



Theme: God's Dreams

"Dreams to Bring Us Hope"

Jeff Huber, September 19-20, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. – Jeremiah 29:11

SLIDE Dreams to Bring Us Hope

Today we begin a new series of sermons on dreams and in particular God's dreams and what those might mean for our lives and how they might make a real difference. What I have discovered is that many people struggle to dream these days because of the world in which we live which seems overwhelming. We look at wars happening which impact people's lives all across the globe these days – in places like Iran and Ukraine. We just remembered September 11th and there is still fear of another pandemic there may come someday. There is economic uncertainty and daily articles about the dangers of things like artificial intelligence. We see record levels of depression and anxiety in every generation, and our news feeds are filled with constant stories to make us worried and afraid.

I want to suggest to you that dreams today are more important

than ever and it's especially important to remember one of the main purposes of dreams is to bring us hope. Here's a definition of a dream that I find helpful and that we're going to use throughout this series. We will discover this idea in the scriptures over the next few weeks together.

SLIDE A dream is the distinct vision and hope that stirs the imagination and calls us forward into the future.

I can remember as a teenager having many dreams. I had a dream car, a dream girl, even a dream home. None of them became a reality for me in high school, but those dreams carried me through and gave me hope. My dream car was a Datsun 240Z, but my real first car was this Datsun 510 baby blue station wagon. Mine had a white vinyl top. I was able to put large speakers in the back which took up the entire cargo area. My dream girl was Kristi McNicoll from several TV show. I was devastated when I found out she was gay and I had no chance with her!

GRAPHIC Datsun 24Z Coupe

GRAPHIC Datsun 510 Station Wagon

GRAPHIC Kristy McNichol

GRAPHIC House Plans

My dream home was one I designed and even built a model in 10th grade in my architectural design class. It was a three-level home with a spiral staircase, an entire room just for the hot tub, and a workshop bigger than the garage! It even had a home entertainment/theatre room. I was ahead of my time in 1980! Maybe one of my worst experiences in high school was my stepfather stepping on the model and smashing it to pieces in one of his drunken rages. You see my dream at that time in life was to be an architect and even thought that dream did not come true, I know that God gave me that dream as a gift to see beyond the temporary pain and suffering I

experienced during some rough years in high school. I want to suggest to you today that God gives us visions and dreams for a reason and that is to carry us forward, especially through difficult times. Without them, we stumble, and we fall, and we fall apart. I love the King James version of Proverbs 29:19.

BIBLE

^{18a} **Where there is no vision, the people perish...**

GRAPHIC William Lloyd Garrison

William Lloyd Garrison was an American abolitionist, journalist, and social reformer. His widely read anti-slavery newspaper “**The Liberator**” was a driving force that fueled the abolitionist era, which Garrison founded in **1831 and published in Boston** until slavery in the United States was abolished by the **Thirteenth Amendment in 1865**. He supported the rights of women, and during the 1870s became a **prominent voice for the women's suffrage movement**. Imagine standing up against the experts; standing up against the government and declaring that the focal point of the American economy was evil and wrong. Lloyd Garrison had a dream so big that it would change the face of America and world history. His dream was that every man, woman and child should have the dignity of being...what? FREE! He had the audacity to claim that America should live up to its Constitution.

Lloyd Garrison carried out his dream by assembling a “dream team” to abolish slavery. He later would write in his autobiography that the most important element in achieving his dream was that it entailed him literally giving his entire life—his blood, sweat and tears. Lloyd’s dream was not one that would just happen—but rather it took lots of commitment which enabled the dream to be embraced by many in our nation.

Garrison lived through what are the most profound times of upheaval in our nation's history. I realize that we have many struggles today as a nation and many things we should be working on and it also

has been much worse. He witnessed families fighting against each other in the civil war and killing each other. His good friend President Abraham Lincoln was killed for standing up for the same cause and his life was threatened on many occasions. He spent his entire fortune on his newspaper to inform people of the evils of slavery and print many articles about how the scriptures are opposed to slavery and that those who use the Bible to affirm slavery are committing heresy and using it for their own biases and economic gain.

