

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 31:7-9 (NKJV)

⁷ For thus says the LORD: "Sing with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel!' ⁸ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, And gather them from the ends of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child And the one who labors with child, together; A great throng shall return there. ⁹ They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn.

Sermon Theme: A Messiah of Hope and Deliverance for the Remnant of Believers.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our life, our hope and our salvation, dear fellow redeemed;

With the steady, rapid decline of the moral and religious fiber of human society, what are the prospects of very many more unbelievers being delivered from the captivity of sin and unbelief? Closer to home, what is the likelihood of us and our children remaining in the faith until the great and final day of this world?

Lest such weighty questions cause us to be unduly fearful, worried or even to feel hopeless, we need to be mindful of God's powerful Word of life, hope, and salvation. For not only is it the power of God unto salvation, bringing sinners to saving faith, but it is also by this powerful Word that God is faithful to keep us in His saving grace until we are ushered into life everlasting.

The Lord reveals such a message of deliverance and hope in our Scripture text today. This wonderful message was initially declared to the remnant of Old Testament believers in Jeremiah's day who were being held captive in Babylon. And yet not only this, we also find this Word of deliverance and hope having special significance to us and other New Testament believers until the end of time.

The southern kingdom of Judah like the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered and taken into captivity, because of wide spread wickedness, impenitence and unbelief. But unlike the northern kingdom that was scattered abroad and never heard of again, the southern kingdom of Jews was preserved in tact as a people. The Lord did this out of mercy for the sake of the few remaining believers and most importantly so that the promised Savior could eventually come from them and redeem all mankind.

As this remnant of believers lived in the wicked and godless Babylonian Empire, their hearts were sorely distressed by this perverse nation and by their separation from their beloved homeland. Do not our hearts ache when we witness all the ungodliness going on today and do we not long for the day of our final deliverance from this wretched world?

While still living in this godless world, it is no small trial of faith for us to be surrounded by so many unbelievers who run after false gods, live in open defiance of God's commandments, and vigorously oppose believers. If we were to have an open forum of fellow Christians who live and work in the trenches of this anti-Christian world, many could tell the countless assaults on their souls, whether it be the tempting allurements in the world, being subjected to ungodly speech, immoral topics, and religious drivel, or the ever increasing hostility toward those who dare to speak out against ungodly lifestyles.

In order to comfort and reassure the few remaining children of God in Babylon, Jeremiah gave words of hope and deliverance, as he made known God's call for them to pray to God for deliverance. This Word was followed by the divine promise of the Lord gathering the remnant of Israel and bringing them back to the promised land. There He would once again build up and establish them as a people of God devoted to Him. And there He would bless them with His lovingkindnesses and tendermercies.

Jeremiah's message of deliverance and the returning of the remnant of Israel to Zion involved more than the Jews being returned to Palestine in Old Testament times. It also pointed to the latter days of the New Testament age when a remnant of people obtain spiritual deliverance and are gathered into Zion, that is, the Christian Church of believers. Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would be gathering a remnant of people from the ends of the earth to Zion and that their number would constitute a "great throng" of people.

We know Jeremiah's message is not simply referring to the Jews returning to Palestine, because their number was not a "great throng." Of all the Jews who actually returned to their homeland there was a relatively small number. The book of Ezra gives the number of 42,360. In Paul's letter to the Romans, the apostle identifies the remnant of Israel in New Testament times who are delivered and gathered to Zion as being "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.." (V.24) He also quotes the prophet Hosea who writes of the Lord foretelling Gentiles being numbered among the believing remnant of Israel, saying, "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they will be called sons of the living God." (Rom. 9:25,26) Yes, in the New Testament age the Lord would be gathering a great throng of people into His family from the ends of the earth, having delivered them from the harsh and oppressive captivity of sin, death, and the devil.

