

RESTORED**Jeremiah 31:1-14**

INTRO: When my brothers and I had our painting businesses one of the most rewarding parts of that work was transforming a house from a worn down has-been to the beautiful home it could be. In those days, aluminum and vinyl siding and trim were just coming into use, so frame houses almost always had wood siding that needed to be scraped, sanded, and coated with primer before they got their final coat of whatever top-coat the owner wanted. A number of times we even had to redeem houses from overgrown vines, trees, and brambles before we could begin the prep work. These days we would pull out our phone and take before and after photos so the world could see what we were so proud of – like this proud and timely restoration project. Alas, we didn't even have ready cameras back then to take a photo or two of those homes as we stood back and feasted our eyes on the beautiful fruit of our labors. All we could do was marvel at our handiwork as we looked at what we had restored and rest on the memories of our good work.

Keith Crone takes a similar satisfaction in taking what has been so meaningful and full of memories in his life and restoring them to a former glory. Since he retired a couple years ago he has not allowed the grass to grow under his feet. First there were projects to do around his house and he quickly conquered them. Then he got down to what he really loves – restoring tractors, implements and other farm related equipment. He has already moved on to a new project, but last week he finished this.

Let Keith Crone narrate the next 10 slides and have Sheila advance them when he's ready.

As you can see, restoration is a labor of love for Keith. It is for God too. Beginning in Jeremiah 30 the prophet recounts God's plans to bring his people back to their homeland and into right relationship with himself. The chapter ends with these strident verses.

See, the storm of the Lord

will burst out in wrath,

a driving wind swirling down

on the heads of the wicked.

The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back

until he fully accomplishes

the purposes of his heart.

In days to come

you will understand this. Jeremiah 30:23-24 (NIV)

It's a picture of the meaning of the writer of Hebrews who wrote . . . *the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.* "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?" Hebrews 12:6-7. In other words, just like any good parent, God loves his people too much to leave them in their filth. As a matter of fact he promises to bring them out of that into the kind of restoration we find in our text for today. Listen, (Read Jeremiah 31:1-14)

The gist of this is the grace of the wilderness wanderings will result in the ingathering of the scattered. The wilderness wanderings seemed like an obstacle, but instead they were an opportunity to be restored.

First . . .

God's favor is what brings us out of the wilderness.

- In 1 Kings 12 record how the people of Israel had been bitterly split into two separate nations after the death of Solomon. These two countries, Israel and Judah even fought each other from time to time. They were already weakened by the dissipation of being split – but then they further ravaged one another by infighting. The worst part of this was the fact that they were divided in worship as well as they no longer worshiped together in the Temple in Jerusalem, but took part in pagan worship in place like Bethel and Dan. Their fall was complete and it made them weaker when outside nations attacked. In the end Israel was conquered first and then Judah fell to invaders. Further, as we saw last week, the best of the best of Judah were carried off to Babylon.
- Looking back at Holy History and to the Exodus wanderings of 40 years in the wilderness, God's promise is this: the divided people, who had been conquered would be brought back to their homeland and would be united as they returned. There was a silver lining in this present exodus – they would live, learn, and return. The rift between God and his lost people will be healed and they would enjoy restoration.

- The prodigal is still God’s child. The wanderer is welcomed home. God doesn’t give up on us. He’s there waiting for us to come in from our wilderness traveling. If there is anyone who can know, God knows that we are far from his ideal for us – but he is banking on a future purity of a rebuilt Israel. He even refers to Israel as Virgin Israel (v 4b) – his people will be so restored and they will make music and dance in peace. That’s a promise to take to the bank.
- What I love about this, especially in verse 3 is that it shows how God in the Old Testament is the same loving, merciful God of the New Testament who love the world so much that he gave his one and only Son that whoever would believe in him would have eternal life. Listen to it again, “*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.* (3b) This is our loving God who wants humanity restored. His love is everlasting. He never didn’t love us. God loves you. I can look at every window on this computer screen and can speak the irrefutable truth to every one of you – God loves you! Not a one of you can deny it – you can try, but it will be to no avail – GOD LOVES YOU!
- There is a great homecoming in the offing. They had been told to thrive where they were in captivity. They were to build houses, plant vineyards, marry, have kids, and pray for the prosperity of their captors. God knows his people have suffered in exile, but now they would come home and they would prosper in the same way in the homeland. Ruined cities would be rebuilt, farming would be revived, there would be worship in Zion, and great rejoicing.
- It’s time to come home. . .

The scattered will be gathered

- The joy is almost palpable, *Sing with joy for Jacob, shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, “Lord Save your people, the remnant of Israel.”* Jeremiah 31:7. No matter where the wilderness wanderings took them, he will find them and bring them home. Like a shepherd, he will bring them home. (v 10). *See, I will bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor.* Jeremiah 31:8. Not just the fit and whole will come back, but everyone. This is what it is to be restored.
- The homecoming isn’t without requirements though – repentance is necessary. Verse 9 says *They will come with weeping, they will pray as I bring them back.* This return isn’t an entitlement – it’s a gift from a gracious Father who has deemed their exile complete. In other words, it’s something that is not to be taken for granted. What good is restoration if you don’t own up to what you’ve been restored from? What have you learned? You’re bound to find yourself falling back into the same thing that got you there in the first place.
- The gathering will restore Israel to the Promised Land it had been when Moses led them out of Egypt hundreds of years before. The fields would wave with a harvest of grain, there would be fresh olive oil and new wine. The words in verse 12 almost sound like the old description of a land flowing with milk and honey. It will be a paradise. God will turn mourning into gladness. There will be comfort and joy.
- The last words of verse 14 are . . . *and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the Lord.* What the Lord declares, happens! The Lord has declared, my people will be restored.

Conclusion: Last week I compared the exile of the people of Judah to Babylon to our exile of sorts in the Covid-19 quarantine. Truthfully, our own situation is a far cry from that 70 year travail. We get to stay in our own homes, they never saw their homes, and, in many cases, their loved ones, ever again. But still, our exile is a wake-up call for us as God’s people in the same way it was for God’s people Jeremiah was addressing.

What is it God has for you here in this talk this morning?

Are you in the wilderness? If so, he’s calling you home. It’s time for the prodigal’s far-off wanderings to be over. Come home! Be restored.

Are you standing at the frontier looking across into the Promised Land and wishing you were good enough to set foot into that beautiful place? You aren’t. No one is. But God says, “Come on in!” His Son made it possible. Are you weeping? Good. That means you know what it took for that invite to be possible for you to be restored.

Are you in the New Jerusalem, enjoying the dancing and timbrels, fresh pressed olive oil and new wine, and the joy and celebration? Good! You’ve been restored. Even in your celebration, make sure you notice the ones who are wandering in from the wilderness. Help them along to restoration.

It’s God’s plan for his Creation to be restored. Amen.