When we find ourselves living through dark times, whether it's personally or culturally, I find the scriptures very powerful because the Bible is not a pie in the sky book. It was written by people who failed and who experienced extreme hardship and it gives us clues as to how they found vision and dreams which led to hope for the future when everything seemed dark. Today I want to turn to the book in your Bible which has the most words of any other book, the prophet Jeremiah. If you're not familiar with this prophetic book, it is found in the first two-thirds of your Bible which we call the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. We read in Jeremiah 29 some powerful words about dreams, visions and hope where are written to people living in a very dark place. Verse 1 sets the stage.

BIBLE

¹ Jeremiah wrote a letter from Jerusalem to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people who had been exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar.

What we know about the prophet Jeremiah is that he lives between the times of two great empires that controlled the entire region of the ancient near east for hundreds of years. I have taught you some of this history before but it's critical to understand if you're going to read any of the Old Testament books because it sets the stage for understanding what they mean for the people called the Israelites and what they mean to us today.

GRAPHIC Assyrian Exile (put “722 BCE” at bottom of map)

722 BCE is an important date to remember because that is the date that the northern part of Israel was captured by the Assyrian empire which occupied this entire region of what we call the fertile Crescent where now we have Iran and Iraq and much of the Middle East. They came in and wiped out this entire region and the Israelites in this area disappeared forever to become slaves in Assyria as they are forced to walk hundreds of miles to Ninevah. They did not hold on to their culture or their religion and instead became connected to the other religions of this region. When some of these people returned, they brought back some foreign worship practices, and they are the people that we will find in the New Testament as Samaritans. This is a very simple overview of history and obviously there are many more complexities, but you can read all about them in the book of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

GRAPHIC Babylonian Exile (put “587 BCE” at bottom of map)

Jeremiah writes his book as the Assyrian empire is being overrun by the Babylonians who then descend on Israel and destroy the southern Kingdom which is where we find Jerusalem. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is ruthless and kills thousands as he takes them to be his slaves. After the final battle where Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem, he takes the King Zedekiah and makes him watch as his sons are brutally murdered in front of him, ending the reign of the kings of Israel. He then gouges out the King's eyes so the last thing he has seen is the end of the Jewish monarchy. Zedekiah then is forced to lead his people on a March across the Fertile Crescent to Babylon where the Jewish people will live for 50 years. The Babylonians then bring foreign people from their region to live in Israel. Jeremiah is writing to the people so they might hold on to their faith while they live in exile.

For the next 50 years, Israel will cease to exist which, is why 587 BCE, about 600 years before Jesus, is one of the most important dates

in Old Testament history. Everything in the Hebrew Bible, what we call our Old Testament, leads up to this date or is written in response to what happened in 587. For **40 years Jeremiah** has been prophesying about what is going to happen on **July 18, 587 BCE** and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.

SLIDE July 18, 587 BCE

It's important to know because it helps us understand how important Jeremiah's message of hope is to the people who end up going into exile for the 50 years following this destruction of Jerusalem. The people were hopeless and they didn't know if they would ever get to return to their homeland.

When you watched the media coverage on September 11, 2001, you felt what many of those Jewish exiles might have felt as they watched their culture and their city and their way of life crumble to the ground. Except, we must imagine that it wasn't just the twin towers or the Pentagon, but it was the entirety of New York City and Washington DC destroyed. Imagine that, and you begin to get a feel for what it felt like on that day. As the people marched away, they followed their blinded and powerless king, ending up in Babylon as slaves.

Can you imagine the intense anguish and grief of the people? Some fled to Egypt to escape the wrath. Some lingered in the land of Judah and Jeremiah was one of them. He was in prison because the King Zedekiah had arrested him, but the Babylonians set him free and allowed him to roam the streets. He marched among the ruins in the ashes in Jerusalem. The Jews who remained wrote things like the book of Lamentations. Tradition says that Jeremiah wrote it, but scholars debate that. However, somebody walked through the streets of Jerusalem after it was destroyed. This passage will give you a sense of what they were feeling. This is from the 1 Lamentations.

