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Once again, good morning, and it's good to be here again, after a couple of weekends off of the pulpit. It's good to see everyone here in our new church home. I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles now to Jeremiah chapter 29. We'll be reading verses 1 to 14. And as you turn there in your Bibles, I just want to say thank you for your prayers for our family, not only on our holidays, but while we were contemplating the call to Redeeming Grace, thank you so much for your notes of encouragement, for your prayers for us. They meant the world to us during that time, and we felt the prayers of God's people sustaining us, and so thank you.

Again, Jeremiah, chapter 29 this morning is our text. We're taking a little break from 1 John. In light of our first service here in our new church building, looking at this passage of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 29, verses 1 to 14. This is God's word, may He write it upon our hearts this morning.

Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 (This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) 3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying, 4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace. 8 For thus says the Lord

of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord. 10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

This is the word of the living God. May he write it on our hearts this morning.

Well, beloved, what does the Lord want from a bunch of Christians now worshipping at 22 Holiday Drive? During this process of coming into a new church building, we've acknowledged many times God's fatherly hand. Throughout the whole process, the Lord has surprised us in many ways with His provision. He has blessed us with this opportunity this morning to call upon his great name from a new location. And in so doing the Lord has connected us - hasn't he - more intimately with the city that many of us live in. Whether or not you live in the actual city or perhaps on the outskirts, our text this morning speaks about what God desires from his people who are placed by his sovereign hand in various neighborhoods and cities in this world. You see, in our text, God brought about various social circumstances that led to his people being brought into this unique season of life that we call the Babylonian exile. And in that time, beloved, he had purposes for their growth, and he had purposes as well for the city that God placed them - that they would do good. And this morning as a church, we want to think about our unique situation that has come about by the Lord and therefore God's calling as well upon us as His church and as individual Christians to seek the good of our city.

So we're going to dive right in and in verses one through four, we're going to see first, our unique situation, our unique situation. You know, in the Old Testament, God prepared a homeland for the people of Israel. And really, their identity as a people was connected to that place that they were to live in the promised land. You remember this story, perhaps, how God brought his people out of Egypt. He led them through the wilderness, and he planted them eventually, in the promised land. And in the promised land, there was a unique set of ethics that really govern their life, right, something that was unique in the Bible, because the promised land was a picture of heaven on earth. Therefore, Israel could not coexist with pagan neighbors around them. The land was to be

wholly devoted to the Lord. But notice the context of our letter here in Jeremiah 21. In our letter here, the context is very different. Now the people of Israel you notice are living far from home. You see that in verse one and also in verse four - the Lord says: "to all who were carried away captive, who I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem, to Babylon". God's people were now brought into this new life situation - they were now exiles and outsiders in a land that did not belong to them. It was God himself who brought this about. If you read verse one of our texts, you'll read: "Nebuchadnezzar carried them away captive". But then you get to verse four, and also to verse seven, and you read God say: "I caused them to be carried away". Notice God's people were brought to this place, ultimately, by God's hand. They sinned against God and so the Lord brought upon them judgment for a season by the hand of foreign rulers who caused them [indistinctive]. A reminder that the circumstances of our lives, whatever they may be, are not random, but they are ordained of God. And here in exile, God had purposes for his people Israel. He was going to humble them, he was going to refine them, he was going to make their hearts more ready for the Messiah as they sang: "Oh come, oh come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears. But he also had purposes, beloved, for the temporary city that they were blessed to be a part of for a season, as temporary residents.

See, living in Babylon radically changed how they lived. Right? It shaped how they were to think about their unbelieving neighbors. It shaped how they were to think about those they now live next door to that didn't worship Yahweh, that didn't call upon the same God, that didn't have the same set of values. Moreover, living in Babylon shaped their hope, as God's people. They would build houses here, and they would plant a garden -something maybe that we do as well. They would do these things and they would ultimately walk away from them. It wouldn't be permanent. As Christians this morning, beloved, our life situation is actually very similar. Especially in Old Testament texts, you never apply them simply one for one to our setting, right? When you're reading the Bible, you need to consider the context, you need to consider the biblical timeline, you need to consider God's covenant relationships that he has with his people, and you need to consider ultimately Jesus Christ and how he radically changes things. But with that said, the New Testament writers in 1st Peter and in James speak about how the Christian community are a community of exiles and sojourners on this earth. 1st Peter 1 : 1 notice: "To all who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." You notice Christians are dispersed right? All throughout these various cities and various countries and various places, they're dwelling in these particular places, but they live in them as exiles, as foreigners.

