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“Good Things Out of a Bad Place”

Jeremiah 24

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Sometimes the bad circumstances of life are not always bad if God is accomplishing something good. In fact, it's better to be in a bad place with God than to be in a good place without him! Many times, God uses difficult situations to purge us of things we need to get rid of in our lives or to grow us in ways we need to mature. This was the case with the Jews, and that's why God sent them to Babylon for seventy years. Although they saw their circumstances as being bad, God saw them as being good, because he was accomplishing his good purposes in their lives. God works in a similar way with us, and Pastor Gary shares the biblical perspective of good things coming from a bad place in our lives in today's message.

Historical Background

1. King Nebuchadnezzar besieged villages, towns and cities in Judah for approximately 20 years.
2. The last three kings of Judah were Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin (aka Jeconiah – son of Jehoiakim), and Zedekiah (Jehoiachin's uncle, whose name was Mattaniah, before King Nebuchadnezzar changed it).
3. There were three deportations of Jews to Babylon.
 - a. 606BC – King Jehoiakim, plus Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
 - b. 597BC – King Jehoiachin, and Ezekiel.
 - i. [Jeremiah 24:1](#) – *“After Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and the officials, the craftsmen and the artisans of Judah were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...”*
 - ii. Details about the capture of Jehoiachin are found in [2 Kings 24:8-17](#).

- c. 586BC – Nebuchadnezzar finally conquered Jerusalem and both the city and the Temple were destroyed.

Two Baskets Of Figs

- 4. **Jeremiah 24:1** – *“... the LORD showed me two baskets of gifts placed in front of the temple of the LORD. One basket had very good figs, like those that ripen early; the other basket had very poor figs, so bad they could not be eaten. Then the LORD asked me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ ‘Figs,’ I answered. ‘The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so bad they cannot be eaten.’ ”*
 - a. The baskets of figs were brought to the Temple by the people of Judah as first fruits or fruit of the harvest offerings.
 - b. The offerings were given unto the Lord, but they were dedicated as provisions for the priests.
 - i. **Numbers 18:13a** – *“All the land’s firstfruits that they bring to the LORD will be yours.”*
- 5. The baskets of figs do not represent good people and bad people, because all of Judah was guilty before God for adopting the pagan practices and worshipping the pagan gods of the neighboring nations.
 - a. Those who were faithful to God, like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others, were swept up in the captivity and deportation, so this story is not about good people and bad people.
- 6. **Jeremiah 24:5-7** – *“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.’ ”*
 - a. The good figs represent the people who have been taken captive and exiled to Babylon.
 - b. Pastor Gary said: “The good fruit, bad fruit of this story represents the good that will come out of being disciplined by God or the bad that will result for those who resist [God’s discipline]. That’s the lesson of the figs [in this story]. ... What was so ironic in all of this [was] the way that God referred to the exiles as good, [being] the good that was going to come [in] their lives, and the bad fruit, [being] those who would stay behind. The irony of this is that those who were taken captive and deported to Babylon... looked at their circumstances and said, ‘This is bad!’ God [said], ‘No, this is good.’ ... The irony is [that] those who were not deported [like] King Zedekiah and the others

who stayed [behind] they [took] pride in themselves [believing] that they were better than the exiles because [they got to stay in Judah]. ... They thought to themselves, 'This is good!' And God said, 'No, this is bad.' ... The issue at hand was not where they lived but who they were living for. ... [Sometimes] God has to get us out of our comfort zones so we can figure that out... so we will finally acknowledge that we are living for him. ... Sometimes we find ourselves in less than desirable places; places in life where we don't want to be, that can be circumstantial, [relational or a variety of things... and we think this is bad, but could it be that God sees it as a good place for you, because he is accomplishing his purposes in your life? ... Every bad place is not actually bad if it is producing in you something good. ... Being in a bad place with God is far better than being in a good place without him! ... [The people] who were deported to Babylon would learn quickly how to cry out to God and how to draw near to him. ... While the people who remained in Judah, unchallenged and unchanged, without regard for God, would quickly find out that's a bad place to be. [What] we sometimes think are bad circumstances, could actually be God working out his good purposes in our lives. Maybe we've got some growing up to do? Maybe there are some things that God needs to strip from our lives that we won't really [understand] unless we are moved into a place [that's right where God wants us to be, so he can grow us closer to him]."

