

“Diving Deep - Future/Trust”

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11

Graphics: scuba gear, water, diving, bible, future

Big Truth: The word of God guides our lives, but so often we skim the surface with our reading or bible study. This series will take us deeper into common verses that hold incredible meaning for our lives. The people of the Panama UMC are called to dive deeper into the Word for life.

Focus Phrase: Trusting God for the everlasting future gives me hope for today’s struggles.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

- B. It’s been a while since I’ve been to the doctor to get a prescription for something that would cure whatever I’d contracted. The last time I did that, however, I remember waiting for the doctor (PA maybe) in the little drafty room with the super-comfortable vinyl bench with luxurious paper covering it. She came in and just told me that she’d sent my prescription electronically to the pharmacy and I could pick it up on the way home. I don’t remember what it was or what it was for, now, but I do remember thinking, “If I get this medicine and take it like it says, then I’ll get better faster.” Now, I had no idea what was actually IN the medicine that I was taking. I was trusting my doctor and hoped it would somehow work out and make me better.
- C. I suppose if I had motivation and inclination, I’d spend hours figuring out what was IN the medicine and then do some research to see if there was something better or cheaper or faster. But, like we do, I wasn’t willing to dive deeper into the cause and effect of what I had. I just wanted to feel better faster.
- D. There are times when we are tempted to do the same thing with use our scripture. We have a spiritual or emotional need and we want something quick that will help make it go away or fix us. So, we search scripture (which isn’t a bad thing) or we look at the top 20 verses that help anxiety or worry or indecision and we pick one, think we know what it means, take like an antibiotic, and wait for relief.
- E. “Take John 3:5, (or Philippians 4:13, or Joshua 1:9) a few times, with a full glass of water, and call me in the morning. I’m sure you’ll feel better.”
- F. Unfortunately, that’s NOT how scripture works most of the time. And this morning, as we continue our Diving Deep series, we’ll look at ONE (very popular) VERSE from the OT book of Jeremiah.
- G. We’ll look at the CONTEXT, some CAUTIONS, and then dive deep into its full meaning.
- H. Every bible verse has ONE meaning, in context, but many applications. So, we’ll dive down to see what the verse MEANS and then apply that to our lives so we can grow as disciples.

- I. Ready? READY? Let's go!
- J. Our verse this morning is Jeremiah 29:11. It's the famous graduation card verse. It's the verse that gets quoted when someone can't seem to find a way forward. Yet, it's an amazing, hope-filled, future looking verse that DOES INDEED give us hope. Let's read it together and dive deeply into it...

2. Scripture

A. READ Jeremiah 29:11 (together)

B. CONTEXT

- i. If we were staying on the surface, snorkeling our way through the Bible, this text appears to have everything you and I need, as individuals, to get through whatever stuck-ness we're feeling.
- ii. Yet, the context of this verse gives us more information to help us see what was happening in the life of God's people.
- iii. The book of Jeremiah was written around 600 BC. During that time in the life of the Israelites, God had allowed the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar to invade Jerusalem and Israel. When he conquered the land, he then carried many of the elders, priests, and people into exile to Babylon. Basically, King Neb hauled a huge number of people to work for him, to live in his country, and to be separated from home and family.
- iv. Now, Jeremiah was a prophet of Yahweh God. He was known as the Weeping Prophet because of all the times he told the people of God's lament for His people.
- v. Jeremiah had a pretty solid connection with God. God told Jeremiah many things he was to then tell the people - both those living in Jerusalem still and those in exile in Babylon...things about why they were in exile, about what was going to happen to them, and to lament the fact that God was displeased with the people and their lack of faith and practice of faith.
- vi. By the time we get to Jeremiah 29, God had turned His attention (and Jeremiah's) to the exiles, who were understandably struggling to understand why God did this to them...this punishment of exile.
- vii. Jeremiah 29 was written as a letter to those exiles...and if you have your bible open to that chapter, here's what the first 10 verses tell us:
 - a. God was writing to the people in exile in Babylon.
 - b. God SENT them into exile because of their lack of faith and action.
 - c. BUT, while in exile, God wanted them to do 5 things:
 - i) 1 - build houses and live in them, in Babylon.
 - ii) 2 - plant gardens and eat what the gardens produce, in Babylon.

