

Theme: Faith in Exile – I Peter 1:17-19

Title: Be Seekers – Jeremiah 29:1-14

Aim: While in exile, Christians should be seekers.

Intro: You may agree/disagree but I think the #1 flaw in all men, women, boys & girls is pride, which is most often manifested in selfishness. Selfishness is the #1 cause of breakup in relationships, is the primary reason for crime, & in reality, any sin. Whether or not we'll admit it, we are selfish. We want what we want & we want it now. The thing is, however, getting what we want is not always a good thing. The world is full of those bent on getting what they want & paying the consequences, along w/those who are close to them or wounded by them paying the consequences. Jesus told us to “deny [ourselves] & take up [our] cross & follow [Him]” (Mt.16:24). That's what needs to happen in our lives on a daily basis; that's what needs to happen in the world, but we're selfish. Selfishness is what got the Israelites in trouble again & again. Instead of seeking to obey God & do His will, they repeatedly went their own way, disobeyed God, worshipped other idols, etc. – all of which led to their downfall & eventual captivity into exile. But in exile, God gave them hope, the promise of bringing them back to their homeland after 70 years in exile. Theme: Faith in exile. We've established the fact that we who are believers, followers of Christ, are in exile in this world, which is not our home. We are looking for new heavens & a new earth, which shall be our eternal home. Like those exiled to Babylon, we are in exile by the will of God – not for the purpose of discipline/judgment (Jesus took our judgment upon Himself) but for the purpose of being used by God to reach others w/the gospel & further His kingdom. The Church will be in exile until Jesus comes again. There is hope in Christ. God has a future planned for us & all creation groans until that future is unfolded – again, when Jesus returns. Until then, we are to settle down, live in this world as God's

ambassadors & multiply, helping others come to faith in Christ as God the Holy Spirit speaks to their hearts & draws them to Himself. God's message thru the prophet Jeremiah gives us further instructions regarding how to live in exile. Those instructions apply to us as well. Text: Jeremiah 29:1-14 [READ]. There are 3 matters that God tells those in Babylon to seek while in exile. We would do well to seek the same, which will mean our focus will be off of ourselves & away from destructive selfishness. 1) **Seek the welfare of the city/world where God has placed us in exile.** This seems counterintuitive. The Babylonians were horrible to their captives. They killed many & enslaved the rest. They took the best of the nation & left the rest in poverty, under their oppressive thumb. Babylon would be the last place those in exile would hope to prosper. But remember, God told them they would be there 70 years & therefore should settle down & multiply. And note what God said would be true in those 70 years: as they sought the welfare of Babylon, God said, "in its welfare you will find your welfare." Daniel & Ezra & Nehemiah & others heeded God's instruction. They worked hard & served Babylon in the time they were there & Babylon was better for it. That didn't mean God overlooked Babylon's treatment of the Jews in exile. His judgment against Babylon would come, but He protected the Jews in exile in part by blessing Babylon (tho pride/selfishness would be Babylon's fall). That word welfare is the familiar Hebrew word shalom = peace, wholeness, completeness, soundness. You & I, as followers of Christ, are to seek the wholeness/ peace of the place where we live. Tim Keller, in his book, The Reason for God, referring to New York city (where his center of ministry is), wrote that "we ought to make this city the best possible place to live." Isn't that the way we ought to think about Vernon, Northfield, Hinsdale, Brattleboro, etc.? We do this by being the best we can be – by seeking to serve others in Jesus' name, not by brow-

beating others, not by being holier than thou, not by being aloof. Loving Jesus & loving others in His name – that’s what will make our place of exile the best place to live. Get involved, do good to those around you. Be kind, friendly, compassionate. Be a good neighbor. And, pray for your city/ town/country/world; pray for those around you. Pray for others to know Christ. Pray for families & children. Pray against drug abuse & alcoholism & trafficking. Pray against abortion & child abuse. Pray for our leaders, even Republicans & Democrats. Pray for those w/whom you disagree. Pray for countries at war. Pray for the elderly. Pray for & seek the welfare of the place where you live in exile. II) **Seek truth & wisdom**. Don’t be deceived. There were self-named prophets & diviners in exile along w/all the others. They were saying the very opposite of what God said thru Jeremiah. They were giving the people false hope, not from God. They were saying that the exiles would be back in their homeland in a short time. They were telling of dreams they had which gave the assurance of release from captivity soon. Of course, that’s just what the people wanted to hear. It was easy & pleasing to embrace that message, as false as it was. “Don’t listen to them,” God said thru Jeremiah. “I didn’t send these false prophets.” Instead, they were to listen to God’s word thru Jeremiah, which was fulfilled as proof of the truth. They were to seek truth & wisdom. We should do the same while we walk by faith in exile. There are a lot of voices clamoring for our attention today, each perhaps having a measure of truth. But as my favorite college professor (Dr. David Dean) used to say, “a half truth is a whole lie.” Perhaps the most dangerous voices are religious voices, not sent from God, espousing half-truths & whole lies, easy to hear but void of whole truth & nothing but the truth: preaching health & wealth, Christian nationalism, hyper grace, easy believism, etc. We must not be deceived but seek truth & wisdom – founded in the Word of truth/God, the Bible. We must be students of

Scripture, wherein are the words of eternal life. Truth & wisdom always call for action in response. “This is the way, walk in it.” We must be doers of the Word & not hearers only. III) **Seek the Lord w/all our hearts**. Surely the people in exile thought that God had abandoned them. Surely they thought that prayers were useless; God wasn’t hearing them. They were helpless & hopeless. But God assured them He was w/them & had plans for them. They had a future w/Him & hope in Him. If they would do as He told them – His way – He would hear their prayers. He would receive them & their worship. Tho He had seemed to forsake them, He would be found by them as they sought Him, w/all their hearts & He would restore them to the land He had given them. He would help & bless them. And He did, tho they would turn from Him again. Then the Messiah came, “when the time was right.” God’s purposes were/are being carried out in His time. Jesus came & He is coming again. Now, while we are in exile until Jesus comes, it is vitally important that we seek Him w/all our hearts. What does it mean to seek the Lord? It means to desire – to earnestly want; to require – recognize our urgent need for; to seek the face – giving God full attention & longing for His full attention. We must set our focus on Him – like a GPS recalculating – refocus, refocus, refocus. Why do we who are His children need to seek the Lord? Don’t we already have Him? Yes, we do, & God hasn’t forsaken us nor moved away from us. The problem is we move from Him. When we get focused on ourselves we look away from God & we go where our focus is. So, we need to follow the exhortation of the Psalmist in 105:4 – ***“Seek the Lord & His strength; seek His presence continually.”*** Now, again, God hasn’t moved, but getting caught up in the distractions & listening to the voices of the world & being absorbed in our own selfishness, we lose sight of God, we don’t practice His presence (seeing Him in all around us, hearing Him as He whispers to us). We need to seek Him

continually. We should daily come into His presence, seeking to know Him better/more, seeking to commune w/Him & draw near, seeking His guidance & help, seeking His strength & wisdom. The glorious promise is that we will find Him as we seek Him w/all our hearts – undivided hearts, not going our own way but seeking Him. Jesus is coming when our exile will be over, but until He comes we are to seek the welfare of the place & people around us, we are to seek truth & wisdom from God, & we are to seek God w/all our hearts. We can't begin to thrive in exile unless we seek Him continually. But as we do, His promise is to bring us out of exile to live w/Him forever. For now, living in this troubled world takes faith – faith in exile.