In other words, they're part of a country, part of a city, but but they have this heavenly identity. Right? While we might be Canadian, or Americans and, you know, carry around our Canadian passports or American passports and fly our Canadian flags and for me, you know, an American

flag. It might take pride in the places that God has allowed us to be born in. We're reminded by Paul in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in heaven. That means that along with Abraham and Daniel and Esther and the Babylonian exiles in our text, we are to be people of faith on this earth. Although we are exiles, there are important differences between us today and the people of God here in the Babylonian exile. For one, we're an even greater community of faith, aren't we? We're not just one particular nation of exiles, but we're exiles and sojourners made up of people from every tribe, tongue and nation. And we're spread out all throughout this globe to be God's witnesses. Moreover, we're scattered as exiles, not because we are suffering God's covenant curses for our sins. Jesus Christ bore the curse of our sin upon himself at the cross so that we might know God's blessing. And so that even now, while we live as exiles, we do so under the blessing of the gospel.

As we take up roots in a new location, God wants us to remember our identity: that we are those who are called to be exiles and sojourners and people of faith, even as we get to set up roots in this place. This leads us now to the main meat of our texts. The second point is going to be our, our main point here.

How does that identity? How does this unique situation, shape our calling, and what we're called to do? Our second point here is our Christian calling within the city and we see this and verses five through nine. What does the Lord say to us in a text like this, when it comes to our role within the city, I want to sum it up in three words for you from the scriptures here. First, the word is participate, second word is pray, and third word is proclaim.

Notice first, God causes people to participate in the common cultural activities of their city or of their neighborhood, verses five and six. Build houses, and dwell in them, or as the NIV puts it, build houses and settle down. Plant gardens, and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters, take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands. You know, this verse is actually shocking. If you are an Israelite hearing these words, you're like: "What in the world?"

You know, Israel did not co-exist alongside anyone in the promised land. Right? They were called to drive out their enemies, not live with them. Moreover, when they were exiles, here in Babylon, they weren't actually in the actual heart of the city, they were living on the outskirts, they're originally hesitant to set up any routes. Why? Chapter 28, because there were false prophets. Hananiah in chapter 28, told the people of God that he was going to break the yoke of Babylon, and soon they would be free to return home in two years. Right? So don't get too comfortable. It's going to be short. The message sounded good, but our chapter in verse nine says it was a lie. God

said don't pay attention to them. Instead, God tells them to build houses in Babylon for a time to settle down for 70 years, 70 years - not two - God would have them set up roots in a place that wasn't their true home. God had them invest in things that ultimately they would walk away from. I read this past week that worldwide, 5 million people move from the countryside or the outskirts of a city into the urban center. That's a lot of people worldwide who are moving into the city each week. The countryside needs the gospel and needs faithful churches. But God also wants Christians to be engaged where people are at, where the gospel can go effect fallen sinners. Remember, the exiles were here in Babylon at first and they were not living in the city, they were on the outskirts. And God actually sends them this letter, in our text, to remind them of their calling - that they might take up roots in the city. Beloved, in God's providence He has moved us closer into the heart of the city that many of us live in. What does it look like to participate in the city? Well, it means that we get to share in the ups and downs of the people around us. It means that we rub shoulders with unbelieving people who don't share the same God as we do, who don't have the same values, and we put ourselves intentionally in places where we're participating in the city God has placed us in. Perhaps that means we, you know, engage in sports in the city or participate in a book club or in community gardening, or maybe get involved in politics or in community service. The list goes on, doesn't it? Perhaps it means in your own home you host neighborhood dinners or activities and you make your home a place of hospitality for strangers and people who are different than you. But even as Christians engage in the common cultural activities, they do so with a radically different motivation. Christians labor, even in the ordinary things with hearts of faith, with desire to do things in accordance with God's word, and ultimately, for His glory. See, Christians and non Christians both build homes. But Christians don't have to use holy lumber or sacred paint. But they build homes, realizing that their strength comes from God and recognizing that unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor do so in vain. Christians and non Christians plant gardens, but the Christian does so with a sense of dependence upon God as the creator, and Sustainer of all things. Christians and non Christians get married and have kids. But Christians recognize their marriages are to be a picture of the gospel, and they raise their kids as children of God's covenant of grace. You see, we participate in the city. But we do so with a different motivation. And this means beloved that we also engage the city and participate in it critically. We're not to assimilate to cultural idols or sin behaviors. Some Christians and even some churches sadly, have lost their saltiness, have lost their unique prophetic witness because they have become just like everyone else in all the wrong ways. Romans 12 verse two, Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