BIBLE

¹ Jerusalem, once so full of people,

**is now deserted.
She who was once great among the nations
now sits alone like a widow.
Once the queen of all the earth,
she is now a slave.**

BIBLE

**¹⁶ “For all these things I weep;
tears flow down my cheeks.
No one is here to comfort me;
any who might encourage me are far away.
My children have no future,
for the enemy has conquered us.”**

Most of the books of the Old Testament were written down or put in their final form during the exile. 1 and 2 Kings were written during the exile as they were recounting history of their Kings who had fallen, trying to understand why this happened to them. The book of Ezekiel was also written during the exile. Ezekiel was a priest who also was a prophet of God. He preached in Babylon to the exiles. Some scholars believe that Isaiah chapters 40 through 55 and maybe even the chapter 66 were written during this period of time.

Daniel was a prophet who was fed to the lions and he survived. He also talked about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were put into the fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and survived. These stories take place during the exile in Babylon. Many of the other books of the Hebrew Bible were shaped during this exile, including the Psalms, like Psalm 137.

BIBLE

**¹ Beside the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept
as we thought of Jerusalem.
² We put away our harps,
hanging them on the branches of poplar trees.**

**³ For our captors demanded a song from us.
Our tormentors insisted on a joyful hymn:
“Sing us one of those songs of Jerusalem!”
⁴ But how can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a pagan land?**

Can you feel the weight and pain in the words as they experienced exile? It is hard to even sing or lift a voice of praise when you feel discouraged and despondent. There is a question I know that most of you are thinking right now. “Jeff, that is all interesting—ancient history and Babylon and Zedekiah—but why should we really care? Why does this matter to us?”

The reason why the stories of exile and defeat are in the Bible is because the exile is repeated in every generation. This is a timeless story of people who wander away from God and then find themselves in exile, in a land that seems foreign and desolate. Sometimes we are like Jeremiah, and even though we are following God, we still end up in exile. OTHER people do wrong things, and WE experience the consequences of their actions. Whatever the reasoning, this is part of what it means to be human.

GRAPHIC Orientation Disorientation Reorientation art by Steve Thomason

We have talked about this often and I describe it to you like this. There is this time of orientation where we are settled, and life is good and we have open we give God thanks and praise. We often take these times for granted until something happens which takes us into a time of disorientation. This often happens because of pride, greed, anger, fear, hatred, violence, and disappointment when life happens and we cry out to God and wonder, “God, where are you?!” We turn back to God, and we get reoriented so we can praise the Lord because God helped us when we were weak and we trust in God again, but it is a different kind of trust that is deeper. I would argue that every one of us can see this

rhythm happening for individuals and for nations, which is why the book of Jeremiah is so important even today.

There are times in every one of our lives, and even for us as a nation, where we wonder if there is any hope at all. There was no hope for the Jews in Babylon. They are stuck in the Babylonian Empire with millions of people spread across the entire ancient near East. In the middle of that is this small remnant of Judah, these pockets of Jewish communities who have faith and who are trying to remember their God in light of the fact that their Temple has been destroyed.

What are the odds that they will ever get returned to Jerusalem? The human odds were none and zero and nil. They couldn't raise an army, and they would never defeat the Babylonians. There was no hope. They had lost their leaders. They had lost their loved ones. They lost their property. They had lost their pride. They lost everything while they were living in exile.

What I know is that every one of us will experience exile at some point in our lives. Throughout my years as a pastor, have visited with many service members who have served in places like Afghanistan and Iraq and the Middle East. We have seen thousands of US soldiers, and many more from other nations, killed in combat areas in this very region over the past 30 years. More than that number have taken their lives upon returning from active duty and more than 300,000 are dealing with brain injuries because of combat. I can tell you from personal experience of dealing with some of these families that they are living in exile. There is often a feeling of hopelessness or despair. There are civilian families in Iraq and Iran and Afghanistan who are literally living in the land of Babylon and who have lost loved ones and are experiencing exile.

