all we have.



If Jeremiah were here today, and somehow he is as his words continue on, he would say to our society, that if we want to find happiness and salvation from the nagging despair in this culture, seek first the kingdom of God (as Jesus often said). Look for ways of making daily choices that bring about peace, justice and good.

As Christians we anticipate that God’s power is strong enough to bring about changes in the impersonal nature of the work place, in the larger society and even in our homes. Expect great

things to come about in the changes you are making now in your life. Expect great things to come about in your experiences in this church community. Live with expectancy because with God right beside you, you have hope for the moment and hope for your future. ☛



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<sup>4</sup> So suggests Dr. Fred Luskin in his wonderful book *Forgive for Good* ISBN: 0-06-251720-1. I think it could help you change your life.