- iii) 3 - take wives and have children, and keep doing that stuff you do to have more children and grandchildren. MULTIPLY, in Babylon!
 - iv) 4 - seek welfare and find welfare. This simply means that they could rely on the prosperity of Babylon to help sustain them...not unlike our welfare system today, is the sense here. And,
 - v) 5 - don't be deceived by evil people - diviners and false prophets among you - who try to convince you of something other than God's plan.
- d. Basically, set up a life for yourself, IN EXILE IN BABYLON, away from your families and home and temple and all you knew. THIS is your punishment and judgement.
 - e. And all seemed bleak and sad. And, to make it worse, God gave them a timeframe in verse 10: "For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place."
 - f. 70 years! Most of the people that were in exile would NEVER see God's visit to them...to restore them to Jerusalem! No wonder God wanted them to make more babies and grand babies! He needed people to restore from exile so that they could tell the story of how God brought them back...how God provided and redeemed them!
 - g. By the time we get to our famous prescriptive verse for today in verse 11, we're seeing a much bigger picture here.
 - h. It's in the midst of exile, with a call to settle in for the long haul, and to patiently live and wait on God that God promises this: **"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."**
- C. CAUTIONS - Now that we have some context, let's look at some cautions, because this verse gets plucked out and slapped onto our lives. And while it's a great verse and gives us hope, I think it can give us even MORE hope if we avoid two things... here are two cautions with this verse, when taken out of context:
- i. First, this verse is sometimes wrongly applied to humanity in general. There is no wonder drug that can be prescribed by your doctor to heal every ailment that ails humanity.
 - a. As we dive deeper, we come to understand that this verse - and the whole prophecy in Jeremiah - doesn't apply to every human being, but to those who are living faithful lives with the Triune God of the Universe.

- b. Yes, that promise CAN be for everyone, and God desires that no one be outside the promise of a future with hope, but that only comes through salvation by faith through grace in Jesus Christ.
 - c. Jesus said in John 3:18, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”
 - d. God is not a doting grandfather that wants to spoil us, even though he loves us. He loves us enough to give us the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus for life. That’s our definition of discipleship. In Jesus, every promise of God in the Old and New Testaments is fulfilled.
- ii. The second danger of taking this out of context is thinking that everything is always going to work out the way we want. Sometimes the prescription needs to be refilled or changed in order to be effective.
- a. Most of the Jewish exiles in Babylon probably weren’t going to live long enough to see God’s promise fulfilled. You and I aren’t guaranteed tomorrow. And we’ll face all kinds of trouble and grief and strife in this world. Sometimes, we need to adjust our perspective.
 - b. Taking Jeremiah 29:11 out of context gives people the impression that God needs to help me...right now. And if we don’t see it, we get angry. I mean, I sat at the end of the Bills game last week and Stacy and thought, “Why does God not love us enough to help our team win?” We said it tongue-in-cheek, of course...or did we?
 - c. God has BIGGER plans for the world and you IN IT! Be careful not to make every verse in the Bible mean what you want it to mean so you and I can apply it prescriptively to our circumstance.
- D. DEEP DIVE - So what DOES this verse really mean and how do we then apply that to our lives. Let’s dive a little deeper...
- i. This promise was not written to one person in a difficult circumstance. It was not written to a person wondering what their future might hold.
 - ii. This verse was written to a group of exiles, who had just been told that they would most likely die in a foreign land, living a life of sustenance, while hoping beyond hope that their children and grandchildren would return to Jerusalem and be the people of God, once again - a faithful people this time - together.
 - iii. This verse was God graciously allowing the people in exile to see a vision of a promised future filled with prosperity and fortunes and redemption.
 - iv. This was a promise they could rely on, while they were living their lives in exile...and being cared for by their own harvests and families, and the welfare of the Babylonians.

- v. If we go just a little farther into this chapter, we read this in verses 12-14 (this is SO good): “Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”
- vi. The deeper we go into the chapter, the more we see that this is about trusting in God’s ULTIMATE plan of salvation and not an immediate rescue.
- vii. In the midst of confusing and difficult circumstances, or when you can’t see the future that’s coming soon, God’s message to the exiles was, “Be faithful. Pray. Worship. Seek me. Let your hearts be awakened right where you are. There’s something amazing coming, but I want you to be content in your faithfulness and my provision NOW. I WILL restore y’all (notice the plural there).”
- viii. **Hope is what happens when you see the future and start living as if it were a reality today.** (repeat).
- ix. Jeremiah 29:11 gives the church hope because we know that, in Jesus Christ, the future - the everlasting future promised by God because of Jesus - is secure. We can live that hope today!

