

*“Until Then ...” (How to Live Until Your Situation Improves)*  
Jeremiah 29:4-14

Have you ever made this statement: I can't wait until...? I can't wait until I'm out of debt. I can't wait until I feel better. I can't wait until I can get on top of my attitude ... until I get back in shape. I can't wait until I can get back to work ... the economy bounces back ... I can take a vacation ... I can go to church. I can hug my friends ... I can grieve my loved ones ... they develop a vaccine ... I can't wait until things get back to normal!

But we know the old normal is gone. Something new will take its place. And our faithful God is sovereignly ruling over the coming days as well. But we find ourselves still in a time of uncertainty ... a time of disconnect ... a time of countless, unique challenges – asking, praying, *“When, Lord, will our situation improve?”*

What does God want us to do when we find ourselves in those “until then” situations? [P] We find one of these situations in Jer. 29. Look at v. 1: *“This is the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile ...”* These people were wondering, “What do we do until this exile is over?” God gave them an answer. And these principles still apply to us today. Let's take a look at them:

**1. Until then, get God's perspective on your situation.** V. 4: *“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.”* Who carried the Israelites into captivity? It was God! God put them in Babylon for a reason. This is one of the difficult aspects of believing in the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God means that God knows, allows, and sometimes even sends trials into our lives. And that's why it is imperative that we get God's perspective on our situation.

In the book of Esther, we find the Jewish people *still* in exile in Babylon, now under the rule of King Xerxes. An edict goes out that in effect gives his commissioners license to gather young women to become part of the king's harem, and that the king could then choose one to be his queen. We then meet a Jew named Mordecai and his cousin whom he has raised as his own child because she had no living parents – her name is Esther. Esther was one of the young women to be summoned, and after many months of preparations she is presented to the king. More than any other, Esther wins the king's favor and is crowned queen.

Later, the king elevates one of his nobles, Haman, to one of the highest positions and the people were commanded to kneel to honor him. Mordecai refuses because such reverence belonged solely to the Lord. Haman finds out, becomes enraged, but wants to take it out not only on Mordecai, but seeks the annihilation of all the Jewish people in the whole kingdom! Haman convinces the king it is not in his best interest to tolerate the Jewish people whose beliefs and customs are so different, and entices him further by offering an incredible sum of silver to the royal treasury to support his cause of genocide. The king says keep your money but do with the people as you please. Dispatches are sent out throughout the land with orders to annihilate all Jews on a single designated day. When the Jews learn of this, they weep, wail, fast and pray.

Mordecai asks Esther to go to the king and plead for her people. But Esther knows that if she goes to the king without being summoned, it could mean her death. Then comes the pivotal moment in the book. In chapter 4, verse 14, Mordecai sends word to Esther: *“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”*

Esther sends this reply to Mordecai: *“Go, gather together all the Jews and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”*

(4:14-16) In her people’s most desperate hour, Esther fasted and prayed. She sought the Lord’s sovereign hand. Long story short, Esther acts in faith, her people are delivered, and God is glorified. All this because Esther and Mordecai chose not to despair, but trust in God’s perspective on their situation – His sovereign power and steadfast love.

A right perspective does not take away our hardships; but it does give meaning to them. Someone recently wrote to me – *“I am confident that God doesn’t ask us to do anything He won’t prepare us for, and that He has gone before this pandemic preparing ways for us and providing the means for us to do His work.”* ... God’s perspective.

The death of Jesus on the cross is the greatest example of divine perspective. His death seemed so useless – so pointless. To his first followers, his death seemed to be a defeat. But from God’s perspective, his death offered hope to all the world. From God’s perspective, his death offered eternal life. [Pause] Perspective is important.

**2. Until then, get productive where you are.** Sometimes we blame our situation for what is lacking in our lives: I’ll be able to do more for God when things get straightened out at home. I’ll start sharing my faith when I am more equipped. I’ll start loving my neighbor as myself when things out there get back to normal. But as one pastor so vividly put it, *“The problem with excuses is that they’re like armpits. Everyone’s got a couple and they usually stink!”* [Pause]

Listen to what God told His people in vs. 5-6: *“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and*

*daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it.” Instead of blaming their situation, God wanted them to transform their situation.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an example of a man who transformed his situation. He was a German theologian who was arrested by Hitler’s Gestapo in 1943. He wrote one of the classics of Christian literature, *The Cost of Discipleship*. While Bonhoeffer was in prison, he changed the environment of the prison and got productive where he found himself. Someone once said of him: *“Bonhoeffer greatly inspired all those who came in contact with him. He even inspired his guards with respect, some of whom became so much attached to him that they smuggled out of prison his papers and poems written there, and apologized to him for having to lock his door after the round in the courtyard.”*

Sometimes we look at our circumstances, faced with so many limitations, and we prematurely conclude, “There is nothing I can do here; it’s an impossible situation.” Consider all those who changed the lives of others while in the confines of a prison cell or a concentration camp, a nursing home or a hospital bed. “But I’m restricted by social distancing.” But you can be a prayer warrior ... call a friend ... write a note ... make some masks ... deliver some groceries. We can be productive wherever we are.