What does this look like? Well, we see actually examples of this in the scriptures. You can see it in the life of Daniel in Babylon, as we heard a couple of sermon series ago from Pastor Greg. Daniel lived in Babylon and he didn't try to turn Babylon into Jerusalem, but he served Babylon in God's name. Daniel was educated in Babylon. Daniel even participated in some of the politics of

Babylon, but he lived there with a sincere devotion to God. And he refused to do those things that were not in accordance with God's word. He lived in Babylon and invested in the city but he never forgot where his true citizenship belonged. That's our call as we participate in the city.

Beloved look at also verse seven, what is God's will for us here, participate, but verse seven, pray and seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it. For in its peace, you will have peace. This highlights the kind of attitude that we should have towards our unbelieving neighbors. God says I want you to pray for the peace of the city. That word for peace is an important one and Hebrew. It's probably one you've heard a couple of times. It's that word shalom. No one word in English captures the richness of this word. It speaks of complete human flourishing in every aspect of who we are mentally, socially, physically, spiritually - in all of these areas of our lives as human beings made in God's image. God wants us to experience peace, shalom. We hear this often in the benediction in Numbers 6: "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and may He give you his peace." But notice how crazy this verses is. God is saying, I just don't want you to be concerned with your own peace and your own flourishing while you're in Babylon. Don't just gather in a holy huddle and think about yourself. But I want you to actually be concerned with Babylon's flourishing. In fact, God says: "In its peace, you will find peace." Isn't that radical? What a unique attitude God is calling his people to have. In Psalm 122 the Jews were comfortable and called to pray these words: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, may they be secure who love you." Now God is saying: "Pray for the peace of Babylon. Pray even for those Babylonians who might have killed your Jewish friends and family as they brought you into captivity. Pray for them. Love your enemies and do good to them." God says. Are these not also the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 verse 44: "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you." This means, beloved, that we are to pray for Branford, for whatever city God has placed this in. We're to pray for our neighborhoods, to pray for our leaders - that they might know God's comprehensive peace in body and soul. In our city, we pray for that Shalom, that peace for the downtrodden and for the poor, for those in the chains of addiction and those in the chains of sin. We even pray for those who oppose us at times, as Paul tells us in Romans 12: 18: "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men." You see here our attitude in the city - we don't pursue our neighbors as opponents that we need to conquer, but as image bearers we are called to love and serve in Jesus's name. And living as an exile in this way means that often we're not very comfortable outside of Jerusalem when we're in Babylon. Often it means we have to inconvenience ourselves we have to execute like Daniel and Esther great wisdom in thorny situations. We have to, you know, meet with people who are different from us and have to reach them for Christ and that has to be sometimes costly to us. Who does that? Who can inconvenience themselves and love people different from them for the sake of seeing them experience God's peace? I know one man. His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus left the glories of heaven, He left his home and crossed over that divide and entered into the City of Man and dwelt among people who were so different from him. Jesus engaged all sorts of people for their good:

the poor, and the rich, men and women, children, those oppressed by demons, and those who were rulers. And often Jesus was misunderstood. He was misrepresented. He was hated by certain people in the city. But he gave his life for his enemies. Jesus came to bring peace between God and man. And he did so when he went to the cross. And he satisfied the wrath of God toward our sins that we might know forgiveness, and peace with God.

And this leads us to our third aspect of how we engage in this city. We participate, we pray, but finally, beloved, we proclaim Christ in the city. We proclaim Christ in the city. See, this comprehensive and lasting peace can only come from Jesus Christ. Christians are not only exiles in the city, but we are also ambassadors for Christ. What's an ambassador? It's someone who belongs to country A, but lives in country B as a representative and spokesperson. In order to be an effective ambassador, that means you have to understand the culture. You have to speak the language. You have to be able to connect with people in that country in meaningful ways. But your values and your interests belong to that country that you come from. And God's word says that we are ambassadors for Christ. In the City of Brantford, we are Christ's ambassadors. We represent his values. We speak his message as we call our neighbors to be reconciled to God through the cross. As Paul went from city to city, the Lord often encouraged him in these things. When he got to Corinth, God said to him in Acts 18 verse nine: "do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. For I have many in this city, who are my people." Here, even in Jeremiah 29, we see much of our Christian calling - the great commandment to love God, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and the Great Commission to seek the peace of our neighbors ultimately by proclaiming Christ, all for the glory of God.