3. Application

- A. Every verse in the bible has one MEANING in context, but that doesn’t mean we can’t understand it in context and then begin to apply it to our lives...to YOUR life.
- B. In the case of Jeremiah 29:11, this verse CAN give you hope for tomorrow and CAN give you the promise that God is working specifically and intimately in your life.
- C. That hope, though, isn’t meant JUST for individuals who are seeking vocation or direction, but for a **community of individuals who, together, are following Jesus and hoping today for the promises of tomorrow.**
- D. More important than any individual decision you and I make is the decision of a community of believers to walk together into the incredibly bright future God has already planned out for us in Christ.
- E. Christianity was never ever meant to be a solo journey of faith. It was designed from the beginning to be a community of believers who are chasing after Jesus in heart, mind, and body.
- F. Let’s see if we have enough air left to dive just a little deeper to get some application today.

- i. The first thing is: **View your future as eternally tied to the Kingdom of God**
 - a. One way to view your life's timeline is as a solid line that stops at today. What's ahead is unknown and what's behind is a solid line that represents where you've been.
 - b. But what if you were to connect the end of the solid line to another solid line that is the sure hope of everlasting life with God when Jesus returns?
 - c. If you do THAT, then the line between now and then is more of a dotted line that represents the uncertain future with God, but has the Holy Spirit guiding and leading. The future is NOT unknown to God... YOU just don't know the details yet.
 - d. But if you view your future as eternally tied to the Kingdom of God coming and already here, then today begins to look much brighter.
- ii. Second, **Be patient in the waiting, knowing that the future is secure**
 - a. That dotted line is like the life of those exiles in Babylon.
 - b. This is NOT your home, church! Every person that is alive and living in the Kingdom of God by grace through faith in Jesus today is an alien in foreign land.
 - c. I'm convinced the stories of the exiles in Babylon are such a huge part of the Old Testament because God wants you to know that THIS IS NOT YOUR HOME.
 - d. This dotted line you're going to experience is a life that seems disconnected with the world. Maybe you haven't noticed, but living for Jesus isn't super cool. Living for Jesus will cost you more than you think. And, living for Jesus will not win many friends or wealth and health.
 - e. AND YET...living for Jesus will give you patience...patience to be intentional about the mission to make disciples, to wait on the Lord in every season, and be humbly confident in your witness to a lost and hurting world...a world that desperately wants to hear the Good News.
 - f. Live life to the fullest in Christ. Don't be afraid or dismayed...get a bigger Kingdom perspective. Your future is secure. Live like it!
- iii. And third, **Remember that you are part of a kingdom community**
 - a. One of the positive outcomes of this pandemic has been the fact that every once in a while we get to stop and remember: "I can do some things to show those around me that I love them. I can care for my neighbors and community."

- b. Jeremiah 29:11 shouts about a community living together in hope. You can encourage others to live in hope, as YOU live in hope.
- c. We've been worshiping throughout the pandemic, and I don't know about you, but Sunday mornings are a blessing because they give us hope. The community worships together, despite the challenges and sacrifices.
- d. We pray together and for each other. I've seen and heard more prayer requests in the last two years than in the previous four. People willing to pray for others and with others. The community prays together so that we can agree together what God knows to be true.
- e. Learn everything you can about the promises of God together in searching the scriptures for His promises. What are they? To whom do they apply? When can we expect them to be fulfilled? What affect do God's promises have on my life?
- f. Later this year, we're planning a sermon series specifically on the **promises of God** in scripture...stay tuned, but begin to seek out God's promises for you and us.

4. Conclusion

- A. I hope you don't have to go to the doctor to get prescriptions anytime soon. Although, I guess we don't really 'go' to the doctor anymore, but get on Zoom and do tele-medicine, right?
- B. Either way, stay healthy!
- C. Spiritually, health comes when we dive deeply into the promises of God and trust in the future, starting today.
- D. Let me reprise the chorus we sang earlier with some slight modification for our life in community together: **Because He lives, WE can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all OUR fear is gone. Because we know who holds the future, life is worth the living, just because He lives.**
- E. Church, Jesus is Lord and Jesus is Alive! Trust Him!
- F. Let's pray...