GRAPHIC Flooding in New Mexico

Last week we sent out a prayer request after a tragedy with the school that we sponsor as part of Native Hope, our ministry with those

living in remote areas of the Navajo Nation. A small girl was picked up by her grandmother at the bus stop and as they were walking home, they were caught up in a flash flood and swept away. The bus driver got out to help them and was also swept away and all three lost their lives in an area that was desolate from drought and now overwhelmed by water. These experiences are disorienting to any family and any community, and it feels overwhelming. I know I read the story, and my heart just sank as I thought about the grief of this family and the community that we have many connections with and we continue to serve.

Some of you have been dealing with struggles finding employment for the last several years and many of you have been affected adversely by the economic challenges we are experiencing today. It feels like exile when you can't find a job and you wonder if you will ever find one that fits who you are. We begin to live in exile, and we feel like there is no help and no hope, nothing that can rescue us from this pit of despair.

Sometimes exile feels personal. Our spouse leaves and we are trying to figure out how to put our life back together again. In those moments, it feels like the whole world has come undone. Exile is a small apartment after being used to living in a nice home. We wonder, "How did it come to this? I'm back to where I started 30 years ago. How did this happen? Am I going to be alone for the rest of my life? What does this mean?"

We got that diagnosis from the doctor that we were not expecting. We find ourselves dealing with the loss of a child. Our life is turned upside down by an addiction, or 1000 other things that could happen and we walk through moments of exile. These books in the Bible are written for people who will walk through these moments in life, either as a group or individually. I don't have to predict by some power of the Holy Spirit of God and claim to be a prophet to tell you that someday you will walk in exile if you are not there yet. It happens

for all of us and we need these words.

If the exile and disorientation were caused by someone else's sin, then we need the words of hope. If the exile was caused by our sin, then we need the words of repentance and the call to turn back to God and know that God is willing to forgive. These are the words that we need.

After foretelling the exile that is to come, we find in the prophets a move to offer hope to those who are in exile. Jeremiah warned the people for 40 years. He begs them to repent. But when the time comes when the exiles are taken away to Babylon, his tone changes and he becomes a prophet of hope. We hear this in every one of the prophetic books. Listen to these words the writer of Lamentations. He has already talked about walking through the ruins of the streets of Jerusalem and seeing the rubble. In chapter 3, he then talks about how he is always thinking about his afflictions and you know what this is like. You find yourself constantly thinking about the situation that you were in and how hopeless it feels.

BIBLE

**¹⁹ The thought of my suffering and homelessness
is bitter beyond words.**

**²⁰ I will never forget this awful time,
as I grieve over my loss.**

**²¹ Yet I still dare to hope
when I remember this:**

**²² The faithful love of the Lord never ends!
His mercies never cease.**

**²³ Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.**

**²⁴ I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance;
therefore, I will hope in him!"**

²⁵ The Lord is good to those who depend on him,

to those who search for him.

**²⁶ So it is good to wait quietly
for salvation from the Lord.**

While walking through the ruins of Jerusalem, the prophet makes a shift, but it has **nothing to do with his external circumstances**. Everything around him is still the same but he makes a statement of faith. ***“I believe, even in the exile and amid the ruins that I'm walking through right now, that God has not abandoned me. God is the God of the second chance and the God of the new beginning. I will trust in God and not be afraid, because I know that God's mercies are new every morning. Great is God's faithfulness. I will trust in him and therefore I have hope.”***

This is hope for the hopeless and it is about a dream that we have because of what God has done for us, and what God will do for us. We can dream because sometimes, in the midst of exile, the only source of that hope is a trust in God. What I have learned is that when we are walking through exile, there is one of two responses that we have towards God. When you have been through hell on earth, we can turn away from God. We say words like, “If there was a God then this never would've happened. If God exists, then God would've saved me. I cannot believe in God anymore.” Sometimes, we believe in God but we're so angry at God that we lash out, almost as if we hope to punish God by saying, “I don't even believe in you anymore.” Sometimes, we find it almost impossible to believe in God anymore because of our circumstances. Most of us have been in a place where we begin to wonder if there really is a God.

