



Sermon Growth Guide

September 24, 2023

Homeward Bound

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Lead Me Home - Homeward Bound

Jeremiah 31:10-17, 31-34

Key Verse: Jeremiah 31:10

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: "He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd."

Big Idea: God's promise to bring us home fulfills our deepest longings.



Foundations

As much as we have a longing for home, God longs even more for us to be at home with Him. When we began this sermon series, we saw how the Lord prepared a beautiful home for us. In this home we would have unbroken communion with our Creator. We would feast on delights. But we listened to the wrong voice and rebelled. We lost our home.

But as that tragedy unfolded, God made a promise to bring us back to Him (Genesis 3:15) through a redeemer. A promise—a covenant which He has kept.

It is a covenant that God has had to repeat time after time because we keep sinning, and He keeps calling us home. In today's passage God tells us what He is going to do to break the chains of our self-willed lives. He then tells us what the effect will be. There will be joy and mirth. Poverty will be replaced with abundance.

Even the jarring words in verse 15 are not the last word. They describe the deepest grief known to humankind - the grief over the loss of children that cannot be assuaged. Jeremiah tells us that no matter how severe our losses and how deep our grief, life will overcome death.

The old hymn tells us that "grace will lead us home." And it is Jesus Who will lead us home for He is the Way. And no matter how it offends our sense of self-reliance, it is pure gift—just receive it, gratefully.

Understanding God's Word

Read Jeremiah 31:10-17, 31-34

How many times does the verb "will" appear in these verses? *The Cambridge Dictionary* states that "will" is a verb that is "used to talk about what is going to happen in the future especially things you are certain about or things that are planned."

What kind of future is described in these verses? What do you think it means that there is a pattern here in God's speech to us that begins with "I will" followed by "They will?"

Applying God's Word

In *The Mandalorian*, there is a code signified by the catchphrase, "This is the Way." As the story unfolds, we learn that it signifies a code of virtue that Mandalorians must keep rigorously. Isaiah 30:21 tells God's people, "This is the way; walk in it." In verses 33-34, what do we learn of our transformation that enables us to walk in the way of Jesus?

Witnessing God's Word

Read Jeremiah 31:6-7. What are some specific ways in which you can invite others to experience life in Christ, the One Who fulfills our longings? What form can your "singing, shouting, and praising" take?

We are walking through the great story of salvation, God's story, from creation to fall, to redemption in Christ and consummation at the end of time. The big story. We are still in the fall chapter, the wandering chapter, the exile chapter, and we are starting to wonder will we ever get to turn toward home? In the story of the people of God in the Old Testament, two defining events stand out: the Exodus, when God sent Moses to release them from slavery in Egypt with the desert wandering that followed. And the other one is the Exile. After they were in Jerusalem for centuries, God allowed Israel and Judea to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC and they were carried off to Babylon, modern day Baghdad, for about 150 years. Exodus and Exile. Last week we talked about Exodus, not historically so much, but what happens to the heart in the wandering. This week we talk about Exile. When you are in exile, you long for nothing more than to be **Homeward Bound**. Exile.

Abigail and I went to Italy this summer for the second time. The first time was on our honeymoon back in the 1900s. On our honeymoon, we stayed on an island called Elba Island which is famous for being the place where Napoleon Bonaparte was once in exile. And I just want to put it out there, if there ever comes a time when it is necessary to cast me into exile—I'm not expecting it, but should it happen—I just want to keep Elba Island on the top of your mind. Pretty nice place to be in exile. But exile isn't always comfortable. Could you say you have been in exile? Maybe not formally, but have you felt exiled? Maybe you went off to college and things changed at home or your family moved, and you had no way to return to the home you missed. Maybe you got cut out of a friend group. Maybe you were in a job where you were never in the circle. Maybe a marriage failed, and you wound up separated from your own kids. Exile. Longing to return, but there is no return. The real need in exile is not actually to go back, it is to go forward, to know that you are homeward bound. To know there is something out ahead to look forward to.

Jeremiah is the Prophet of Tears. He's the one who wrote Lamentations. He was in touch with his shadow emotions. A big part of that was that God gave Jeremiah the privilege of foresight, the Holy Spirit allowed Jeremiah to see the exile coming, which he then lived through, and foresight to see the end of exile coming, which Jeremiah did not experience. God showed Jeremiah what was coming, and he preached it as forcefully as he could. The people were flirting with false gods. They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless people. You become what you worship. So, God in effect said, "All right. Do what you want. You want to act like these other things are gods? You want to act like money is more powerful than me; you want to act like sexual promiscuity is more satisfying than my love; you want to act like getting drunk or high is better than the ambience of my Holy Spirit; you want to try that. Here you go."

