



Jeremiah 29:10-14  
 Life Is Too Short To...  
 "Fear the Future"

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At different times and seasons of life, we probably all have had a fear of the future. It might be because of something personal that's going on – like a job loss or a health diagnosis that's not good...or something good, quite frankly, like a husband and wife expecting a child. **Recent "statistics from the Brookings Institution, an economic think tank, show that the average middle-income family [in the U.S] with two children will spend \$310,605 to raise a child born in 2015 up to age 17."**<sup>1</sup> Note the age...this does not include college expenses. Tack that on and you're looking at \$400,000 to \$500,000. Talk about fear-inducing. I'm sorry if I'm causing some of you young parents to have great fear right now! So personal situations and circumstances can bring fear into our lives.

But fear for the future can also come because of something on a larger scale like a collegiate athletic conference disappearing after over 100 years of existence, or new governmental leadership, or global warming and all the effects of it. These kinds of things can impact us at the individual level. For instance, maybe you see the article in the Seattle Times this week about the gal in the Spokane area who lost a home she's had for many years in Lahaina because of the wildfire there, and then a week ago or so, a new home that was just about done being built in the Spokane area, was consumed in a wildfire there, as well? What are the odds of losing two homes in two separate wildfires? There's a lot that can cause us to fear the future.

And: **The effects of fear can be paralyzing.** I've mentioned this briefly before, but a number of years ago I went through a half-year season of depression, and it was all wrapped around fear of the future. So, this kind of fear can have debilitating effects. This morning's passage contains in it one of the most beloved Bible verses of all time that can help us get through the tough times and the times when the future might cause fear to be in us. Many Christians have this verse memorized, taped to the bathroom mirror, on the home screen of their phone, and so forth. But paired with it is a verse that gives us one of the most difficult themes of Scripture, one that we see repeated in the Bible. So, I am going to read Jeremiah 29:10-14 this morning

as our Scripture passage, but I'm going to invite you to join with me in reading a couple sentences in particular in this passage as well. So, follow along on the screen this morning as we turn to **Jeremiah 29:10-14**, and join in when I invite you to. This is God's word to you and me.

**The context here, is that the Israelites are in captivity – more commonly we call them “in exile.”** Many of their leaders – spiritual, governmental, economic, arts, manufacturing, and so forth – were hauled out of Jerusalem and other larger cities and deported to the capitals of the invading nations. Some people would have been left in place...but the cities are in shambles, the leadership is gone, and new leadership takes over. First it was Assyria (northern kingdom), then it was Babylon (southern and also northern), and then later it was Persia who conquered Babylon. Jeremiah was writing after the northern portion of Israel had been conquered by Assyria, but before the southern portion had been conquered by Babylon, and then into that southern captivity. And I know this all sounds like ancient history...and, in a sense it is. It was like 2500-2700 years ago or so.

**But the kinds of fears for the future they faced was not so different from fears that we face.** They're in a difficult, tumultuous time with some things beyond their individual control and others that are closer to home. So, why did the exile happen? That's the challenging part of this passage. At a certain level it was their, and their ancestors', own fault, as they strayed from God: Idol worship, their own arrogance, leaders who didn't lead well and keep them on the straight and narrow path, dismissing God's word and God's presence with them, and so forth. So, they had been far from perfect in the decades and even longer, leading up to their exile.

But the passage we just read (verse 14) makes it clear, that the Lord had banished them, and is banishing them, to these places. He will bring them back, there is a good future for them...but right now God is bringing them into this dark and challenging time. And: **This idea that God brings difficulties into our lives is a challenging one to wrestle with.** Even though we've all experienced discipline from humans who love us – like our parents – we struggle with the idea that God would discipline us out of his love for us.

This past week, before I even really had a chance to look at this passage and start working on the message, God dropped into my lap a little video clip that I want to play for you. It's about 4 years old, but its 100% pertinent to today's passage. It's an interview of Stephen Colbert, the late night tv host, done by Anderson Cooper of CNN. Now, you need to know that Stephen is a Catholic Christian, the youngest of 11 children, and you also need to know that on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1974 when he was 10 years old, two of his older brothers and his father were killed in a commercial plane crash. That, as you can imagine if you haven't experienced something similar, is a tremendous tragedy to go through – perhaps especially for a 10-year-old kid. Anderson Cooper's father also died when *he* was 10, and his mother had passed away just two months before this interview. So, there's some background that helps set the stage for this conversation. Watch this (**Video Here**). *If you're reading this online, you can watch the video [here](#). (First 3:15 is what we watched in the service from this shortened version of the whole interview. The full interview – I think it's the full interview – is [here](#).)*

First, and this is connected to the main point, but sounds like an aside: **Did you notice how Stephen naturally shared his faith, because his faith is naturally a part of him?** I know the comment about being a Catholic or a Buddhist might be off-putting to some, but a light-hearted, even humorous, comment like that helps to connect to others who aren't Christian.

Christianity has some things about it that are very distinct and totally different than any other religion, yes. The idea that all religions are the same is a fallacy. But there are places where they overlap. And there's nothing wrong with highlighting points of commonality because rather than building walls, it builds bridges between us and others. It's hard to lead someone to Jesus when we've built a wall between us and them.

