



February 10, 2019
“Restoration”
Jeremiah 29 – 31
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Sin separates us from God, and we feel estranged and distant from him, but God is a God of restoration. Like a skilled craftsman who takes an old piece of furniture and restores it to its original beauty is our Lord who takes our old, sinful lives and makes us brand new! Jeremiah 29 describes the hopeful future God had in store for the Jewish people who had sinned and rebelled against him, and it’s a reminder for us that he does the same for us too. After David had sinned, he prayed to God, *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.”* ([Psalm 51:12](#)). David understood that God restores broken lives for his glory, and this the theme of Pastor Gary’s teaching today.

Historical Background

1. Restoration is God’s specialty!
 - a. Webster’s defines restoration as “bringing back to a former position or condition or an improved condition.
 - b. In a biblical sense, the definition of restoration would be when God leads people back to him who are estranged or distant from him, or when God forgives sin and gives hope.
2. From 586BC to 606BC, King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Judah (Southern kingdom).
 - a. [Jeremiah 29](#) is actually a letter Jeremiah wrote to the thousands of Jewish exiles, who were taken 1,000 miles to Babylon, most of whom would never return to their homeland.
 - b. Jeremiah’s message from God to the exiles was to go about the business of establishing their lives in Babylon, because that was going to be the way God was going to discipline them over their rebellion against God and their worship of idols and pagan gods.

- c. The people of Judah were exiled in Babylon 70 years.
- d. We read that God called King Nebuchadnezzar his servant three times in the book of Jeremiah.
 - i. **Jeremiah 25:9** - “ ‘I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the LORD...”
 - ii. **Jeremiah 27:6** - “Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...”
 - iii. **Jeremiah 43:10** - “... This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...’ ”

3. Pastor Gary said: “Oftentimes God will often give us what we want in order for us to realize what we need. ... What the people wanted was to worship false gods. [So, God gave what they really wanted! And God let them spend 70 years in a place in which they worshiped all of the false gods.] And it was only then, when they got what they really wanted, that they realized what they needed, and what they needed was the Lord. And it would take Babylon to make them realize that. This is true in our lives as well, friends. Some of you are not in a good place. You know it and God knows it. You know that you are not right with God and you are not in a good place. And the fact of the matter is it’s possible that the reason you’ve arrived at that bad place is because you’ve gotten what you wanted. ... But it’s only there that you realize that what you wanted is not what needed, and it wasn’t until you got what you wanted that you realized what you really needed, because what you wanted wasn’t really ‘all that’! ... For a season [the Lord] gives us just enough rope to realize, ‘Man, I’m hanging myself, I really need to run back to the Lord!’ So this is the process God will sometimes use to get us to the place where we finally realize [that we need him].”

4. Pastor Gary said: “What I really love about God in this whole story is that his mercy is demonstrated on the front end and the back end. ... [If they returned to God, they wouldn’t need] to go to Babylon. They didn’t have to be carried off as captives. [God] sent prophet after prophet after prophet [to] warn them in advance. So, God’s mercy was on the front end, [because] God was saying over and over and over again through the prophets, ‘If you’ll turn to me the Babylonians [won’t] need to come. If you turn to me, they don’t need to come. If you don’t turn to me, they’re coming.’ ... [They] didn’t heed his warning; they rejected the word of the prophet, they rejected God, and so the Babylonians came. ... [The] beauty of God is that not only is his mercy evident in the front end, but his mercy is evident in the back end of this story, because even after the 70 years, it’s not like God has ‘washed his hands’ of them. He [was] still going to display his mercy to them by bringing them back and restoring them! ... What is so amazing to me is that they have barely gotten over to Babylon, when he told Jeremiah to write [this] letter! ... [God] wanted them to know that there’s still mercy on the other end of [being exiled.]

Here's why this whole story is important to us. We need God's mercy too."

God Thinks About Us

5. **Jeremiah 29:10-11a** - *"This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD..."*
 - a. A literal translation is that the Lord is saying, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you."
6. The Lord wanted them to know that he hadn't forgotten about them, even though they had forsaken him and sinned against him.
7. Pastor Gary said: "Even though they had been banished from the land of Judah and sent over to Babylon, they had not been banished from the heart and mind of God. God still loved them and thought about them and [had] a plan for them. ... You [might] be here today and you might feel far from God because you've sinned against him and you know you're not right with God and you know that you are not in a good place with God, but I just want you to know that you are heavy on his heart and mind. He still thinks about you. He still has thoughts toward you. You are near and dear to the heart of God. God never loves our sin, but he still loves us and he separates what we do from who we are, and he loves us enough that he won't abandon us. ... Of course his heart is broken when we sin. Of course he's grieved over [sin]. [Remember, God sent his children to Babylon] as part of his disciplining them and purging them of idolatry and bringing them to a place of greater surrender, but he never forgot them, and he never forgets about us, because we are still near and dear to his heart and mind."
8. **Psalm 139:17-18a** - *"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand."*
 - a. The literal translation of the Hebrew *"to me"* would be "for me."
 - b. We should read this verse: "How precious for me are your thoughts. How precious concerning me are your thoughts."
9. **Psalm 8:4** - *"[What] is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"*

God Is For Us

10. **Jeremiah 29:11b** - *"... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*
 - a. The Hebrew word for *"prosper"* is shalom, which means peace.