It reminds me of a famous C. S. Lewis quote, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'" God said, "I am bringing a distant nation against you... And when the people ask, 'Why has the Lord our God done all this to us?' you will tell them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.'" (Jeremiah 5:15,19) God's going to make it worse. He cares more about getting you home than making you comfortable. Off to exile they go. Psalm 137 expresses the pain: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Psalms 137:1-4)

Have you ever been so homesick you smelled the letters? Know what I mean? There were only a few times I was that homesick, and they were all courtesy of

Uncle Sam. I'd get a letter from Abigail and take it somewhere quiet and still and smell inside as I opened it, to catch the air of home. Envelopes of light. When you are down so low, God sends envelopes of light. That's what the prophets are. When the people of God were so down they started to doubt that there even was a home, God sent them envelopes of light, messages of hope, not only to remind them, but to inspire them. Not only to turn their hearts back, but to pitch their hopes forward. Yes, there is a home. Yes, there is a place where everyone can belong. We start to wonder in our exile if home even exists, if these promises of God are even real, or, if maybe the world is right, and it would be braver, nobler, to admit that there is nothing to this, there is no satisfaction of our desires, no living water to fill our thirst, no home. Maybe it is braver to stare down the dark, eternal abyss, stoically accept it, and then just squeeze the juice out of whatever time we get. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Aren't you tempted sometimes to forget home?

God sends messengers, like Jeremiah, not just to look back, but to lean forward to the restoration: "The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again.'" (Jeremiah 31:3-4) What will that look like? As we read, "Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'" (Jeremiah 31:10) The whole world will see the Shepherd of God's people come and gather them up again. Hmmm, a Shepherd. "For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they." (Jeremiah 31:11) God will pay the ransom price, the redemption price, the freedom price against the slave bond, to get us out from under the power stronger than us. God will pay the price for us.

"They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord — the grain, the

new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more." (Jeremiah 31:12) Home again. But not without cost. "This is what the Lord says: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'" (Jeremiah 31:15) The gospel writer Matthew remembered this verse when he witnessed the slaughter of the innocents, when Herod had all the boys in Bethlehem killed after Jesus' birth. Matthew remembered how Rachel had wept for her children as she died on the road from Ramah to Bethlehem.

Ultimately it will be the perfect Son of God who gives His life as a ransom, a blood price, to make a new covenant with us. "'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the Lord. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'" (Jeremiah 31:33-34) "All will know me" says the Lord. Now, we are not there yet. There are many yet to know the Lord. Every time Christians gather we need to take a minute to see the empty seats and ask the Lord, "Who should be here? Who needs to be here to worship and know the Lord?" Those two verses are among the most important in the entire Old Testament. A new internal covenant is coming, not external but written in the heart and mind, a personal relationship with God. A renewed relationship. Forgiveness. Redemption. Knowledge of God. Jesus lifted the cup and said, "Behold, a new covenant, sealed in my blood."

Prophets bring us envelopes of light. Not only to remind us of the past, but to point our hope to the future. We think our home longing is nostalgia or a memory

of a beauty we once experienced in the past, but that beauty was only to increase our thirst for the home that is to come. C. S. Lewis said, “These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not yet heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*) Our true home is out in front of us. Prophets remind us of that. I believe God is sending messages to you: little envelopes of light, little coincidences, words of a song that ring like a bell, passages of Scripture that jump off the page and grab you. God still does this. Just when you start to wonder, is God still there? Does God still care? Is God doing anything about all this? Will we ever feel at home? Will my children ever get home to God? Will I make it home? God sends envelopes of light.

Without God, people try to answer these questions in a hundred ways. We all need home. We all need a place where we belong. “Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name.” (Ask an older friend). People want a place to belong. I hear echoes of it over and over. “The nice thing about the climbing community, the nice thing about CityRock, is everybody can jump in. The great thing about Cross Fit is anyone can join the community.” Well, not everybody can throw a tractor tire and not everybody feels comfortable hanging from a rope thirty feet in the air in yoga pants and a climbing harness. “The nice thing about this coffee shop, the great thing about Creek Week, the nice thing about Colorado Springs...” We all wonder. Is there a place where we can all belong? That is our question this week. Start a conversation with a not-yet believer in Christ: “Do you think there is a place where everyone can belong?” There is.

Is there a home? Part of this turn toward redemption in Christ, part of the solution

to the brokenness of sin and the ravages of the fall, part of God’s great salvation story is the opening up of the gospel for all people, the open door to the Kingdom of God for all who would enter. Look again at verse 10, “Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’” (Jeremiah 31:10) You nations. Not just you Hebrews. Not just you children of Abraham. You nations, all peoples, distant coastlands. The Shepherd of God’s people is the Shepherd of all who will come to Him, all who will hear His voice.

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) How will this new covenant happen? Only by the blood of Jesus. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (John 10:14) Any who respond to His voice will enter. “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16) “I think I’m not included. I think my people are not included.” No, this is a home for all people. “I think my sexuality precludes me.” No, in this home are all types of sheep. “I think my past sins are too much.” No, this is a covenant of forgiveness of sins. You will find nothing but sinners within these gates. The home where we are headed is open to all who will call on Jesus Christ. You don’t know who that is. You don’t know who will respond. You never know who will turn and wind up at home with the Lord. Keep declaring, keep offering, keep inviting. Do you think there is a place where everyone can belong? Keep sending envelopes of light, and keep receiving them and sharing them when God sends them to you. Don’t hide God’s gifts of grace. Let others see them. Lift up your heads, exiles. We are homeward bound.