Then at the end of the clip – and the interview does continue on for a while longer – **He very naturally and clearly shares his faith, a significant truth about it, and how his faith has encouraged him in the midst of his sufferings.** He said, “In my tradition that's the great gift of the sacrifice of Christ...that you're really not alone, that God does it, too.” He just lays it out there – no apology, not trying to persuade or get into a debate about it...he

just states the truth of our faith and what he believes and how it has gotten him through the tragedy that he experienced nearly 50 years ago. It's just a part of who he is and it's completely natural. It's an example of leading people toward Jesus where you live, work, and play, at its absolute best, and I hope it sticks with each of us. We'll come back to this at the end.

More directly connected to our passage, Colbert helps us see that even the difficult, challenging things in life...The things that are hard in the moment and cause fear for the future, can actually be embraced and seen as something that shapes us to connect with others. His loss has allowed him to connect with others and talk about his faith in Jesus, such as in this interview.

**You don't have to fear the future because even the negative stuff – exiles, loss of loved ones, loss of job, health issues – even these can be blessings that help us prosper to be more of who God is shaping us to be.** And let me be clear: it may take time to get to that point. Some healing and perspective on the situation that time can give us may very well be needed. For instance, the interview started with Cooper quoting Colbert from another interview, “I have learned to love the thing that I most wish had not happened...What punishments of God are not gifts?” (A quote from Tolkien, which they discuss later in the video.) I doubt Colbert felt that way at age 10.

And then Anderson Cooper asked, “Do you really believe that?” I love Colbert's thoughtful, non-rushed, sincere, response: “Yes.” For Israel, the punishment that God brought Israel through was a gift that showed them their waywardness, how they'd strayed from God, and got them back in tune with him. I'm not sure if it actually made them more sympathetic toward other nations in similar positions...but that's another benefit that Colbert has seen in his life. For sure, we see that in Jesus. He became human, related with others, laughed, cried, forged friendships, was betrayed, had celebrations...He experienced the range of what it means to be human. He really was “the most human” as Colbert put it. And then ultimately was crucified – the punishment for sin that we deserve: Jesus took it in our place. And so, in all of his humanity, Jesus knows what it is that you and I go through. He understands, because he's been there.

And all of this is wrapped up in the verse that so many people know, **“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’” (Jeremiah 29:14)**. Difficult seasons of life, even punishment, aren’t to harm us, and all that God leads us through is part of the good plans he has for us – just as the cross of Christ lead to the resurrection and eternal life. Now, remember, this Jeremiah verse, and the verses around it, indeed all of the book of Jeremiah, is written to the people of Israel as a whole. So, this isn’t just a personal thing. It’s about the plans God has for the nation, to bring them back, to give them hope and a future. But it can still apply to us individually – just as a wildfire that impacts a community impacts at the personal level. A nation is, after all, the sum of its people, and God seeks after each one of us, even leaving the 99 sheep in the pen to go for one lost sheep.

And so, when we realize that the good plans God has for us may also include seasons of punishment, and correction, and consequences and sadness, and so forth...but it’s all ultimately for our good, then we can praise God in the midst of it all. **We need not fear the future, and we can praise God and give him the glory no matter the circumstances.** In fact, some of the correction might be, like the Israelites experienced, to bring us back to God so we would glorify him more.

The great hymn, “It Is Well With My Soul”, was written by Haratio Spafford in 1873 after his wife and four daughters were on a ship sailing from England to the U.S., that was struck by another ship, sank within 12 minutes. 226 people perished that day - including all four of his daughters. Of his family, only his wife, Anna, was one of the few survivors – she was found unconscious, floating on a wood plank.

Historical records of the event have this to say, “Naturally, Anna was utterly devastated, but she testified that in her grief and despair, she had been conscious of a soft voice speaking to her, ‘You were saved for a purpose!’ **“Anna remembered something a friend had once said, ‘It’s easy to be grateful and good when you have so much, but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God.’”**<sup>2</sup>

So, first: whatever you've gone through, whatever you're going through, whatever you will go through...God is with you each step of the way as he leads you through it. Through faith in Jesus, His spirit resides in you and he is with you, and he has good plans for you and your future. And then second, when we can embrace the difficult seasons of life, the things that might otherwise cause us to fear the future, the things we wish hadn't happened, it brings glory to God and is a faith that surprises others; kind of like Jesus' death and resurrection: it's unexpected. When we embrace all of God and all that he's doing in our lives, it gets people's attention, and God can use that to lead people toward him.

So, there's a lot in life that might cause us or others to live in fear. **But with Jesus leading the way forward into God's plans, we need not fear the future.** Life is too short to fear the future, and God's got a good plan for you, for me, for us. Jesus' resurrection means that through faith in him we have the ultimate victory on that day we breathe our last – talk about a good plan, right? And in the meantime, we can trust him, walk with him as he is with us, no matter what we're going through – the highs and the lows – and give him all the praise and all the glory. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/090415/cost-raising-child-america.asp>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bethelripon.com/life-stories/horatio-gates-spafford> - The account of this is easily and widely available, not just here.