Well finally beloved, as we do this we do this with great hope and with great expectation in our hearts. As we see here really in our concluding point, the third thing from our texts. Not only our unique situation, not only our Christian calling, but notice, beloved, verse 10 through 14, God's plans for our good. The peace and prosperity of Babylon is not ultimate. Israel was not to try to turn Babylon into Jerusalem, because it wasn't their true home. God had better plans for them. Verse 11: "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." Now in Christianity, at least when I was growing up as a new Christian, as a teenager, I saw how often this verse was misrepresented. Maybe you see it all the time in bookstores and on plaques and on different things. Often, it's seen as a verse that just gives a general blessing on all of our ordinary labors. Right? God's plans for good mean, he's going to prosper our business, he's going to bless our marriage, he's going to give us a large home. But the context of this verse is sobering, isn't it? Exile is going to be quite a long time. 70 years. For 70 years, God's people are going to taste His judgment, they're going to be uncomfortable in a foreign land. But God says, I will cause you, I will cause you to return home. God's plans for good mean the exile will one day come to an end, and God will bring his people

back home. Those houses that Israel built in Babylon, those gardens they planted one day, they would walk away from them. They wouldn't be permanent. God's plans for good meant that he was going to bring his exiles home. Beloved, God fulfilled his word. After 70 years, he raised up another pagan ruler, King Cyrus, to deliver his people, to bring them back home. And they were able to come back, they're able to rebuild the temple and its walls and experience a taste - a taste - of the glory restored, but again, because of sin, the land would become polluted. Foreign rulers would again oppress the people of God and even that temporary setup of the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. So where do these plans for our welfare and our security, have their true fulfillment? It's in a person, the answer is in a person, Jesus Christ. He is our peace and our stability. He alone is our hope. John 14, verse 27, Jesus says: "Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world do I give. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Beloved, this morning, it's a wonderful blessing, to have a beautiful new church home. But it is not ultimate. And spiritually speaking, it is just another tent that God has provided for us in our pilgrim journey. The Lord has given, and the Lord can take away. That's true of our church home. That's true of our physical homes. That's true of our health. That's true of everything in this world that we want to find stability in. But our true home in heaven, and our true peace in Christ cannot be taken away. And so God's plans for us, God's future for us is forever secure because of him. And isn't that such good news this morning? Because living in Babylon can sometimes be hard. All of those things we thought were stable today, our home and our health and our finances and our future. We were brought to realize so many times, it's so fragile, it's not stable. But God says my promises are, and your home is, and Christ is stable for you. And so with those early Christians, we confess in Hebrews 13 verse 14: "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come." For now we steward the good gifts that God has blessed us with, including this new building, as we serve the city. But even as we do this, we do it with a holy detachment from the things of this earth because we are pressing on to our true home. Hebrews 11 says: "of Abraham and the patriarchs of old, these all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. But as it is, they desired a better country that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." Beloved, it is the Lord who has moved us into the heart of the city. And he says to us this morning, through this text, make it your home, but don't make it your ultimate home. Because Christ has gone to prepare a place for you. And the place he has provided is a permanent dwelling place of worship in the very presence of Almighty God. And so may we seek the good of the city by participating in it, by praying for it, by proclaiming Christ. But may we do so with hearts that desire that better country and as we longed for, and seek the city that is to come, may we know that God is not ashamed to be called our God? Amen. Let's pray.

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Hallowed be Your name in our lives, and in your church, and in this city that you have placed the sun, May Your kingdom come and Your will

be done on earth as it is in heaven. Glorify Your name among the nations, including our own and help us to be those who worship You, and live as servants of the city that you have placed us in. Lord, hear us and glorify your name in this new season of life. Help us to call upon you in this place from hearts that seek the Lord and desire to do your will. For this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our ascended Lord and our great God and King. Amen.