

Sermon #2 - Lange (Jeremiah) - PRA628  
"Preparing for the NEXT". - Jeremiah 52: 31-34

*This Sermon was preached for an installation for one of our pastors who accepted a call to his new congregation shortly before the SIP order in CA. A very sparsely attended installation was held which was broadcast to his congregation. A public celebration is to follow.*

Dear people at Bethany and brother Phil, all of you have been preparing for "the NEXT" for some time. Waiting upon God's timing has not always been pleasing, but we know that we have a God of anchored hope. You, Bethany, have watched and prayed, looking for and desiring the right man whom God has called to lead, feed, and walk beside you into what God has NEXT for Bethany Lutheran Church and School. You, Pastor Phil, have been living into many callings in the past months and years: (Executive leader, Interim pastor - twice, father, grandfather, husband, pastoral coach ...); however the next professional calling, if God would grant one, has been elusive. Waiting and watching for what comes next can be anxious and fearful, and overwhelming. But for those who are called to be the people of God, and who dwell with his identity and covenant blood sprinkled upon them, the NEXT is always approached with hope.

The calling of a pastor into the life of a congregation and the community that it affects is centered around the very cleansing and holy word of God and its power. Calling people to repentance, (destroying and overthrowing strongholds), and to heal; Breaking down unrepentant barriers and to build up with Gospel power; Plucking up that which is sown as evil and planting the loving truth of our Lord Jesus.

Some of t this work doesn't sound like much fun, does it? In fact it can be overwhelming! For Jeremiah, in whose book we find our text for today, his prophetic calling often brought him pain. He loved the people to whom he had been sent, but they would not respond, and when they did respond, it was often against him. In Jeremiah's book and ministry there is an abundance of challenging prophetic words and unheeded warnings to turn back to Yahweh.

Twenty-six years ago, many in America went to the cinema to see a movie called *Schindler's List*. The movie was shot in black and white. For me, this was a blessing, the horrors of movie itself would have been too graphic in color. Many movie goers found themselves at the edge of emotional endurance as they viewed the story of oppression, destruction, and persecution as well as the tension of those who sought to deceive the authorities so that some might be redeemed. When I felt like I couldn't take it any more, there was an interlude of calm and hope inserted into the movie. In Jeremiah's book we also find nuggets of God's hope and love for his people and Jeremiah himself sprinkled throughout his book. Our text found in Chapter 52 is no exception to this rule. When it seems that Jeremiah's book will end with an historic recounting that will only be a downer listing total destruction; the sweet and fulfilling promises of God rescue and remind us that our God is about hope. He is about a NEXT that brings a future for his beloved people whom he draws, calls, and redeems.

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Chapter 52 is a challenging, but largely passionless, restating of the justice of God that destroys, overthrows, breaks down, and plucks up that which has been rebellious unbelieving and faithless.

It begins with the final rebellion and punishment of King Zedekiah, the last king in Jerusalem before Jerusalem's final destruction. His sons are slaughtered before his eyes just before he is blinded and imprisoned for the remainder of his life.

There is famine, the breaching of the walls, and the fleeing of the military.

The city and worst of all the temple is burned, but not before all of the remaining wealth that made up the holy things of the temple is broken apart and/or removed, carried into Babylon seemingly to never be returned.

The remaining priests and leaders are removed from the city and slaughtered publicly in the plain of Riblah by the King of Babylon.

A precious few, 745 are the final group to be taken into captivity. Only a fraction of the population resumed to have survived. A precious few others were left behind.

The NEXT for God's people seems empty, without options, and certainly beyond hope. However, Yahweh is with his people even in this NEXT. He renews his sure promise.

Sixteen years later, removed but not disconnected from the hopeless horror of chapter of Jerusalem's final destruction, we read these words, a nugget of pure grace, *"Evil-meradach, king of Babylon, in the year that he became king graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison."*

Jehoiachin, better known in Matthew's genealogy as Jeconiah had been languishing in jail for about 30 years from the time he was a young man, deposed as king after only 3 months. In many ways, he is unremarkable (*and unworthy, I might add*), but he is the man God is gifting as the recipient and sign of God's great NEXT for his people.

Jehoiachin is the grandson of King Josiah, the last "good" king of Judah. Josiah responded to God's leading through his re-discovered word, leading a temple reform and calling the people to repentance. Most notably, he and his grandson, Jehoiachin are in the lineage of King David, with whom God had cut an irrevocable covenant:

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah."* \*Jeremiah 33:14

This word from Jeremiah guarantees God will follow through with his promise to David and to his people, even in the midst of the "breaking down" of God's unrepentant people.

"I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David." (v.15)

This branch, we know as Jesus is not only for the future, but as Psalm 110 and Jesus himself in Matthew 22 proclaim, this branch from David, PROMISED BY GOD, is truly God's perfect, ultimate and all-encompassing NEXT.

*He is salvation*

*In him all will dwell securely*

*He is our (and David's) righteousness - the perfect balancing of the scales*

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In Jeremiah's time, people doubted this promise would be fulfilled. Some had even said that God was not keeping promises. God in his overflowing love desires the people and all of us to know he makes good on his unbreakable promise to David and to his people. This promise would result in the building and planting of what God intended for his people in his great NEXT. To ensure this, God binds himself to his creative order. *As surely as the day follows the night, he will keep this promise to his people.*

Have you struggled in the midst of the "waiting periods" of life?

Have you found yourself like Jehoiachin, languishing in seemingly un-ending prison, (maybe even of your own making)?

Does it seem nearly impossible to believe that God's love could or would rebuild and replant?

*"and he, (the king of Babylon) spoke kindly to him, giving him a seat **above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon.**"*

When it is impossible to believe that God can redeem, when the story has left us only in despair, God reminds that he has a NEXT. The restoration of Jehoiachin allowed his son Shealtiel to beget a son Zerubbabel, who would play a key role in the return of the exiles from Babylon. Ultimately out of David's line would be born Joseph, who is known as the earthly father of the one who is the King whose reign still is lasting to this day, the promised one, and now our risen king Jesus.

I have a good friend who was in a near fatal car wreck 5 years ago. He has lived the last five years as an amputee, functioning through the changes and learning to adjust and function with a prosthetic limb. During this time of pandemic and uncertainty, (a time where we fear the NEXT), Chris shares that he has a great distaste for the term "new normal". He prefers to approach each morning as a gift that is "new" every morning.

Jeremiah and the children of Israel did not just have a new normal. They had God's sure and certain hope of what would come NEXT. He would keep his promises. He would grant hope. He demonstrated this by reviving seemingly hopeless circumstances as he did with Jehoiachin.

As we today prepare for our NEXT. We have a Lord Jesus who is our eternal and lasting NEXT. He has done this not only with a word of promise, but by balancing that promise on his own sacrificial acton for the sake of the world. Want to prepare for the NEXT? Listen to the voice of the one who draws, calls, and redeems. He is always the NEXT and new every morning.