But here's the thing that I remind you of as your pastor. When we turn away from God in the midst of exile or pain or hurt or loss, then what do we have left? We have no hope. Where will we turn now if we simply give up on God? We have the pain and hurt and sorrow and the exile and the loneliness and whatever else we are feeling, and that's it. If there isn't a God who has a dream for you, a plan to prosper you and

to bless you and a plan to give you a future with hope, then what do we have left? Where else will we find hope if not in God?

The other option when we find ourselves in exile is to come back to God. We may have wandered away from God, or we may have been faithful all along, but we hold on with white knuckles like the writer of Lamentations. He is standing in the charred remains of Jerusalem and says, “Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is God’s faithfulness; God’s mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in God!’”

SLIDE We can borrow hope from God to dream again.

The prophets call us to this place of hope, and they invite us to borrow hope from God when we have none. This gives us the strength to dream again. This is what Isaiah does in chapters 40 through 55. If you have your Bible, you may want to turn to that section of the book of Isaiah who is writing this section of the book while the people are in exile. These words are clearly for the people who were living in Babylon. You may know many of the words from Isaiah 40 because Handel set them to music in the Messiah.

BIBLE

¹ ***“Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.***

² ***“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.
Tell her that her sad days are gone
and her sins are pardoned.***

***Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over
for all her sins.”***

³ ***Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting,
“Clear the way through the wilderness
for the Lord!***

Make a straight highway through the wasteland

for our God!
⁴ Fill in the valleys,
and level the mountains and hills.
Straighten the curves,
and smooth out the rough places.

You can almost hear the music ringing in your ears from Handel's Messiah as the prophet Isaiah promises that a highway will be created in the desert, in the wilderness, and the exiles shall return to Jerusalem with singing, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. What an audacious claim that is to make while the people are living in exile and there is no way they will defeat the Babylonians. But we hear these words in Isaiah 51:11.

BIBLE

¹¹ Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return.
They will enter Jerusalem singing,
crowned with everlasting joy.
Sorrow and mourning will disappear,
and they will be filled with joy and gladness.

We catch glimpses of this hope in Jeremiah as God promises that he will be there for his people, especially in Jeremiah chapters 29 to 33. These chapters are relentless, unbounded. You might open your Bibles to Jeremiah 29 which is where our Scripture memory verse for this week is found.

BIBLE

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

That verse was written to the exiles in Babylon who had no hope and who wondered if they would ever return home. In 597 BC Jeremiah watched the first 10,000 from Judah be taken into exile with King

Jehoiakin. All the leadership in Jerusalem was taken with them and carried away as slaves. Jeremiah sees this deportation happen and he sent a letter to the exiles, the Jews who were taken away to Babylon. This verse is a part of that letter.

When this deportation happens the prophets who were taken with the exiles told the people not to worry because they wouldn't be gone very long. They promised them that the Egyptians were going to come and rescue them. Jeremiah begins his letter to the exiles with the bad news that this is not going to happen. Listen to what Jeremiah says in verses 8 through 10 just before this passage that we read.

BIBLE

⁸ This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let your prophets and fortune-tellers who are with you in the land of Babylon trick you. Do not listen to their dreams, ⁹ because they are telling you lies in my name. I have not sent them," says the Lord.

¹⁰ This is what the Lord says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.

These exiles would live in Babylon for 60 years. He tells them to go ahead and, "build houses in Babylon. Give your children in marriage to one another and seek the blessings of God on the city in which you live and upon the Babylonians, because if they are blessed then you will be blessed as well. Plan to stay in Babylon for a long time because your exile will not end soon."

This was not happy news to the people living as exiles in Babylon, but **that's how life is sometimes**. We want God to deliver us in an instant. I'll be honest with you and confess that when I pray, **I want the answer tomorrow...well...immediately, if I'm honest!** If God could just give me what I want when I want it, then everything would be just fine, thank you very much! If I pray three weeks in a row for something and

nothing happens then **I get disappointed in God**, maybe not literally but you know what I'm talking about. You have had those feelings, haven't you? Or am I the only one in the room that thinks that way?

