

It started with compromise.
The people of Judah had slowly moved away from what mattered - the heart of God.
Leaders lost their way. Kings came and went, some faithful, many not.
Idols crept into the temple.
Justice slipped through the cracks.
The poor were forgotten.
And the warnings....they were there.
But they were ignored.

Then came Babylon.
A rising empire. Fierce. Unstoppable.
Nebuchadnezzar swept through the region, and Jerusalem trembled.
And in 597 BC, the first wave of exiles was taken.
Workers, leaders, families,
all uprooted from home and dropped into a foreign land.
Carried off to Babylon.
Exiled.

They waited.
They hoped.
They believed the exile would be short.
False prophets fed their dreams,
“You’ll be home soon; God will break Babylon. Just wait.”
But then came a letter...from Jeremiah...from God.
And it didn’t say what they expected.
It didn’t say, “Hold tight, I’m coming.”
Or, “Revolt and escape.”
Not even, “Just be patient.”
Instead, it said,
“Build houses. Plant gardens. Marry. Multiply. Seek peace. Pray for the city.”

God wasn’t abandoning them.
He was reshaping them.
He didn’t send a message of rescue – but a message of resilience.
He didn’t send a message of escape, but a message of endurance.
And though the exile would last seventy years –
a lifetime for some, a long wait for everyone –
the promise was sure.
The promise that is often framed on walls, tattooed on skin, and whispered in prayer:
“I know the plans I have for you.”
“Plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”
But the exile was real.
Because exile isn’t just a place.
It’s a feeling.
A season.
A stretch of life where things don’t make sense.

That was then.
But this is now.
And doesn't it feel familiar?

Our world trembles.
Wars rage. Economies falter.
Trust erodes.
Families fracture.
The noise around us sometimes feels deafening.
We ask: "Is this where we're supposed to be? Is this what life is now?"

Maybe the answer isn't escape.
Maybe the answer is presence.
Maybe it's learning to live.
Right here.
Right now.

Maybe the answer can still be found in a letter.
Not from a king.
Not from a rescuer.
But in a letter from a prophet named Jeremiah.
A message from God.
And what does He say?
Not, "Pack your bags."
Not, "I'm coming tomorrow."
Not, "Escape while you can."
No.
"Settle down. Build houses. Plant gardens. Marry. Multiply. Seek peace."

What? Live here?
In this place of pain?
In this place that sometimes feels foreign?
In this season that feels like it might be a mistake?
Yes.
Even here. Even now.
Even in the midst of all the deafening noise.
Because - here it comes -
that verse that provides us hope,
"I know the plans I have for you,"
says the Lord.
"Plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."
But don't forget this:
That promise was spoken into a seventy-year wait.
A lifetime.
A generation.

So, what does this mean?

It means joy isn't the absence of pain.
It's the presence of purpose.
It's the choice to live fully, even when the future feels foggy.
It means we don't wait for the storm to pass to dance in the rain.
It means we don't wait for the healing to start planting seeds of hope.
It means we don't wait for the miracle to start living like we're loved.

Because we are.

Joy doesn't wait for perfect conditions.
It grows in imperfect soil.
And the promise still stands.
There is a plan.
There is a future.
There is a God who can be found.

At some point in our life,
many of us have found ourselves in our own kind of Babylon.
A place we didn't choose.
A season we didn't expect.
A time when everything familiar feels so very far away.
A time when we wonder if God is still with us.
I know I've been there – more times than I'd like to admit.

Times when I felt like I had been exiled from everything I knew.
I was going through the motions, but inside, I was asking,
"God, where are you?"
I didn't feel strong.
I didn't feel spiritual.
I just felt... **lost**.
But here's what I now know:
God didn't wait for me to leave my Babylon to show up.
He met me there.
God didn't abandon me.
Although I didn't know it.... he was reshaping me.
He didn't send me a message of rescue – but a message of resilience.
He didn't send me a message of escape, but a message of endurance.

He had a plan.
Because the God who led me to those places is my life...
those times of "exile," when my courage, my convictions, and my ability to trust was tested,
is the same God who led me **through** those places.
And the same God who restored me.

While my times of exile didn't last forever,
and certainly not seventy years,
they forever changed me.

We don't usually think of exile as sacred.
It feels like abandonment.
Like punishment.
Like silence.
But in the story of God, exile is not the absence of holiness.
It's the hidden place where God meets us.
In exile, the plot shifts.
The chapter turns.
But it doesn't read like a fairy tale.
It reads like perseverance.
Like waking up in a foreign land and choosing to build anyway.
Like praying when the answers don't come.
Like planting gardens in soil, you didn't choose.

God doesn't rewrite our story with shortcuts.
He rewrites it with strength.
With scars that speak.
With endurance that outlasts the exile.

We want answers.
We want timelines.
We want to know *why* and *when* and *how long*.

But God responds with something deeper...
presence.
As we read in Jerimiah, God speaks to the ache in the hearts of those in exile.
"You will seek me," God says, "And you will find me."

So today...or any day...
If you feel exiled in your own life.
If you're waiting for the rescue.
If you're wondering if joy is even possible in this season,
hear this:
build, plant, pray, love, live.

Because joy is not what comes **after** the exile.
It's what God grows in the middle of it.

And the promise still stands.
He knows the plans.
He holds the future.
He is findable.
Especially here.
Especially now.