

Text: Jeremiah 29:1-14

Sunday 13th September 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be pure and pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Last week we began a new series on prayer, because the Lord is calling us to grow as a people of prayer. We need to lean into this because our purpose – to 'invite, encourage and enable people to follow Jesus' – is beyond our ability, and so we need to go to God and receive from Him strength, truth, wisdom, peace, insight, love, forgiveness and power. All this and more, is available to us through prayer if we will relate directly and regularly to God.

I suspect that most of us, when think of prayer, we think of praying for others, praying for their help, their benefit, and that is what we're going to reflect upon this morning, since today is Guild Sunday and much of their labour is done for the benefit of others.

I was talking to a friend recently and he shared a story about prayer and its impact. He lives in another town in Scotland and he and a group of friends decided to pray for their local area, doing so by walking around the local streets and praying for the things they saw around them.

After a number of weeks praying in this manner, two things happened. Firstly, a shop closed, a shop which was selling items that were not good for the well-being of the community. Secondly, a run-down disused factory was taken over and redevelopment work for it...

was announced, bringing a sense of renewed hope and life to the community. As these people prayed for the well-being of their community, things changed.

In our passage today, the Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah, called **His people to: ‘...seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile [and] Pray to the Lord for it...’ (v7) In these words are echoes of an earlier promise and calling given by the Lord to His people. In the book the Genesis, we read that the Lord **said to Abram**: ‘...I will bless you...and all people on earth will be blessed through you.’ (Gen. 12:2-3) Within the plan of God, there has always been this balance: of receiving His blessing – His goodness, His life and purpose – but then to be the means through which others can share in God’s blessing as well...**

The prophet Isaiah reminds God's people that they **were to be** '...a light to the nations' (Isa. 51:4) and in our last series, we saw that Jesus calls us to share the love of God in word and deed, not to just keep it to ourselves.

So, it shouldn't really be a surprise when **Jeremiah says**, '...seek the peace and prosperity of the city...[and] Pray to the Lord for it...' Yet it probably would have been a surprise to God's people, because this city, whom they are to seek its well-being and pray for, this city is home to the very people who invaded their land and took them 800 miles away from everything they'd known and valued. **To many an Israelite**, Babylon was the enemy and all they wanted was to get home to the place where they belonged. But they are in exile, they are foreigners and strangers, surrounded by oppressors, and yet God...

calls His people to seek the ‘peace and prosperity’, the well-being, the *shalom*, of that place and to pray for it.

I wonder, does this at first seem a bit disconnected from our time and our place? Well, in the New Testament, we’re reminded of **some important truths: ‘you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession...Once you were not a people, but now you are the **people of God**...Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to...Live such good lives...’ (1 Peter 2:9-12) We might not be surrounded by invaders, but brothers and sisters, we too are foreigners and exiles, as the apostle Paul will say, ‘our citizenship is in heaven’. So we are pilgrims, with our true home, not being here on earth, but elsewhere, in that new heaven and new earth which we will experience fully when Jesus returns.**

And so, the words of Jeremiah echo a truth for the people of God found throughout Scripture: we are to ‘...seek the peace and prosperity of [where we live and] Pray to the Lord for it...’ As we do so, especially as we pray for our locality, things change – both around us, as my friend’s story showed, but also in us.

The people of Israel, when they were called to pray for Babylon, they are praying for their enemy, the oppressor, people they didn’t like. But as they prayed, a number of things would change. Firstly, they’d begin to see their situation in light of God and His purposes; He reminds **them** **in verse 11** that ‘...I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’ As they pray, as they talk with God, remembering who He is and what He has promised, they will get a greater perspective of Him and instead of focusing

on their plight, they will begin to focus on the Lord instead and hope will arise, expectation will build, clarity will come, and they will be set free from self-pity and a victim mentality.

Friends, what are the situations you need to pray about? Where do you need to turn to God, and know His presence, His promise and His provision? As we lean into God, talking with Him, finding our shelter in Him, knowing Him near, especially in the difficult circumstances of life or the uncertainties of the future, it is as we pray that we are changed, and so we are then enabled to fulfil the purpose God has for us.

But as we pray for others, another change comes as well.

If we deliberately, intentionally, begin to pray for the well-being of others, as the Lord commanded through

Jeremiah, then love for neighbour will also arise within us. It really is impossible, I think, to pray for the well-being of another and yet harbour hate, bitterness, hurt or jealousy in your heart towards that person. And so, as you pray for them, your love for them grows, and so within you grows an even greater desire to make known the love of God to them, both in word and in action, to be the conduit by which they experience the blessing of God.

So friends, who are you praying for? Who are the people that get under your skin? Who's the neighbour you try to avoid, or wish would move? Who's the person in church that irks you? Well, pray for them. Pray for their well-being. Pray for God's blessing to be known in their life. Because if you do that, good will come for them and good will come for you, because you'll know a greater peace

and joy, and you'll know a greater love for them, and they might get to know the love of God as well.

So, prayer does change us – it gives us a renewed perspective of God and of our situation – and prayer for others also changes us by increasing our love for others. But prayer, and prayer for others, does change the world around us as well. In the book of James, **we're reminded that 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father ...' (James 1:17) Every good thing in your life, every good thing in your community, every good thing in our world is a gift of God, and if we want to see our community or our world flourish, it will be a gift of God, a gift of His grace and love and power.**

When the Lord called His people to pray for Babylon, He was showing His international concern, His concern for the world, not just for His people or where His people lived, but also for the nations of the world, and even the nations that had turned away from Him. He wants their good and He calls His people, then and now, to pray. **So, let's be a people of prayer** on behalf of our communities, and for the nations of the world. Let's ask God for great and good things to happen. Let's ask for God's power and glory to be seen. Because as God's people, as His representatives, a holy priesthood, we should show the same concern as God for the brokenness of His world, sharing His love in word and deed and prayer.

So, what's that going to look like this week? Remember, I said each week we'd have something to pray or do....

Well, for this week I invite you to get a copy of this prayer resource, called 'Taking it to the Streets'. It's a resource that gives you some explanation and some examples of praying for your local area and especially praying as you walk around your locality. You can get a copy from the website and it will also be on our Facebook page this afternoon. A copy is being posted to those who receive a CD, DVD or our 6-week printed material, but if you would like a printed copy then do just let us know.

And the invitation this week is to go out, if you are able, and do a prayer walk with this resource. It gives you four basic prayer points to get you started, as well as a prayer of blessing you might pray for your street or your neighbour. And if you are unable to get out, you can still use the prayer resource and what's written there.

Additionally, this Tuesday evening I'll be doing a live prayer walk via our YouTube channel, so join me then if you're able and contribute your prayers to mine in that time. See the notices for more information.

The Lord is calling us to a season of prayer that we might fix our eyes on Him and be a conduit of His blessing to neighbour, both near and far. May we respond to His call, and in so doing share the love of God in the Braes and to nations across the world. May it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn...

HYMN *MP-151 For I'm building a people of power*