We want God to fix things now and yet when we look at the scriptures, **God doesn't fix things like that most of the time**. The Israelites were **slaves in Egypt for 400 years** before God raised up Moses. The Jewish people were in exile for more than 60 years before they returned to Jerusalem. **Jeremiah is brutally honest** with the people and tells them this will be their reality for a while so keep doing those things you need to do to survive like building homes, tilling the fields, planting crops, creating families and seeking the blessings of the people around you. Jeremiah also reminds them that God says, "But the day will come when I bring you back." You can take that to the bank. Jeremiah declares to them, "I am telling you that the day will come when your exile ends."

The truth is that some of those in exile would not live to see that day. Their children and their children's children would see it but many of the adults would not, but knowing it was coming sustained them. They found hope in that reality and that promise from God. Once more let's hear these words again from Jeremiah 29:11.

BIBLE

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Whatever our circumstances are today, God says to us, "As you turned to me and seek me, I will give you a future with hope."

People ask me all the time if I'm scared about this thing or that thing in American culture and here's what I must remember. **Why should I be scared about those things?** I know who holds history in their hands. I know that **God has promised us a future with hope**. I know that in the end, **our lives will be redeemed**. I may not know all

the details about how it turns out, but I know that **God is not finished with me yet or finished with us**, and that God has a plan to bless us, to give us a future with hope. I may not even see what that looks like but **I'm confident that my children or their children** will see this come to pass. Therefore, we have hope.

The people continue to follow God in exile as opposed to taking on the gods of the Babylonians because **they knew God's promise was to bring them back**. What do these prophecies mean for us in the Bible about being in exile? They are not there to teach as ancient history or just to teach us that exile will come. They are there to say to us that exile will never be the final word.

SLIDE Exile will never be the final word.

You hear me say this all the time as your pastor, in the words of Frederick Buekner as he describes Easter, “The worst thing in your life will never be the last thing.” The worst day of your life will not be the final experience of your life because God will always bring us a future with hope. **It may not be on this side of eternity**, but there is always hope with God.

The reality is that **we can't live without hope**. Victor Frankl was a Jewish psychotherapist in the concentration camps in Germany, and he talked about watching **prisoners who lost hope**. He knew it was only a matter of time before they died because human beings can't live without hope. Dr. Jerome Groopman holds a chair in medicine at Harvard, and he's written one of my favorite books called, **The Anatomy of Hope**. He is a physician and he says these words based on his experience of working with thousands of patients.

GRAPHIC The Anatomy of Hope by Jerome Groopman

SLIDE (Use the picture of the book, The Anatomy of Hope on the left of this quote.) *Hope gives us the courage to confront our circumstances and the capacity to surmount them. For all my patients, hope, true hope, has proved as important*

as any medication I might prescribe or any procedure that I might perform.

I find this fascinating that a doctor says that the most important thing I can give people is hope, not medicine. Medicine is important but hope is indispensable. This is what Jeremiah was giving the people in exile. Listen to what Jeremiah says in Chapter 33:10-11.

BIBLE

¹⁰ “This is what the Lord says: You have said, ‘This is a desolate land where people and animals have all disappeared.’ Yet in the empty streets of Jerusalem and Judah’s other towns, there will be heard once more ¹¹ the sounds of joy and laughter. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will be heard again, along with the joyous songs of people bringing thanksgiving offerings to the Lord. They will sing,

***‘Give thanks to the Lord of Heaven’s Armies,
for the Lord is good.
His faithful love endures forever!’***

For I will restore the prosperity of this land to what it was in the past, says the Lord.

I think of people that I have served as pastor who have walked through moments of exile. I think of the despair of families who have lost a child and the loss we will always carry with them, but I see them laugh today. I see the joy that does return in glimpses. I think of the man who lost his job and filed for bankruptcy several years ago. He now has a new beginning and it's not quite like the old job or the old way of life, but in a new start he discovers joy again and feels like he has a future with hope.

What happens for us during exile is that we start to feel like it is **always going to be that way**. There is a word we use for what happens when our heart begins to believe that we will always be in exile and

that life will always be as bad as it is now. **We call that depression.** I preached in the past on the text for today, Jeremiah 29:11, in a sermon that I did on depression. I encourage you to take that verse and to memorize it and carry it with you, to always remember it by praying it to yourself. Remember that God has plans for you that are filled with hope. God can see what the future holds and whatever you are going through now is not going to be the last word in your life so put your trust in God.

