

AFTER THE ELECTION

“After the Election”

Jeremiah 29:4-14

Sunday, November 15, 2020 (Ordinary Time)

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Scripture Reading

“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. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 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. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. ‘For thus says the LORD: 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. 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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:4–14, ESV).

Our Heavenly Father, I thank you that you are good and wise and very much in control. Though our politicians and politics may change, you are forever Lord and are forever the same. We draw near to you this morning with the hope that you will draw near to us. By the grace of your Holy Spirit, help us to see what it means to be faithful to our call of being your people. Help us love you with all of our hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We pray this in Jesus’s glorious name. AMEN.

Introduction

It is a risky thing for a pastor to directly address a divisive election. But I do believe that it is a necessary thing.

It is certainly possible for churches to become over-politicized. But when the church is silent toward the pressing issues of our day, other voices will step in to fill the void. If we do not strive to look at our world through the prism of the Word of God, we will naturally find ourselves interpreting our reality through the word of man.

It is a dangerous thing for Christians to be catechized by cable news and social media echo-chambers to the nature of reality. So, my hope for today is that we can look to the wisdom of inspired Scripture so that it might give us wisdom and direction in our cultural moment.

Twelve days ago, over 140 million Americans voted in a historic presidential election. In the last several days, I talked and corresponded with several of our church members. In that correspondence, I have noticed that fellow believers, even in the same local church, are reacting to this election in different ways.

Some are disappointed and very scared by the outcome. Some have a sense of cautious optimism as a result of the outcome. Some sincerely doubt the legitimacy of the outcome. And some do not wish for anyone to know their true political opinions because they are wary of fighting and our culture of shaming and outrage.

I pray that we can be a church that follows Jesus together, no matter your response may be to this election. It is only through faith in Christ we have union with God and one another. The basis of our salvation is our shared faith in Christ, not our shared political ideology. On Christ the solid we stand; *all other ground is shifting sand*.

Our Scripture reading today comes from Jeremiah 29. It is the same text that I preached in 2016, after Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. I intentionally chose this text again because, although it appears this election has had a different outcome, our call to live faithfully as citizens of the city of God while we live in the city of man stays the same.

Context of Jeremiah 29

As we have seen in our study of Isaiah this fall, understanding historical context is key for understanding the message of the prophets. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied at a time of rapid social change and transition for God's people.

God's people had been in a season of prolonged compromise. And as a result, the kingdom of Judah was under the rule of the Babylonian empire. In claiming dominion over the people of Judah, Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II captured several members of the priesthood and royal family and took them into exile in Babylon. This was when figures like Daniel were taken as a youth into Babylonian captivity.

As the exiled Jews began to live in Babylon, they wondered how long their exile would last. Would it last a few months, a few years, or a few generations?

During this time, Judah was ruled by wicked kings who rejected walking according to God's law, but they still felt a sense of false confidence that God would never allow the nation to fall. It was a time when most people in Judah were consumed by popular nationalism yet defined by religious nominalism. And several false prophets rose up to tell the people exactly what they wanted to hear.

In Jeremiah 28, we have an example of one such prophet named Hananiah. Without any word from God, Hananiah said, "Don't worry guys! In two years, it'll all be different. The yoke of Babylon will be broken. The kingdom will be restored, and everything will be the way you want it."

Hananiah told the people of Judah exactly what they wanted to hear. He validated their spiritual compromise and complacency. He coddled their idolatry. He was very popular. And he was a false prophet.

Jeremiah, on the other hand, was a true prophet of the living God. He is often known as “the weeping prophet” because he had to testify that judgment was coming upon Jerusalem, and then he saw that destruction come to pass with his own eyes. But, contrary to Hananiah’s false declarations, Jeremiah knew that the exile was just beginning.

And this is why Jeremiah wrote the words of chapter 29. The exiles had been lied to. They were told they were coming home soon, and so they made little effort to adjust to their new homeland and lay down roots. So, he writes them a letter to give them vision for this time of exile.¹

In contrast to the crowd-pleasing preaching of Hananiah, Jeremiah adopts a long-term vision that is beyond temporary political whims, but is nevertheless viewed through the lens of God’s absolute sovereignty.²

Exegesis and Application of Jeremiah 29

Thus, the letter of Jeremiah 29 contains instruction on how to be God’s people in this context of exile.

