

Theme: Faith in Exile

Title: Settle Down Now – Jeremiah 29:1-14

Aim: Consider how we are to live in exile as Christians.

Intro: William Miller was a retired War of 1812 captain, a New York farmer, & a nonordained Baptist minister. As he studied the book of Daniel & made calculations he concluded that Jesus would come again sometime between March 21, 1843 & March 21, 1844. Beginning in 1831 he preached this message all over New England & the United States, gathering quite a following – Millerites, they were called. This was all part of – or precursor to - the 2nd Great Awakening in the later 1800's. As the time approached – 1st in March of 1844 - it is reported that many of these Millerites quit their jobs, even sold their homes, put on “ascension robes” & if they could, stood on “ascension rock” in Low Hampton, New York, or their rooftops, & waited for Christ to come. Obviously, that prediction was incorrect, so some of Miller's followers readjusted the calculations & determined that October 22, 1844 was the correct time. So, they did it again, put on their ascension robes, stood on ascension rock & waited. Of course we know that again, there was no return of Christ at that time. Can anyone say “No one knows the day or hour?” All this led to the “great disappointment.” You can actually go to “ascension rock” today, not far over the Vermont/New York state line. Here is a picture of it, not far behind the William Miller Chapel, pictured here. I encourage you to go see it sometime. It's not far from Rutland & a very pretty drive & setting. But I don't encourage you to take on the mindset of those 19th century Millerites. Yes, Jesus is coming again, but until He comes we're to be about His business! Last Sunday we began a New Year – 2023 - & so we unveiled a new theme: Faith in Exile. We established that we who are Christians – followers of Christ – are in exile. This world is not our home & does not belong to us, nor do we belong to this world. Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil.3:20). When He comes again, our exile will be over. But how are we to live in exile until Jesus comes & we join Him in the New Earth Kingdom? God's instructions to the exiles

in Israel apply to us today. So again, our text is Jeremiah 29:1-14 [READ]. Again, God decreed that the people of Jerusalem/Judah would be in exile for 70 years. Then He promised He would bring them back from there to their homeland. They were there by the will of God, just as we are here in this world by the will of God. His purpose for them in Babylon was discipline. They had turned aside from God to follow idols. He sent them into exile to move them to repent & return from their spiritual exile back to Him. Though that may be God's intention in some of the situations in our lives, if we move away from Him, His overall plan for us, His children & Church, is to use us to point others to Jesus. We do this in part by living lives that are different, Christ-like. Let's look at God's instructions to the Jews in exile & see how they apply to our lives today. I) **Settle Down** – vs5-6a. "Settle down now!" My dad used to say that a lot to us when we were kids – "Don't make me come up there!" As you can imagine, settling down was opposite what the Jews had to be thinking. They had to be thinking about getting home as soon as they could – as soon as the Babylonians released their grip. To build houses would take time & money & energy. They could just make do until they got to go home. To get married just added another person for whom to be responsible. Children? Children added that much more responsibility - & they made it that much harder to travel. And why plant crops? That also took a lot of time & effort. Why plant crops if you weren't going to be around to harvest them? "Why should the Babylonians benefit from our hard work?" But God was saying to them, "Look, you're going to be here 70 yrs. That's 2 generations. You might as well settle down & live your lives. You'll need to eat, so plant crops & harvest them & eat the produce. Don't be idle while you're there. Get married, have children. Let them get married & have children. Enjoy & take care of your families." That didn't mean that they wouldn't want to go back to Judah. Some of them obviously stayed in Babylon after the 70 years (Daniel). But they were to live as if Babylon was their home while recognizing & remembering it was not. And that's the way we are to live in this world – as if it is our home, but realizing/remembering it is

not. However, that puts us in a bit of a conundrum. As said last week, it's very easy to get comfortable in this world. It's easy to get absorbed by the world, to become under the world's influence. It's easy to become like the world. Perhaps the greatest complaint against the Church/Christianity is that it is filled w/so many hypocrites. Too often that's true, although I'll say that most of those in the world don't really understand the Church/Christians. They think we're supposed to be perfect, but we're not – far from it. They don't understand that we struggle w/the same things they do, but we have the help of the Holy Spirit to be overcomers. We're in process – God's not finished w/any of His children yet. We have a long way to go, but we're forgiven, purchased, accepted by God, justified because of Christ. However, we who are in Christ should be cooperating w/God in this process of sanctification. We should be becoming more & more like Christ as the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in us. We should be seen as different. We should reflect the love & grace of God. Others should be able to see the beauty of Jesus in us. We should be looking for Jesus to come & living our lives to honor Him. That being said, we should not be so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good. We should be approachable, down to earth, loving, kind, helpful. We can & should live our lives in a normal but at the same time extraordinary way. That's where settling down comes in. In this world we should live our lives – build houses & dwell in them; plant crops & eat their produce; go to work & earn an honest living. Work hard & be honest. Get married & display what a Christian marriage can be, w/God's help. Have a family & display what a Christian home/family can be, w/God's help. Give your sons/daughters in marriage & display what a Christian wedding can be. As said, the way we live our lives is a major way we can be effective witnesses to the world. Not that we are or should think ourselves holier than thou/others but we ought to be different/distinct. We ought to be showing others what really works because we're trying to follow Jesus & do things His way. Not perfect, but working. Problem is, we often don't look any different as any other family, marriage, individual. We

are in the world, but we're not supposed to be of the world. Surrender your life daily to the Lordship of Christ so that others will be drawn to Him as well. II) **Multiply & do not decrease** – vs6. This is certainly intricately attached to the last instruction. God wanted the people of Judah to increase in number while they were in Babylon – just like they did while enslaved in Egypt. The Hebrews went down to Egypt numbering 70 people. They came up out of Egypt almost 2 million! God had made a nation out of a family. The nation was decimated by war & division. The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken into exile years before, by Assyria. The southern kingdom was only 2 tribes: Benjamin & Judah & they were decimated also by war. We know there were about 10,000 taken into exile in the 1st wave, then non-disclosed numbers more in the 2nd & 3rd waves of captivity & exile. When Cyrus decreed that those who wanted to return to Jerusalem/Judah could, it is reported that over 42,000 did so (Ezra 2). These were leaders, heads of households, so it may have been upwards of 150,000. Many others stayed behind in Babylon, perhaps absorbed by the culture. But they definitely followed God's instruction to multiply & not decrease. God wants us, His children/Church to multiply & not decrease also. I'm not talking about the method of church growth involving families having babies, tho that's good, too. I'm talking about spiritual multiplication – sharing the gospel & helping others become followers of Christ & then grow in Christ. We are to increase spiritually – “grow in the grace & knowledge of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet.3:18). We are to be disciples of Christ who make disciples of Christ. ***“Go therefore & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”*** (Matt.28:18-20). That's why we're here, you know. To glorify God & make disciples; to glorify God by making disciples! There are some who think that Christians should keep their faith to themselves & not try to convert anyone or share the gospel. But, that's our purpose in all of life for the believer – know & enjoy Him & make Him known. It's not just the job of the pastors, church leaders but for every believer! We

must daily pray for the lost. No matter what the life situation is for everyone, their greatest need is to know Christ as Savior/Lord. While we are in exile until Jesus comes, we are called by God to settle down & live our lives – not going our own way but His. In the world but not of the world, pointing others to Christ in every way; living in such a way that others see Jesus in us. Building our lives upon the Rock, Jesus, & being examples of how life should be lived. Then taking the opportunities to make disciples when & wherever we're given those opportunities. That will take faith – faith in exile.