

# Sermon Text for August 7, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

***Psalm 53:6, 55:22 and Jeremiah 29:10-14***

***“Obeying God in all things”***

For the first time all summer I felt like this past week was a week that I was able to take a step back and see the future more clearly instead of making it day by day and week by week. I can't remember a summer where we were able to pack more into it than this past summer. We were able, as a church, to send youth on a mission trip to Italy, we sent youth on a mission trip to Florida, we had a number of funerals in there, and we lost people that we love and that were precious to us. We had weddings in there and then to top it off, we had VBS where all of the church was mobilized to welcome the community in our midst.

When you are in the middle of these kinds of events that take planning and logistics and problem solving all you can do is check off one event after another and there isn't a whole lot of room to look towards the future and see what lies ahead. In the midst of this time it is difficult to evaluate and self-reflect when one event comes after another. I know that last week I asked you to do a pretty deep dive of evaluation asking yourself what kind of legacy of faith are you leaving behind, but I felt as if this week was really the first week all summer that we may have had the time and the bandwidth to do that type of evaluation.

It seems almost as if once the calendar page was turned to August, the future became clearer. That doesn't mean that things are slowing down. We are getting ready to gear up for preschool, and the regular church activities that take place in August to kick off the school year, but at least for now I felt for myself an ability to reflect on where we are and how we are doing.

Scripture helped in that evaluation and that time of reflection. Although the timing hasn't been great. We have been in Jeremiah in the last few weeks and I need to tell you that I now have a new least favorite book of the Bible. One member of the church told me this week, hey, I've been doing this whole 9 month reading challenge, I just hope Jeremiah doesn't make me regret the decision to do it. It is a slog and it is difficult and he is moody and seemingly depressed and when you read that week after week, it is tough. But hang in there.

Today, we find a call to obedience even as we live in a busy, moody, hectic and even at times threatening world. That obedience that we are called to in Scripture is based upon knowing a God who has charted for us a future of hope. That is what we can rely on, that is what we can trust, we all have, individually and collectively as a church, we all have a future of hope.

## READ

I called Comcast this week and cancelled my TV service. I was tired of the prices going up and up and realized that I don't watch TV at all except for sports, and I know a guy who can help me get access to the sports I need to watch. When I do watch something I tend to stream on my computer and I watch series like Stranger Things, or all of the Marvel Universe, like all of it. Recently I began watching a series that I heard a lot about but didn't want to watch it because I honestly didn't think it was something I should be watching. But I began watching it, this is a situation where I am not recommending the series, especially for anyone under the age of 35.

So I started watching Breaking Bad, what a study on human decision making. We are looking at decision making in our Sunday School class, so I'm really just watching that series so that I can do some research for the class, no, not really. Do as I say, not as I do, don't watch the series. But I find that as I am watching it I get anxious. It is filled with people and events who make decisions based upon a future without hope. There is no way out for them in the future. So they are trying to eke out of the present whatever benefit they can find. As a result, those who do not see hope in their future will inevitably make decisions in the present that are destructive. Hear that again and see how it applies to real life. Those who do not see hope in their future will inevitably make decisions in the present that are destructive.

If you do not have hope for your future, then your present decisions will be destructive. In the Psalms, in our first readings, the author makes a promise about the future that is seen in all of Scripture. It is a promise of restoration. God will restore, God will reconcile, God will bring all things to completion. Or as Paul states in Romans 8, all things work for good for those who trust in the Lord. This promise is a promise which provides unmitigated hope. I don't care what you are going through this promise is never cancelled. This promise provides every single person in every single life situation to have a future of hope if they love Jesus as their Lord and Savior. God will bring about restoration in your life in all things. Now, not everyone wants restoration in all things, just the things that they pick and choose, well, that's not healthy, but it is true.

I want to be reconciled with only some of my family, not all of it. I want to be reconciled with one of my neighbors, but not the crazy one. I want to be reconciled with some of my workers, but not the one that I can't stand. God's promise is for reconciliation in all things if we would only pursue it. God tells us in this promise that no matter what our present may look like, God's plans for you and your future is always for good. We read that in vs. 6 that God restores

the future of Israel. We read that in vs.22 that God will maintain you. These are all promises for your future. And as we talk about the future it is actually in Jeremiah where we see the people of God desperately in need of a word of encouragement about their future.

