



SERMON REFLECTION QUESTIONS for the week of June 14, 2020

“What Now?”

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Theme/concept

This is a “special sermon,” meaning it was not previously planned. It speaks to the issues of racial tension and injustice that have risen to a fever pitch in America these past few weeks. How do we respond to this long-simmering crisis? We can avoid temporarily, react defensively, or respond constructively and biblically. The exiles in Jeremiah’s day were in a hostile environment, having lost the promised land. But God called them to “seek the shalom (peace, well-being) of the city.” We will explore how we can pursue kingdom reality where we come together with people of “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9) to show the redemptive, reconciling power of the gospel.

Application

We will seek the peace and well-being of our community by honoring our Lord and loving all our neighbors.

Charge

Seek the peace of the places where God puts you.

Reflections on the sermon

How has the sermon changed your feelings about current issues, and perhaps motivated you to respond biblically—to seek peace in your family or neighborhood, or at school or work?

Passage Background/Context:

In Jeremiah 29, the prophet Jeremiah sends a letter from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon in about 594 BC, eight years before the final fall of Jerusalem. The exiles (and the people still in Judah) were hoping that the deportation would be short. Many prophets were telling the people what they wanted to hear: the prophet Hananiah had proclaimed that God would bring the people back to Jerusalem within two years (Jeremiah 28:1-17). But Jeremiah tells the exiles to ignore the false prophets and repeats his earlier message that the exile will last seventy years. Our passage comes from the beginning of his letter. The exiles are given some revolutionary advice: settle down for the long haul, and seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which God brought them.

3. Did God want the Israelites to keep to themselves during their exile, or were they to be assimilated into the Babylonian culture?
4. In this passage, who would benefit from seeking the city's peace and prosperity? How would they benefit?

Going deeper

1. What does the composition of the early church, including the apostles and early converts, tell us about God's desire for salvation and for the church?
2. In Revelation 7:9, which nations, tribes, and languages will the people come from? If God welcomes these believers before the throne, is there any basis for us not welcoming and accepting "people from all nations, tribes, and languages"?
3. In Joshua 1:6-7, what resources and instructions does God give Joshua as he prepares to enter the promised land? How can we apply these to the challenging situations of our lives?
4. What does responding to problems with faith, hope, and love look like when these three aspects of our responses are rooted in biblical values and teachings?

5. What does Hebrews 12:11-13 tell us about how to move forward when God disciplines us (not only as individuals, but as the church, a nation, or the world), and what does God promise?

6. In Hebrews 12:13, what does the “straight path” refer to, and what is the purpose of marking it out?

7. How can you connect Jeremiah’s letter to Jesus’s greatest command, and the second like it (see Matthew 22:34-40)?

Reflection questions

1. What is the difference between reacting and responding?

2. Why is Psalm 139:23-24 a good place to start when you’re faced with a problem and tempted to avoid it or react defensively? How can it help you think before you act?

3. What are the benefits, if any, of avoiding a problem? What are the costs?

4. What are the benefits, if any, of defensively reacting to a problem? What are the costs?

5. What are the benefits of responding to a problem biblically? What are the costs?

6. Given that today's Jesus-followers are, in a sense, exiles living in a strange land, what does Jeremiah's letter tell us to do? What might that look like in our context?

7. What can you do to seek the well-being of others in your community?

Closing prayer

Pray:

- For courage and strength to respond biblically in difficult or hostile situations
- That each member would mark out a Hebrews 12:13 straight path to help strengthen others
- That we would look to the gospel mandate and the early church examples when shaping our biblical responses to difficult issues
- For an open mind, heart, and hands when recognizing our neighbors and their needs
- For our obedient response to God's discipline, trusting God to yield a peaceful harvest of right living