For the rest of our time today, I would like to examine three ideas of our text and seek to apply them to our times: *1.) The Identity of God’s People in Exile, 2.) The Social Engagement of God’s People in Exile, and 3.) The Hope of God’s People in Exile.*

1.) The Identity of God’s People in Exile.

- “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (Jeremiah 29:4, ESV).
- This letter is to “exiles.” This is a divinely granted identity. They live in one kingdom but belong to another. There are several things that knowing your identity does.
- *Identity forms expectations, especially as it related to how the world sees us and we see the world.*
- New Testament authors apply this identity to Christians (1 Pt 1:1). We are to be a distinctive people. We are to live in the world but not be of it.
- We must not adopt the language, the methods, the style, and the ideology of the world.
- Christians are called to embrace this identity no matter who is in the White House.
- The summer after I graduated, I took an art history course in Europe. After several weeks, one of my fellow students expressed frustration that the natives didn’t speak English.
- That is what it is like when we expect the world to validate and accept everything that Christian stands for.
- Christians as elect exiles possess a dual calling of preserving our distinctiveness from culture, while at the same time being culturally engaged.
- As Dr. Russell D. Moore writes in his recent book *Onward*: “Our call is to an engaged alienation, a Christianity that preserves the distinctiveness of our gospel while not retreating from our callings as neighbors, friends, and citizens.”³
- *Identity forms our vision.*

¹ F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 250–251.

² *Ibid.*, 253.

³ Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 8.

- “*Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease*” (Jeremiah 29:5–6, ESV).
- Jeremiah is casting a long-term vision. Houses, gardens, and marriage are all long-term activities and commitments. There is a difference between being an exile and a tourist.
- The call to “multiply” in our stage of redemptive history means we are called to make disciples. The work of discipleship has never been more crucial.
- *Identity determines allegiance.*
- Our ultimate loyalty must be to our God and his kingdom – not our political team.
- In his letter to the Philippians, Paul says, “*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 3:20, ESV).

2.) The Social Engagement of God’s People in Exile.

- “*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*” (Jeremiah 29:7, ESV).
- The call is to literally seek the “shalom” (שָׁלוֹם) of Babylon. A blessing is promised. In seeking shalom of Babylon (where God has sent them), the people of God will find shalom. Can you imagine how shocking it would be commanded by a prophet of God to pray for the welfare of Babylon?
- This was an extraordinary command. In fact, it is the only place in the OT where prayer for one’s enemies and for unbelievers is commended (cf. Matt 5:43–48; Rom 12:21; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Pet 2:18).⁴
- Here are few quick categories of what it means to seek the welfare of the city: *local engagement, righteous citizenship, and prophetic witness.*
- *Local engagement*
- I want you to imagine what it means to be politically engaged.
- Now, I want you to imagine what it means to be politically engaged without a TV, smartphone, and social media.
- Such a vision would require you to know your neighbors, know your neighborhood, and know your city.
- Jeremiah calls believers to seek the welfare of *your* city.
- Examples: Carenet, RLP, CALL, and One in Christ. These are not partisan activities. But they are political because they bear witness to the kingdom of God.
- *Righteous citizenship:* Be good citizens according to the word of God. If we believe that Joe Biden has been elected our next President (and I know not everyone is there yet), but if he has, it is part of our Christian obedience to honor and pray for President-elect Joe Biden as he is inheriting a deeply divided nation in need of healing.
- The commands of Romans 13 and 1 Timothy 2 applied to president-elect Trump in 2016, and they apply to president-elect Biden now:
- “*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment*” (Romans 13:1–2, ESV).

⁴ Huey, 253.