Let's turn there now to Jeremiah. Once again, we have to set the stage for this writing. Jeremiah has been telling the king of Judah that Babylon is going to come and destroy Jerusalem and take the people into captivity. None one wants to hear that, because there are other preachers running around and saying don't worry, God is going to come in just a short time and deliver us. This promise of the future is for tomorrow, not for a long time from now. Instead, Jeremiah, look at how he starts, he says that these 70 years have to pass before the promises begin to reveal themselves. So, let me ask you, if you had to choose between a preacher that said God is going to restore you tomorrow and another preacher that says God isn't going to restore you until your great grandchildren are around, who are you going to choose? So, that is Jeremiah's entire life, no one listened to him because he was telling the truth, but the truth was not attractive. The ones who were telling the people what they wanted to hear were getting more clicks.

Jeremiah is telling the people to wait on God's promises and don't try to force them to come about. I grew up in a pretty intense activist family. From the time we were very young we were taught that when you see a problem, you fix it, if you see an injustice, you change it and you are called to take the initiative on behalf of God to bring about the change that is needed in society and around you in general. We were raised to work so that we could help facilitate the coming of the kingdom of God. I have tried to raise my kids in the same way. Don't sit back and wait for other people to do what God wants you to do here and now. For such a time as this God has placed you in this position to do, to act, to be involved.

But Jeremiah says something different here. Let me be clear. We are always called to act, to change injustices especially systematic ones, but Jeremiah says something different here for his people which makes me realize that there is a time for all things under heaven. There is a time to act, and there is a time to wait. Look at vs.10, after Babylon's 70 years, then I will fulfill my promise. You can't bring it about before that no matter how much you do, no matter what kind of activism you are involved in, until those 70 years are passed, you will be in the life situation in which you find yourself.

What's the significance of 70 years in this verse? It could be a reference to Psalm 90:10 which describes a full life as being 70 years. But since it does refer to Babylon I believe it is a

literal description, especially since we know that Babylon took Judah into captivity from 600 BC to about 530 BC, so yeah, Jeremiah was prophesying that there is going to be a time of captivity out of which you will not be able to free yourself. You have to be in it, you will live in that captivity and my deliverance and my restoration will not come until after that time period is over. I don't like to hear that because I want to solve this problem, I want to fix this time of exile and depression. But that time was part of God's timing.

You will be restored, Jeremiah states, but right now is the time to wait. I don't know about you, but I don't like waiting. I told you, I like to act. I don't think I'm alone in this. Look at vs.11, I have plans for you and for your welfare, to give you a future of hope. It is a future of hope even if the present is so bleak that you can't imagine what that rebuilding process is going to look like. It may feel like the rebuilding process is impossible and so it makes the future look impossible, but the promise remains, God has given us a future of hope.

But we can't force it. One of my favorite Psalms to read to people as they are recovering from surgery or something else is Psalm 27, listen to verses 13-14. I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage, wait for the Lord. It is hard to stay obedient when we are waiting on the Lord. But as my sermon title states: we are called to be obedient to God in all things, and maybe even more importantly in all times. We can't force the kingdom of God, there are times that we are called to wait on the Lord for God to act even before we act.

How good are we at waiting for the Lord? I'll answer that one. Terrible. I am terrible at waiting for the Lord. This whole past week has been a week where I feel like I have been able to wait, the first time that I have been able to wait and understand and discern God's guidance and the plans that God has for me and for us. I realize it comes down to how much do we trust God? As the Psalmist states, placing our burdens on the Lord will produce sustainability. But placing those burdens on the Lord takes trust, a whole lot of trust.

For the people of Jeremiah the period of waiting in a grim and threatening world of exile were to be years of spiritual discipline and an opportunity for repentance. That should be no different for us. Maybe, just maybe, we find ourselves in a period of waiting similar to the Israelites as they were in exile, and as they were encouraged to pass through a period of spiritual discipline and repentance. It was true for the people of God in Jeremiah's time, maybe it is true for the people of God in this time as well.

If we try to force and eke out a blessing from God in the here and now it may be that we will seek it and not find it. Instead, Jeremiah promises that if we wait, God will and can use us to carry out this future of hope. Amen.