I met with someone recently who is going through divorce and who lost his job and who also was diagnosed with an illness that needs medical treatment. He told me they were feeling utterly hopeless, so I gave him this verse, and I told him to write it down to carry it with them. He sent me an e-mail two weeks ago telling me how much he needed that verse and how grateful he was that God would not forget him. He told me that every day he begins by reading this text to remind himself that God has a future filled with hope and a plan for him and if he remembers that he can get through each day. **He even found himself laughing recently at one of his misfortunes.**

That is what the prophet Jeremiah offers us. Let's take one more look at the history of the Jewish people and what happens next.

SLIDE 539 BC Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon

In 539 BC Cyrus was King of Persia. He takes his army to march against Babylon, and the city is surrounded by giant walls. It is built on top of the Euphrates River. They had an iron gate which went down into the river. By night, the Persians redirected the river flow, and they came underneath the city of Babylon. The next morning, they took the city of Babylon without having to hardly fight because they took them by surprise. Cyrus became king of the Persian Empire which conquered the Babylonian Empire in a day.

SLIDE 538 BC the Jewish people return to Jerusalem

In 538 BC Cyrus issued an edict which you can find in Persian

history, not just in the Bible, that allowed all the Jewish people to return to their homeland. He also gave them money to rebuild their Temple and their city in Jerusalem. What was humanly impossible for the Jewish people, God did through the forces of history. The people returned to Jerusalem with singing, knowing that joy was coming.

It may not be tomorrow. It may not be a week from now or even a month from now, but **there is always hope**. God has not abandoned you and when you return to him, he has a future filled with hope and a plan for you. This is what Jeremiah was reminding people about, to say that there is always hope.

“I've seen you returning to your home, so don't give up. Keep fighting and keep pressing on, because the day will come when you return to Jerusalem with singing. Your exile will end.”

One of the ways our exile ends is by serving others. Much like the Persians came to the rescue and helped bring hope to the Israelites, you and I are invited to bring hope to others. We can do that this weekend by bringing canned goods and blankets here to the church for Native Hope to give to families affected by the flooding this last week. Maybe you can do it by serving someone at school, at work, or in your neighborhood. The message of the prophet Jeremiah is needed today to help people dream again. Hope is coming, so hold on.

BIBLE

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. – Jeremiah 29:11

Would you pray with me?

SLIDE

Prayer

While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, I would like to invite you to simply turn to God and put your trust in God. You might simply say, “God, you know what I need from you. I need your

help. I want to know you're with me. Lord, I trust you with my life and I choose to follow you.”

In whatever words you need to use, would you take this time in prayer to put your trust in God and ask for the hope that God offers...

If you are in exile right now, you might simply say, “God, you know the exile that I am experiencing. Help me to know that you have a plan for me. A plan with a future and hope...help to dream again...”

God, there are people sitting in this room today who were in the midst of an exile. Some of them are self-imposed because of their own actions and they long to turn back to you today. Some are in exile because of the actions of others, even though they were seeking to do your will. God give them a message of hope. In their hearts open to know that you walk with them, that you see beyond the exile. Help them to feel your arms surrounding them, holding them.

Lord, for the rest of us who one day will be walking through exile, and exile we can even imagine today, help us to walk with you each day, now and through any exile become, trusting that in the end there is always hope. Thank you that you are the God who redeems and saves us. In Your Holy name we pray. Amen.

September 19-20 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people, inviting them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – “Praise”
4. Song – “Rest on Us”
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
 - A. QR Code
 - B. Connect Card and Pet Prayers
 - C. Invites people to greet each other
6. Sermon Video Intro
7. Sermon
8. Med Moments
9. Offering (Women’s Retreat and Native Hope)
10. Song – “Gratitude”
11. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
12. Care Ministers
13. The Bridge
14. Men’s Retreat
15. Closing Prayer