- *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:1–3, ESV).*
- *Prophetic witness:* means we call out both the good and bad of our leaders without fear or partisanship. The gospel of the kingdom of God will always be an affront to the kingdom of man. True prophets are not the puppets of kings; they represent God.
- When prophets start sounding like mouthpieces for political parties, that is a good sign that they are probably false prophets (Jer 29:8-9). Who are the voices forming your views of what the state is and what is called to be? Are they of God or of the world?
- Romans 13 shows that state governments can be tools in God’s hand to promote justice and restrain sin. However, Revelation 13 shows us that state governments can turn into beasts that violently oppose the kingdom of God.
- To possess a truly prophetic witness is to stand in the tension of Romans 13 and Revelation 13. We must pray for our state leaders to promote justice and policies that lead to the flourishing of all people. We should commend the state when it does so. Likewise, we must call evil “evil.” We must speak truth to power when the state is in danger of becoming a beast.
- But when we do this, we are to do so as Christians. We are to speak with dignity and honor that gives glory to the name of our savior.

3.) The Hope of God’s People in Exile.

- *Exiles are called to be a people of kingdom hope.*
- *“For thus says the LORD: 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. 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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:10–14, ESV).*
- Increasingly, so many people in our nation feel a level of alienation and powerlessness.
- But in this context, Christians must be counter-cultural by avoiding the wasteland of identity politics, wherein we exclusively promote our own self-interest and use government as a club to beat our group’s agenda into society (this will only cause a cycle of action and reaction; a politics of vengeance and resentment).
- Rather we are to seek the common good here and now, but with eternity in view.
- We are called to seek first the kingdom and his righteousness. We are to seek the Lord with all our hearts, knowing he will be found.
- We are called to possess an unflinching hope that God will ultimately bring about good for his people.
- We will face struggles and challenges, but restoration is coming.
- But as Christians, our ultimate hope is not a restored America, but a restored creation.
- ***Whatever our political opinions might be, all political systems are stained by sin and corruption and doomed to end. All Babylons will fall (Rev 18).***
- ***Politics are a necessary coping mechanism for dealing with a fallen world.***

- ***Politics may be good and useful, but they can never be ultimate. For they cannot save us and they can never be our hope. Our savior is Jesus Christ. Our hope is his everlasting kingdom.***
- In world of frenetic fear-mongering over political outcomes, Christians must be a people who embody the virtue of hope.
- C.S. Lewis writes, *“Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”*⁵
- When we place messianic expectations on politics, we are aiming too much at this world.
- As Christians, our hope is that our greatest political victory was won on Calvary by a Victor who conquers through humble love and whose kingdom will never end.
- This is why we yearn for the return of Christ and his kingdom of perfect justice.
- With this hope, we can be a people of supernatural peace in a world of chaos.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, let us be those that exude the spiritual fruit of peace. Whatever your thoughts and emotions may be with this election, let us all hear and respond to the call of Hebrews 12: *“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28–29, ESV). AMEN.*

Prayer

Almighty and Everlasting God, we acknowledge your sovereignty over every square inch of creation. In a time of great political tension, may we draw perfect peace from the truth of your undisputed reign over Heaven and Earth. I pray that in the days, weeks, months, and years to come our lives would bear forth fruit of your Holy Spirit and the quiet confidence that comes from resting in your gospel.

According to your commands in Scripture, I pray for President Trump, President-Elect Biden, and all of our leaders in this season. Grant them wisdom to rule justly and effectively for the sake of the common good.

In our deteriorating health situation, I pray your mercy upon our city. I pray for the sick that you would grant them recovery. I pray for the grieving that you would grant them comfort. I pray for the health care professionals that you would grant them strength and endurance. I pray for our citizens that you would grant us wisdom, good-will, and Christ-like compassion.

We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus, our hope and our healer. AMEN.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1952; 2001) 134.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

1. Read Jeremiah 29:4-14 and summarize this passage in your own words.
2. Jeremiah the prophet writes to the Jews who are in exile in Babylon. From this text, what does it mean to be an exile? What are the expectations of an exile? Where does the ultimate allegiance of an exile belong? Why do you think the New Testament refers to Christians as exiles (see: Phil 3:20-21; 1 Pt 1:1)?
3. What does it practically look like for the people of God to seek the welfare of our city (Jer 29:7)?
4. How should the hope of an exile be different than those who are citizens of the kingdom of man?
5. Consider spending time to pray for the leaders of our nation according to 1 Tim 2:1-3.