This gathering of a great throng into the Church does not mean that at any one time the number of believers will outnumber the unbelievers as the millennialists would mistakenly have us believe. Why is this? It is because it will only be a remnant, a small number of believers among so many unbelievers. Jeremiah's reference to a "great throng" of believers includes all the believers who will have been drawn into the Kingdom of God over the New Testament era.

Among this remnant the prophet testifies there will be "the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child." Such physical impediments would ordinarily prevent folks from making a long journey, such as to Palestine. However,

these were consoled that God would not allow such hindrances to prevent them from being brought back to their homeland.

In the spiritual realm there are different obstacles and hindrances, standing in the way of individuals becoming a part of the kingdom of believers, as well as causing us to depart from and leave behind the kingdom of grace. There is human reason which cannot fully comprehend God or fathom all His revelations. There are human prejudices which cling to manmade beliefs and philosophies that run counter to the Bible. There is the false science of evolution that denies the existence of God and His creation of the world. There are other obstacles and hindrances like the love of worldly pleasures, material riches, and temporal pursuits that can push God out of our hearts as being the Lord of our lives. And there is also human pride which prevents us from confessing and repenting of our sinfulness. All these are spiritual road blocks in our minds and hearts which can prevent God from entering in and reigning with His mercy, love, and forgiveness.

In the Gospel record, we hear of a rich young ruler who did not come to see Jesus as His Savior, because his overwhelming love for earthly riches blocked the Lord's entrance into his heart. Jesus then told the disciples of how hard it is for a rich man to become a member of God's kingdom, saying, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Mt. 19:24) Jesus' disciples were amazed at this saying wondering that if this is the case "Who then can be saved?" Jesus removed this thought of hopelessness by saying, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (V.26) While it is impossible for us to come to the Lord on our own and to remain in the faith on the basis of our own power or strength, God makes it possible for us to come to faith and to remain in the faith. Martin Luther writes in his explanation to the Third Article, "I believe that I cannot by my own reasoning or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Through the Word of God the Lord removes the obstacles in our minds and hearts, opening our eyes to see and our hearts to believe in the almighty God who made us and all the world, removing biased ways of thinking so that we acknowledge all the Bible as God's absolute truth, crushing our prideful spirit and replacing it with a humble heart that repents of our sinfulness and believes in Jesus' sin-atoning sacrifice for the eternal salvation of our souls.

As we travel through this wilderness of sin and godlessness, what is the likelihood of us, the small remnant of believers making it to the promised land of heaven? The Lord declares in the book of Jeremiah, "I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." What a great comfort it to know that through Jesus God is our Father. For since He is our Father, He loves us and cares for us. He will lead us and enable us to walk on the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life in heaven. It is through that same Word which He used to draw us into His family that He will lead us so

that we do not stumble and fall away from Him. Jesus promised us as much when He said in John 10, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” (Vv.27-30)

With the rivers of waters, which is the Gospel of Christ, the Lord gives us to drink of the water of life. That sweet and cool water comforts, refreshes, and sustains us as it reminds us again and again of God’s grace, His mercy, His pardon, and His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

It is because of God’s message of deliverance and hope that the remnant of believers in the world can “Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; (to) proclaim (and) give praise (to God).” The remnant of believers, who were held captive in the godless land of Babylon, rejoiced with joy and gladness over the message of their coming deliverance from captivity and their return to the promised land through the mighty hand of God. With this word in their hearts they sang hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God and proclaimed to others this wonderful news so that they too could have hope.

So also today, we who are the remnant of believers, who live in very wicked and perverse times, have reason to rejoice and give thanks to God, because He has given us a message of deliverance and hope. Through His powerful Word the Lord guards and keeps us in the faith so that we finally reach the promised land of heaven. Also through that same Word of God the Lord will gather and deliver others.

Sing songs of praise to the Lord for this wonderful grace and mercy He shows us. Make widely known the Lord’s message of deliverance and hope so that others will join us in singing praises to God both here on earth and in the glorious realm of heaven still to come. Amen.