



ENCOUNTER

King Zedekiah asked, “Jeremiah, what’s your message for me?” As always, Jeremiah spoke plainly: “IF you surrender to the King of Babylon, you and your family will live; the city will not be burned.” As always, the king listened but did not hear. So the historian wrote, “Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.” He (and many others) paid dearly for his rebellion.

God never gives up; neither did Jeremiah. Before the final conquest of Jerusalem, he wrote a letter to the Hebrews who had already been taken to Babylon. There was no false comfort—they should settle down and prepare for a long period of exile. But there was a future—not just in Jerusalem, but in God’s love, if only they would seek God with all their hearts.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In Jeremiah 38:14-18, 52:3b-11, 27b, the king wanted to hear what Jeremiah had to say, but in the end, he didn’t believe him. Why might the king not have believed Jeremiah? What might cause you to fail to listen to God in your life? King Zedekiah was responsible for an entire kingdom and its people. He obviously made a disastrous decision for everyone in Judah. Was the king a good servant to his people? Who are the people you serve? What does it mean for you to listen to God’s direction for your family, your church and your work?
2. Read Jeremiah 29:4-14. After they went into exile, the Hebrew people must have lost hope. But through Jeremiah, this God who never gave up on his people told them that he was still with them. He promised hope and a future for them...in seventy years! How willing are you to wait on God’s timing, especially if God’s help is not immediate? How do you imagine the Hebrews reacted to this message from Jeremiah? Would that have been your reaction? How do we seek God—with all our heart? What factors might lead us to hold back from whole-heartedly seeking God?

What kinds of things can cause people, even your friends and family, to lose hope in the world of today? What kinds of things can we do, as individuals and a lifegroup, to bring some measure of hope back into their lives?

MONDAY - JEREMIAH 38:14-18, 52:3B-11, 27B

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- Imagine that you are King Zedekiah. Jeremiah has said the only safe course is to submit to the King of Babylon, to be a loyal, tribute-paying vassal. What inner and outer forces would make you want to ignore Jeremiah, and seek a pact with Egypt to throw off Babylon’s rule? Do similar forces ever make it harder for you to obey God in your day-to-day life?

- “Judah went into captivity, away from her land.” Zedekiah’s weak leadership had dire results, not just for him, but for his entire nation. How well are you serving those who depend on you in your family, your church, your workplace or other settings?

TUESDAY - JEREMIAH 29:4-14

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- Through Jeremiah, God told the Israelites he had “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” But the message began, “When seventy years are completed.” Could anything that lay seventy years ahead be a source of hope for you? What makes patience and trust essential as you walk with God?

- In a sense, Jeremiah’s message of judgment and hope was summed up in Jeremiah 29:13: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” How do you understand the meaning of seeking God “with all your heart”? What in your life has driven you to seek God with all your heart, and what steps helped you do that?

WEDNESDAY - LUKE 4:1-13

We turn from Jeremiah to focus on Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We look at Jesus' time of testing...as we reflect on our times of difficulty, displacement and "exile". As we go through our wilderness moments what can we learn from the life of Jesus.

- Luke 5:16 says, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." He probably did not go to the wilderness seeking temptation, but to spend time with God. In what ways have you found that temptation seems to follow you around, meeting you even when you plan time with God? What can you learn from the way Jesus dealt with his temptations?

THURSDAY - LUKE 22:7-29

Jesus made provision to eat the Passover on the night before his death. He made the annual Passover meal into the Christian Lord's Supper. This sacrament looks back to God's saving acts (centrally to Jesus dying for us), and ahead to God's eternal kingdom. The supper gave Jesus the chance to teach that, in God's kingdom, true greatness is found in service.

FRIDAY - LUKE 22:39-54

After the Last Supper, Jesus prayed on the Mount of Olives. He had resolutely come to this moment—but still, he agonized over the awful suffering just ahead. At the moment of spiritual crisis, he said to God, "Not my will but yours be done." And then the religious rulers and Judas set their dark plot to execute God's Son in motion.

- Life can feel unbearable at times for all of us. How does reading about Jesus' time in the Garden teach you that it takes greater inner strength to honestly face and express your feelings in those times of anguish than to deny them? When you face the unbearable, are you learning to trust and say, as Jesus did, "Not my will but yours be done"?

- "This is your hour—when darkness reigns," Jesus told those who arrested him. Are there things you think it's important to do "in the dark," to keep them hidden from others? From God? From yourself? Invite God to come in and dispel the darkness in you, and to change you from the inside out, creating a joyous, whole life.