11. Pastor Gary said: “Let me bring some clarity to [this verse] because over the years some people have done damage to the text, because some people have Westernized this verse. Whenever people see the word “*prosper*” they instantly think that God wants to make everybody rich. ... That’s not what [God] is saying here. ... The Bible is true and because [it is, we need to make sure that is true] no matter where you teach it, to whom you teach it, or what generation you teach it to, because God’s Word is relevant to every language, nation, tribe, race, creed, culture, and generation. [We need to read this and figure out whether or not it applies to all people, at all times, and all places]. ... God wants his overarching peace for [our lives]. He’s not promising [us] a new car! ... What he’s saying is here transcends material things. What he’s saying here is that ‘I want a peace that passes all understanding. I want you to have my overwhelming goodness and favor expressed to you through my peace in your life.’ ... Whenever we have this overwhelming peace of God in our lives [that’s] better than anything in our [lives].”
- a. [John 14:27](#) – *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*
12. Pastor Gary said: “When God is disciplining us it’s easy to think that God is out to get us! ... There’s a difference between punishment and discipline. God disciplines those whom he loves. ... When we come through the discipline of God, we are better off for it, and we can experience a greater measure of his peace.”
- a. [Hebrews 12:11](#) – *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*
13. Pastor Gary said: “It’s easy to think that God is done with [us]. ... When God says [that he has a ‘*hope and a future*’ for us, he’s telling us that] there’s a future after failure. ... [This] promise is for anyone. ... If he says [this] to his own people who have rebelled against him and worshiped idols and sacrificed their children in the process... that’s there’s a hope and a future, don’t you think there’s a hope and a future for us, regardless of what we might have done?”
- a. Two examples of a future after failure would be David and Peter.

God Is Near Us

14. [Jeremiah 29:12-14](#) – *“ ‘Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried*

you into exile.’ ”

15. Pastor Gary said: “God is only a prayer away. He is near to us. ... Sometimes it’s easy for us to think that there’s such a great distance between us and God. ... [Sin] creates the distance, but listen, God is only a prayer away. That distance can be bridged through Christ... because God is a God of restoration.”

God Wants Repentance And Responsibility

16. Pastor Gary said: “[God] wanted [the Jews] to repent and own their own sin and not blame anybody else. ... Repent means that you are sorry about your sin and you turn from your sin and turn to God. ... As for responsibility, he wants us to stop blaming other people for our sin. ... This is all we have to do. [If] you really want to experience restoration from God, [then] get right with him, and that comes by repentance and taking responsibility for what [you] do.”
17. **Jeremiah 31:18–19** – *“I have surely heard Ephraim’s moaning: ‘You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.’ ”*
- They felt sorrow and pain of their sin and they felt conviction for their sin.
 - Acts 3:19** – *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...”*
18. **Jeremiah 31:27–30** – *“ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,’ declares the LORD. ‘In those days people will no longer say, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” ‘Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes – his own teeth will be set on edge.’ ”*
- Pastor Gary said: “Another way of saying this is, ‘My parents have eaten something sour, and I experience the tartness of it.’ What they were meaning by that saying was, because [their] parents did something, the result was that [they] felt the consequences. ... [Their] parents really were to blame for the sour taste in [their mouths]. ... We are living in a day when there is diminishing responsibility. Very few people take responsibility for their actions. We hear more blame and excuses than we do words like: ‘That was my fault’ or ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘I take responsibility.’ ... The environment that [we] grow up in does have an impact and can shape people. I’m not denying that. What I am saying, however, is if you really understand what a relationship

with Christ is, [and] when you are born again, and Jesus Christ comes into your life – with all due respect to how you may have been shaped growing up – God reshapes you and makes all things new. And God takes your life and in the process of the miracle of restoration, [he] takes the old grimy self that you used to be and makes you new in Christ. ... When we understand our new identity in Christ, then we can stop blaming other people.”

- i. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) - *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*
 - b. Pastor Gary said: “I totally believe the next statement I’m about to make. The power of your spiritual heritage is greater than the influence of your physical parentage. I believe that with all of my heart.”
19. [1 Peter 5:10-11](#) - *“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Jeremiah 29:1-14](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss the definition of the word restoration. (See #1 above)
3. Allow the people in your group to share examples of times when they’ve felt like they had been banished/exiled by God. (See #2a - 2c above)
4. Read [Jeremiah 25:9](#); [27:6](#); and [43:10](#) and talk about the fact that God used Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument of discipline to the Jews who had rebelled against him. (See #2d above)
5. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s remarks concerning the fact that God gave the Jews what they wanted, and it was only after they got what they wanted, that they realized that God was what they needed. (See #3 above)
6. In what ways have you seen the mercy of God on the front end and the back end, as Pastor Gary described it, concerning his never-ending desire to restore people? (See #4 above)
7. In what ways have you felt that God had forgotten you? (See #5 through #7 above)
8. Read and discuss [Psalm 139:17-18a](#) and [Psalm 8:4](#). (See #8 and #9 above)

9. When you consider the fact that God is for you, how does that change your understanding of who he is, even when you face difficult situations/trials? (See #10 above)
10. Spend time reading Pastor Gary's comments about the way the word "*prosper*" has been misunderstood. (See #11 above)
11. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they believed they were being disciplined by the Lord. (See #12 and #13 above)
12. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 29:12-14](#), and Pastor Gary's remarks. (See #14 and #15 above)
13. Share times when you've repented from and taken responsibility for your sin against the Lord and others. (See # 16 through #18 above)
14. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 31:27-30](#). (See #18 above)
15. What was your reaction to Pastor Gary's statement about physical parentage and spiritual heritage? (See #18b above)
16. How will Scripture and this message from Pastor Gary change the way you feel about your relationship with the Lord?
17. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.