- i. Those who were deported were stripped of everything, including: being taken from their homes, separated from their families and friends, everything that was familiar or comfortable.
 - ii. **Romans 8:28** - *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*
- c. The good news for the exiles was that God was going to bring them back to Judah, which is the evidence for the fact that God's discipline is always wrapped in grace.

Four "I Will" Statements

7. **Jeremiah 24:6-7** - *"My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land, I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."*
8. **Jeremiah 24:6** - *"My eyes will watch over them for their good..."*
 - a. The exiles may have been far away from Judah, but they were never far away from the watch-care of the Lord.
 - b. Pastor Gary said: "Nothing about our circumstance goes unnoticed by God."

He watches over us. We might feel like we're distant from him, but he will never leave us nor forsake us. ... You may perceive what you think is God's silence but do not misunderstand, [because that] is not his disinterest. ... God cares about everything we go through and he sees everything concerning you and me."

- i. **Deuteronomy 31:6** - *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified... for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*
- ii. **Psalms 121:7-8** - *"... [The LORD] will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."*

9. **Jeremiah 24:6** - *"... I will bring them back to this land."*

- a. Pastor Gary said: "[God didn't have to make a promise to bring them back], but he always goes the extra mile and he always goes beyond what we deserve; that's what's called grace! ... God always holds out hope for those who turn to him. ... There's always the promise of restoration with [God]!"
 - i. **Psalms 145:13b** - *"The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made."*

10. **Jeremiah 24:6** - *"... I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them."*

- a. Pastor Gary said: "The idea behind building and planting speaks of growth and development... God promised that out of this experience would come a deeper walk with him, a more mature relationship with him, [and] a [surer] foundation in their lives. Something happens in our lives when we endure the [difficulties] of life and the discipline of God."
 - i. **James 1:2-4** - *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

11. **Jeremiah 24:7** - *"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."*

- a. Pastor Gary said: "You can summarize verse seven in one word; relationship. That's what God wants. He [wanted] relationship with them and he wants relationship with us, [and] he longs to have relationship with us. ... The ultimate good of every bad circumstance of our lives is that we might know him better. ... God has a way of seeing us through those things in order to bring us out [to] the other side, [for us] to be able to say, 'I know him better, [and] I understand his love for me at a deeper level. Our lives become more surrendered [and] more mature, because when we are faithful to turn to him, he stands ready to always receive us [and] forgive us. ... He is accomplishing

his good purposes in every bad circumstance of [our lives].”

- i. [Jeremiah 29:13-14](#) - “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,*’ declares the LORD...”
- ii. [Ephesians 1:17](#) - “*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Jeremiah 24](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 24:1](#) concerning the figs not representing good people and bad people. (See #4 and #5 above)
3. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 24:5-7](#) and spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s remarks. (See #6 above)
4. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they’ve been in a difficult season of life and how the Lord brought them through.
5. What are some of the ways the truth of [Romans 8:28](#) has been demonstrated in your life?
6. Read and discuss the four “I Will” statements in Pastor Gary’s outline. (See #8 through #11 above)
 - a. *“My eyes will watch over them for their good...”*
 - i. Read and discuss [Deuteronomy 31:6](#) and [Psalm 121:7-8](#).
 - b. *“... I will bring them back to this land.”*
 - i. Read and discuss [Psalm 145:13b](#).
 - c. *“... I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.”*
 - i. Read and discuss [James 1:2-4](#).
 - d. *“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.”*
 - i. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 29:13-14](#) and [Ephesians 1:17](#).
7. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984)