**3. Until then, do not listen where faith is lacking.** What else did God tell His people? *“Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD (vs. 8-9).* The mystical and spiritual advisors in Babylon did not speak for the Lord God Almighty. They simply spoke what the people wanted to hear: “Don’t worry, this exile won’t last long; you’ll be back in Jerusalem in no time.” Their faith was not genuine; nor was what they offered the people genuine. In the

midst of empty promises and counterfeit dreams, faith in the one true God was lacking.

A prime example of where faith was lacking is when Moses sent 12 spies to check out the Promised Land. They came back with glowing reports. They spoke of its fruit, its prosperity. However, ten of the spies concluded, “We can’t take it. The people are giants. They will overcome us.” Only two of the spies remembered the promise of the Lord – Joshua and Caleb. They put their faith in the fact that their God was bigger than any enemy, any situation, any problem. They took God as His Word – His ever-faithful Word.

Because faith was lacking in the ten, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness until an entire generation came and went. *But*, for the two who trusted in the Lord, their “*until then*” season did reach its desired end – they were able to enter the Promised Land. If they had listened to the majority report, they would have been defeated as well – just like the exiles in Babylon who listened to the deceitful dreams of diviners, instead of the promise of the Lord.

We too must be careful not to buy into lies, however convincing they may seem. We must not become distracted, discouraged, or disheartened by voices lacking faith. Instead, we need to remember the One who is all-powerful & makes good on His promises.

**4. Until then, listen to God’s voice.** *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, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (10-11).*

These verses reveal at least two principles. Principle #1: ***Listen to God because He is more concerned with obedience than comfort.*** If God wanted His people to be comfortable, He would never have allowed them to spend 70 years in Babylon. Rick Warren put it this way: “*God’s ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but*

*character development.*” Sometimes, God allows us to spend time in a desert to build our character as we surrender in obedience.

When Jesus went to the cross, he displayed perfect obedience to the will of the Father: *“Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!”* (Phil. 2:6-8). And verse 5 says that *“Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”* – humble and obedient. Jesus trusted in the Father even in the most difficult of circumstances. And that is why we can as well.

Principle #2: ***Listen to God because He knows your situation.*** Verses 11-13 tend to be our favorite, so let’s hear them again: *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 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”* (vs. 11-13)

The Lord has just told His people: You are in a time of waiting – a long time of waiting. Don’t be in a hurry to get out of it. But know that when the time comes, I will be the one to lead you out of it. Why? Because I know the plans I have for you.” That is the God we serve! The God who gives us hope & a future – a certain hope & a forever future!

And so we learn that our time of displacement – in this new place that is strange, foreign, uncomfortable, and uncertain – does not last forever. God promises it. And He always makes good on His promises!

There is one more thing we are to be doing in our time of waiting – the most important thing. Did you catch it there at the end? Our God promises to hear us; He promises that we will experience Him in our midst. When? How? When we call on Him,

come to Him, pray to Him, and seek after Him with all of our hearts. As we wait “until then” ... will you seek after Him right now? [P]

I want close with a story about a young man named Daniel Ritchie. Daniel was born without arms. But he has not allowed his disability to slow him down. Daniel was called into ministry at the age of 16. He said that when he put his faith in Jesus, Jesus changed his life and gave him a confidence that he never had before. Daniel often tells people, “God had a purpose in making me this way. He has gotten me this far and He won’t forsake me now!” His message to the rest of us: *No matter what you have to face – even when things don’t go as we would’ve planned – God is still Lord over it all.*

Daniel is an example of one who has chosen to *live with God’s perspective* ... knowing that his limitations cannot keep him from *being productive* ... and instead of listening to voices lacking faith, He *listens to the voice that informs His faith*. And because of all this, he does not live his life waiting *“until then.”* He trusts in the God who is using him *right now*. May we live likewise.